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Have you ever had an idea about something you want to do, but it's hard to get going on it? Maybe it's a New Year's resolution to begin a physical habit, such as walking more, exercising, or eating the right kind of foods. Maybe it's a mental challenge to read more books, take a class in painting or world history, or do brain games to keep your mind sharp. Or maybe it's a spiritual habit such as studying the Bible by yourself or with others in Sunday school, sitting quietly in prayer and meditation, or getting up regularly to participate in worship in our community of faith.

These are all great ideas, but it's hard to get going when our patterns of life have been something else. It's so much easier to do the same thing day after day, week after week, for we get comfortable with our patterns of life. Making a change in those patterns is very difficult!

Imagine if the wise men woke up and had a hard time getting going.

"Hey, Melchior, it's bright in here. Did you light the candles already this morning? I was hoping to sleep in."

"No Balthazar, I'm trying to sleep in too. Maybe Gaspar did it. Hey, Gaspar, snuff that candle."

"Hey guys, I didn't do it. The light is from that star shining brightly."

"That star wasn't there last night. Where did that come from?"

"Well, how would I know?"

"Hey guys, we are wise men, astrologers who look to the stars for signs about important events. Maybe this star is announcing something wonderful!"

"Well, that could be. Maybe we should follow it and see where it leads us."

"Oh, not that again. Remember the last star we followed led us to the edge of a cliff. I don't think I can get going again on this star-chasing-idea."

"Based on my calculations, it may take us several years to arrive where this star would take us."

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“Maybe we should just close the curtains and go back to sleep.”

Ever had one of those days when you just can't get going?

Matthew's Gospel tells us those travelers did get going, and they found the young Jesus, but their journey was full of obstacles and people who may have felt like giving up. The wise men, called *magi* in the Greek text of the Bible, lived a great distance from Jesus. Yet they saw something unusual in the patterns of the stars, indicating they may have been astrologers. Some today have tried to explain that they saw the regular visit of Halley's Comet or the alignment of planets or stars. It's fascinating to wonder about the phenomenon they saw, but whatever occurred, the travelers interpreted the event to signal the birth of a new king.

They traveled from the East, possibly Persia or some other country, traveling a great distance. They didn't arrive at the stable with the shepherds (as is often portrayed in Christmas pageants and nativity scenes), for the story says they entered the house.

Luke wrote the story about the birth of Jesus with shepherds and angels visiting a manger, but Matthew wrote from a different perspective. Matthew included these astrologers or magicians, outcasts by Jewish laws, Gentiles from a faraway county of the East. Even in these early stories of Jesus, we see that he was born to welcome all people in God's kingdom.

This was a trip well worth the distance to visit the child sent by God, though I'm sure the journey across the hot, dry desert did not make their travel easy. Imagine again their conversation,

“Why are we traveling this way?”

“Yeah, just where are we going?”

“We're following that star, remember?”

“O yeah, but tell me again why we're following that star.”

“Because something important happened. It signals the birth of a new king.”

“How about we wait until he grows up and see if he really takes over? Then we could go visit him.”

“Are we there yet?”

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“Maybe we could wait a few thousand years until the invention of the radio or television and then we could see him.”

“No, we want to be there first.”

“But at the rate we’re traveling he won’t be a baby anymore.”

“Come on guys, keep going.”

They finally arrived in Jerusalem and asked King Herod about the birth of the new king. Herod did not like any competition, so he consulted the priests and scribes and they confirmed that a ruler would be born in Bethlehem. Herod set a trap by sending the travelers to Bethlehem to find the king, asking them to return to him. After visiting the young child, a dream warned the travelers to get going and return home another way.

And then a dream told Joseph to get going to Egypt to escape the evil intentions of Herod, for Herod decided to kill all children two years and younger near Bethlehem. He didn’t want any new king stepping in on his rule. After Herod died,

another dream invited Joseph to once again get going—this time back to Bethlehem.

But this doesn’t seem the way that life should go—escaping from the plots of those who try to destroy life. It’s just not fair. And when we face these difficult times, we may not want to hear someone tell us to “get going.” We may feel stuck. We may sit, feeling stranded in the desert, not wanting to travel to see some great event. Or we may not know how to escape the evil that seems to surround and threaten our life.

After the events of 2016, we may feel a bit hesitant to get going in 2017. We’ve heard top news stories last year¹ tell us:

- Half a million people were killed in Aleppo in the war in Syria and another 11 million people forced from their homes.
- North Korea conducted nuclear and missile tests, with a 10 kiloton underground explosion in September. That may be only half the size of the nuclear bombs dropped

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on Japan in WW2, but enough to create a lot of destruction if they complete their tests.

- Violence against police officers and African Americans has set our nation on edge.
- We watched a very close and bitter Presidential election, leaving our nation more divided and uneasy than most of us can recall.
- News reports continue to support the idea that Russians hacked into American emails that impacted the outcome of the U.S. Presidential election.

In the midst of these stories, we may find it difficult to get going, to wake up in the morning and believe we can make a difference in the world. But just as those travelers 2000 years ago were determined to follow the light of the star even when they faced obstacles, we can continue following the light of that star as well.

¹ www.newsweek.com/top-ten-world-shaking-events-2016-536023

What can we do to make a difference? I read an editorial in the *The Elkhart Truth* this week that lamented about the tragic events of the year and then offered a suggestion:

Mentor a troubled youngster. Volunteer at a food bank or a hospital. Lead a scout troop. Coach a team. Visit the elderly. Read to the blind. Clean up a polluted stream. Raise a service dog. Be a foster parent. Preserve a historic building.²

I would note that our bulletin announcement adds the invitation to read to 2nd grade children in the Read United program.

On those days when the news seems overwhelming, when violence fill the first week of the New Year, look for the light of the star, **get going** and follow the light, spreading its glow in the corners of your world.

² Steve and Cokie Roberts, "How to sleep better," *Elkhart Truth*, January 6, 2017, A4. Also at www.uexpress.com/cokie-and-steven-roberts/2017/1/4/how-to-sleep-better