



Home by
another
Way

Matthew 2.1-12, NRSV

In the time of King Herod, after Jesus was born in Bethlehem of Judea, wise men from the East came to Jerusalem, ²asking, 'Where is the child who has been born king of the Jews? For we observed his star at its rising, and have come to pay him homage.' ³When King Herod heard this, he was frightened, and all Jerusalem with him; ⁴and calling together all the chief priests and scribes of the people, he inquired of them where the Messiah was to be born. ⁵They told him, 'In Bethlehem of Judea; for so it has been written by the prophet:*

*⁶"And you, Bethlehem, in the land of Judah,
are by no means least among the rulers of Judah;
for from you shall come a ruler
who is to shepherd my people Israel." '*

⁷Then Herod secretly called for the wise men and learned from them the exact time when the star had appeared. ⁸Then he sent them to Bethlehem, saying, 'Go and search diligently for the child; and when you have found him, bring me word so that I may also go and pay him homage.' ⁹When they had heard the king, they set out; and there, ahead of them, went the star that they had seen at its rising, until it stopped over the place where the child was. ¹⁰When they saw that the star had stopped, they were overwhelmed with joy. ¹¹On entering the house, they saw the child with Mary his mother; and they knelt down and paid him homage. Then, opening their treasure-chests, they offered him gifts of gold, frankincense, and myrrh. ¹²And having been warned in a dream not to return to Herod, they left for their own country by another road.*

“Home by a Another Way”

Introduction

Last April I heard retreat leader Paula D’Arcy tell an Advent story about several middle-aged women who walked right out of their lives one day. Not forever, just for a little while. They caused a great stir as they strode single file down the highway. They were instant news, but they weren’t trying to be news. It had just occurred to them that they were too far from home, the inner home, and they pledged to walk until they felt reconnected. They needed to find their way back. So they made a practice of walking and walking until they remembered what really matters and how much it matters. For a little while they practiced walking “another way” to try to find their way home.

Great stirrings of the wise and majestic kind prompted news in Jerusalem. The kings, high atop camels, their velvet robes gilded with desert sand, were impressive in their grandeur, knowledge, and exotic travels. Little did they know that their search for a Child would become legendary; their quest, a journey which all our journeys echo; their worship, a model of humbleness; their commitment to their pilgrimage so true that every wobbly camel step through the desert to their place of arrival mattered more than anything else they could have been doing in their old kingdoms. Maybe the magi weren’t trying “to be news” either. Maybe they were just seeking their heart’s true home.

It’s the good news of what happened after the kings left the manger in Bethlehem that continues to cause great stirrings of our hearts. Matthew says “they went home by a another road way.” No doubt, they confounded Herod by taking a different geographical route. But the different way they went home was likely a way of the heart as well.

It’s that different way that’s prompted the writings in this book. From the journeys of their own lives, Lake Shore members guide us through Advent toward Christmas. Some tell about

wandering with no end in sight as they've looked for God. Some, trying to find their center, are as circuitous as a labyrinth. Others let us in on how spiritual friends have been their companions on the way to God's incarnation. Others tell of travels that involved risk, imagination, or change in direction. These page-sized images from individual pilgrimages describe stopping points along their journeys. They are memories of where God has been leading and guiding these writers as they, too, seek "another way."

Walking the path toward home is an Advent practice. So is looking into the night sky to look for a star to guide us. So is pausing to light a candle for a before taking the next step. So is re-thinking our own pilgrimages every Advent when we read about Mary and Joseph's journey.

Let us pick up our maps and begin again this year.

Sharlande Sledge

November 29

They look oddly out of place in the collection. There they sit, three men richly dressed in jewel-toned robes, one with his hand shielding his eyes from an imagined sun, another in the front holding a map, and the third in the back holding on for balance. None have grasped the oars, and all look amazed. And it is an amazing sight – three wise men from the nativity scene returning home in a boat.

Artist Dennis Brown, in his collection called *The Bethlehem Experience*, places the three magi in a row boat. The nativity scene actually has two sets of wise men – three who apparently come to the baby Jesus on more traditional camels bearing traditional gifts and three returning home in quite a different way.

Quick study of a biblical map of Judea and Persia adds skepticism to Mr. Brown's art. Hot, dry deserts, a Dead Sea, and the Jordan River flowing south hardly lend themselves to a water journey from Bethlehem back to Persia. Even as men of wealth, a trip west to the Mediterranean Sea followed by a sail up the coast and an overland journey to their home country would have taken considerable time and resources.

What could have transpired in Bethlehem that changed men such as these? What did they see or experience in the humble manger in a stable built to house cattle and feed? What so disrupted their loyalty to King Herod that they extravagantly avoided reporting back to him of their sighting of this new king of the Jews?

Perhaps they not only came home a different way, but also came home different. Different as in not the self-assured wise men they thought themselves to be. Different as in a new understanding of what a new kingdom could look like. Different as in so touched by the presence of baby Jesus that they forsook all security and status afforded them and took off through a dry country in a boat. Anything to protect this baby from the slaughter of King Herod.

Each advent season offers the chance to be different. Maybe this will be the year when our sighting of the baby Jesus will call us to question how we choose to return home. We can do the expected and safe thing, remount our camels and go back to the capital with our news. Or we might do the different thing and go in a direction that further expands the kingdom of God, the kingdom revealed to us in the birth of Christ. Compared to getting out of Bethlehem in a boat, our call is easy.

Loeen Irons

November 30

This year is the seventh consecutive year I have spent Thanksgiving away from my family and away from My Old Kentucky Home. By now, I'm pretty used to it. And while I've had other as-good-as-families and almost-homes to spend the holiday, it never fully assuages the bittersweet homesickness.

Homesickness is a close friend of mine. I suppose it's the downside of the vagabond nature of being a student. I've moved around, between school and work, and now hold a little bit of home with me in each place and leave a little piece of me behind when I leave. This restless ache is particularly profound in leaving one home behind and heading into the unknown of the home-yet-to-be. With every departure from a place and a people that has become home and family comes the echo of questions of the unknown. Where is home and when will I get there? Will I even know it if I find it? Is home a place or is home a people or is home something else entirely found in that peace that passes all understanding?

My life as a perpetual student (going on 24 years now) has given me a collection of homes and families that stretches across the map but has also inured me to the sense of restlessness. We all sense this restlessness in the search for feeling at home. When we move away, our new homes will never feel the same as the comfort of the walls or the streets we leave behind. A sense of feeling like a stranger in a strange land haunts us to varying degrees, at least for a time.

The Bible is thick with stories of persons and groups of people who were homesick, wandering, and finding home in surprising places. By the last chapters in Isaiah, the Hebrew people had witnessed the destruction of their temple, their beloved city, and had endured fifty years of captivity. They looked forward with great anticipation to finally returning home. I can only imagine the pit of homesickness that must have consumed their stomachs and eaten away their hearts. They

could cling to one another in their exile, all the time resting on the promises of God that they would find a new home. But what happened when they arrived at Jerusalem? They could not go home again. And as current events show, the battle for the Holy Land has only gotten more hateful and more divided. Where is the home that God promised? There is a profound restlessness that longs for the comfort of the words of Isaiah: "I am about to create new heavens and a new earth; the former things shall not be remembered. . . . No more shall the sound of weeping be heard in it, or the cry of distress." (Is. 65: 17, 19).

In reflecting on the story of the Magi, I think about the surprising ways that home finds us. Often in the midst of our restlessness, in the midst of our searching, in the midst of "I-won't-be-here-long" and "just-for-a-bit" we find ourselves at home. We find persons and places along our journey that serve, for a time, as a resting place for our weary, questioning, and restless bodies, souls, and spirits. Out of the sense of already-but-not-yet, often without realizing it, and without planning it, we find ourselves at home.

Meredith Holladay

December 1

Holiday trips to my grandmother's house are now silent, having found repose after her death in 1989. Now family members have become fewer in number, more poignant in importance, as they surely must. Connecting with family has a grace that is irreplaceable, indelible, and unfazed by the laconic Christmas Cheer.

Family grace comes in the waiting, a slow dawning that marks the early part of the season, then reaches into fullness toward the end. "Coming home another way" is about resilience, is it not? It's about finding new paths that graciously mark the way to the old story of Christ's birth. Those paths leading to the manger are rocky, sometimes circuitous, and mostly slow, deliberate. Many failed attempts are needed before a shining Advent appears. At least that's true for me.

Advent now begins to take shape for me with the aid of a changing season and so many visual enticements. The path this time will again be steep. The practice of averting the eyes from the season's pervasive flotsam can give gratitude a chance to fill in. Gratitude for the manger and for our own births, rebirths, and deaths. Gratitude for each of you in our church family.

When you see me next, please give a hug, as only family can, and join me in the waiting.

Buddy Prather

December 2

“Once upon a time there was a not-so-very-wise woman sitting in her own country minding her own business when a bright star lodged in her eye. It was so bright that she couldn’t tell whether it was burning in the sky or in her own imagination, but she was so hungry for a divine word that it didn’t matter all that much. The point was, something beyond her was calling, and it was a tug she had been waiting for all her life.”

*Could it be that she was, in a way, glad for a reason to get out of town--because that was clearly where the star was calling her – out -- away from everything she knew, out from under the heartbreak, the high expectations, the disappointing returns. And so she set out, believing ...” **

What I **wanted** to do, that late August in 1999, was to pack a suitcase (maybe a second one for books) and get on a plane and **fly** to Nicaragua. I really wanted to start off with nothing – knowing full well that pots and pans, a bed and table and chairs, soap and shampoo, could all be purchased there. The last thing I desired was to export the lavish style of life to which I was accustomed. But in the name of compromise and not being too hard-headed, I gave in, and we got a truck to haul a stove, a fridge, a bed, and even an electric coffee maker for heaven’s sake.

The problem with **not** traveling light – with having lots of stuff - is that then you have to protect it somehow. South of the border, traveling with a big truck fairly well shouts “hey banditos – here we have LOTS of stuff to protect!” So for nine days we traveled across Mexico and Guatemala with a large government lock on the back of the truck, and then across Honduras with a soldier armed with a machine gun (graciously supplied free of charge by the Guatemalan army) riding with us in the cab, and staying with us at night and at meals.

I came home by a different way. The “stuff” was gone, and the star was no longer lodged in my eye. The people that I had gone to love and to help had ended up loving and helping me far more. A three-year-old brought me sweet coffee each morning with a warm tortilla. My friend Hilda walked a mile in the dark each night to bring me a cup of hot tea. In those weeks before coming home I was given food to eat, a bed to sleep in, and the comfort of shared tears. I had seen the Christ Child in the eyes of dozens of street kids in Managua, and I encountered Mother Mary in the hands and feet of the women I came to know. I flew home, with one suitcase (and books in a second one) and with the remainder of my worldly possessions wrapped in cardboard and twine by a drunken carpenter who had been hired by my Nicaraguan friends. My most important possession, my journal, was safely tucked inside my backpack. Traveling light? Indeed. The only two necessary things would have been my passport and that journal, and I had already found that a stolen passport could be replaced.

Coming home by a different way allowed me to know the blessing of an empty cup, the freedom of nothing left to protect, and the grace of depending on God alone.

Jo Pendleton

*a mangling/mingling of a section from Barbara Brown Taylor’s collection of sermons entitled *Home by Another Way*

December 3

Sometimes, the journey home takes a wrong turn or three along the way. At least that's been the case for me. Stumbling upon the labyrinth behind Lake Shore last February, I was struck by how beautiful, yet sad, it looked – overgrown, neglected. It was by the grace of God that the labyrinth became a metaphor for my own life. I arrived full of anger, hurt, selfishness – in a word, fear.

But, before discovering the labyrinth, I showed up in church one day. It seemed so harmless – just a decision to surprise my stepmother, Charlene, by showing up and sitting with her in church. I honestly don't know where the thought originated, but there I was. And again, the grace of God was present. I knew nothing of Lake Shore, had never been in a church whose services began the way Lake Shore's do, did not know the pastor was a woman.

I realized later the importance of having the voices of women inviting me back home. Women had been the enfolding presence in my life as a child, protecting me, though unable to protect me because I knew no words to explain how I needed help. But isn't that a part of the grace of God – meeting us exactly where we are?

There was Rachel Sciretti and Children's Time that Sunday morning. I almost bolted as the children gathered in front. The message that morning was "sometimes we need help." The tears started as I thought to myself, "Why wasn't I taught that?" The miracle of it all is that my next thought was, "How wonderful these children are being taught that."

The journey home had begun, though I had no way of knowing it at the time. The sermon was "The Tearing that is Teaching", a part of the "Tearing and the Light" series. The message I heard was that the light enters through the places torn in our souls. And I ran. The tears hurt too much.

The next week I was back. I didn't know why. For once in my life, I'd decided not to question why, but simply showed up. I contacted Dorisanne and asked if it would be okay if I did some weeding in the labyrinth. I felt a strong attraction to that place and knew my soul needed as much tending as the labyrinth.

Each Sunday, I returned to sit with Charlene. And each Sunday, I knew a little more of why I was there. This frightening place with its scary and comforting music and message had begun to feel like it could be home. But I walked away from church forty years ago. How was I supposed to know what home looked like anymore?

So, I listened. And I cried. And I laughed. Gradually, I realized I didn't have to have all the answers in order to recognize home. Every week there were people coming up to me before and after services to welcome me. They seemed genuinely happy I was there, though I had no idea why. I decided I was happy I was there, also.

One tiny step. It truly is all that's needed to begin the journey.

It's said one can never go home again.
We've lost the way, it seems
at times.
The loss is dearly felt.
Ignored, it doesn't go away.

Another drink couldn't dull
the desire, the longing
to return
to what I knew was right
what was truly home.

Then, finally, by accident it seemed,
a glimmer of hope,
a glimpse of the God within

led me back
one trembling step at a time.

A new friend reminding me
I've found a safe place,
and now, an *ichthus* around my neck,
gently tapping my chest when I move,
reminding me I'm loved.

These are ways home,
questioning,
listening,
accepting,
saying yes.

Benjamin Eakin

December 4

In the summer of 1979, I joined a long list of seasoned fellow travelers like Kerouac, Hemingway and a new Christian writer Peter Jenkins and hit the byways of America in search of . . . home?

Starting at our annual family reunion in Allentown, Alabama, I took to the state highways and country roads hitchhiking to see a friend in Providence, Rhode Island. I carried in my backpack: clothes, a backpack stove, maps, dried food, travelers checks, and a copy of *Watership Down*. I also carried a one-man tent and sewn to the backpack was the most valuable thing of all, a Texas flag.

In the two-week journey north and the 10-day return, I met America, this incredibly diverse land teeming with good-hearted and hard-working people — lovers, listeners, givers and sharers in all shapes and sizes. One family from Alabama found me hiking in the Smoky Mountains, stopped to pick me up when they saw the flag, and gave me a watch so I would know what time it was. A nurse in Asheville, North Carolina, gave me free medical care after a blistering 20-mile, one-day hike. A CIA employee, returning to D. C., gave me lunch and a 200-mile ride along the Blue Ridge Parkway and drove an hour out of his way to partly repay the debt he owed to a Texan who gave his life saving him in Vietnam. To him that day, I was “Tex.”

A couple from New York shared their meal with me on the Appalachian Trail. I met two female diamond brokers from Ohio who carried me across Kentucky to Tennessee because a Texan in the car made them feel “safe.” I re-met old friends in Virginia, Texas, and New Jersey and made new ones from Jamaica who shared their Rhode Island home for a week. But most importantly I discovered “Home” is not a place but rather a relationship.

The New Testament tells us that our “home” is with our “Father” and since God can't be in a place bigger than Himself,

he must hold heaven in Himself so . . . “home” is in my relationship with God. My earthly home is in relationship with his most wondrous and perplexing of all creation, humans. What a great group of fellow travelers to journey with on the way home.

Rick Allen

December 5

In a devotional guide a story is told about a short but significant journey a young boy and his father made. The young boy and his father once stood in line to buy tickets for the circus. They noticed a poor family immediately in front of them. The parents were holding hands. They had eight children (seems like an African family), all probably under the age of twelve. You could tell that the circus was going to be a new adventure for them. The attendant asked how many tickets they wanted. The man proudly responded, "I'd like to buy eight children's tickets and two adult tickets." When the attendant quoted the price, the man's wife let go of his hand and her head drooped. The man leaned a little closer and asked, "How much did you say?" The attendant quoted the price again. The man obviously didn't have the money. He looked crushed. According to the young boy, his father watched all this, put his hand in his pocket, pulled out a twenty dollar bill and dropped it on the ground. His father then reached down, picked up the bill, tapped the man on the shoulder and said, "Excuse me, I think this must be yours." The man knew exactly what was going on. He looked straight into the eyes of the father of the young boy, took his hand, shook it, and with a tear streaming down his cheek, replied, "Thank you, thank you, sir. This really means a lot to me and my family." The young boy and his father went back to their car and drove home. They didn't have enough money to go to the circus that night, but it didn't matter. They'd blessed a whole family, and it was something neither family would ever forget.

Like the story of the "Good Samaritan" or the "Three Wise Men" or the young boy and his father, we may not know what we will encounter on the journey. We are, therefore, to listen to the voice of the Spirit as the Spirit speaks to our spirit directing us as to what to say, what to do, or where to place our next step. This does not come to us easily for the voice may not be as loud as we are used to, nor in the same tone and accent easily recognized. Like the "still small voice" (1 Kg 19:12), it may not be

very familiar or the obvious. But there is one thing about it: its clarity and demand cannot be doubted and ignored.

This advent season may not be like any other advent season. Its peculiarity and strangeness must be sought, found and responded to in an equally “strange” manner—an ordinary response which may turn out to be an extraordinary response, like that of the wise men and the story told above. We believe the wise men, the young boy and his father, and the poor family all returned home by “another” way. They were transformed by what they experienced on their journeys.

Thus we pray, Lord, open our eyes to see, ears to hear, and hearts to remember as we continue this journey in another direction; as we get on the “new” way you have instructed us to take.

Robert Y. Owusu

December 6

A call to mission or task is a strange and perilous thing. Like the Persians astrologers who followed a star to pay homage to a new king, we set out on a journey with a set of assumptions. We assume there will be surprises along the way—both pleasant and unpleasant. We assume we will understand the meaning of the journey—at least, eventually. Finally, we assume we will return home—wiser, more knowledgeable, perhaps even changed.

But what if we don't return home? What if we don't return "home by another road"?

The writer of the book of Hebrews lauds Abraham for his obedience to action when God called Abraham to set out for a place, "not knowing where he was going" (Heb. 11:8). Thomas Merton used the example of Abraham to teach novices in the monastic life the lesson of life as journey, in which one leaves home to search for God. (Esther De Waal, *The Celtic Way of Prayer*, 7) In a sense, then, we all leave home, and in the leaving, we discover a new meaning of "home."

In Celtic Christianity, Columbanus (543-615) was admired as the founder of monasteries in France and northern Italy, far away from his home in Ireland. Columbanus made a commitment to live in exile and was an example of *peregrinatio pro christo* ("wandering for Christ"), inspiring other Celtic Christians to set off on journeys as acts of ascetic discipline. These monks founded monasteries across Europe. Some returned home. Many did not.

Esther de Waal relays a ninth-century story of three monks fished out of the sea near Cornwall after drifting in tiny coracles without oars. When brought to the king, they were asked where they were from and where were they going. The response was "We stole away because we wanted for the love of God to be on pilgrimage, we cared not where." This response illustrates the idea of journey without destination—a journey undertaken from

an interior, inward impulse to go where the Spirit leads (De Waal, 2).

Columbanus, who died at Bobbio in Italy in 615, while on yet another journey far from home said “Therefore let this principle abide with us, that on the road we live as travelers, as pilgrims, as guests of the world (*hospites mundi*) singing with grace and power, ‘When shall I come and appear before the face of my God?’” (De Waal, 3-4)

Many of us are reminded at Christmas that we are more like the Celtic Christians than the Persians who visited the Christ-child. We have traveled far from home to places we could not have known nor imagined. Sometimes we may not have even understood why. We have found ourselves “guests of the world,” and at Christmas especially, with memories of the past flooding our recollections, we think of the home that was and the home that now is.

St. Columba said it in a poem that begins with “The path I walk, Christ walks it.” These words complete the poem:

May I arrive at every place, may I return home; may the way in which I spend be a way without loss.

May every path before me be smooth, man, woman and child welcome me.

A truly good journey! Well does the fair Lord show us a course, a path.

Melanie Nogalski

December 7

In 1999 Lake Shore took twenty-seven of us on a mission trip to New York City, where we stayed at General Theological Seminary in Manhattan. Mornings began in the courtyard of the seminary in view of the imposing stained glass windows of the chapel. In those windows, familiar stories were frozen in time, marked by the precisely placed and colored pieces of glass. Each part of the window, carefully chosen by the artist and placed together, they formed an easily recognizable picture. Unchanging as the window was, what I saw changed each morning as I took the time to look.

As I moved from the courtyard to the subway a few blocks away, the windows I saw changed dramatically. No longer fixed and formal, the windows reflected a mass of humanity. Unfamiliar faces, flashes of light, then darkness, then more masses of unfamiliar faces and places.

The subway ride took us to an old, dirty part of the city: Hell's Kitchen. Windows of light were not obvious. No redeeming qualities were immediately apparent. At the end of the walk there was Metropolitan Baptist Church, complete with bars on the windows, locked doors, and a buzzer for entry.. Welcome to a very different world.

Soon the children from the neighborhood arrived for Vacation Bible School. They came from a dozen or so countries, language groups and religious traditions. Children I did not know soon they mixed with people I *did* know and formed a new form. As I moved through the week at Metro, new faces became familiar faces to me; at the same time, I saw familiar faces in new ways. The window through which I looked at familiar people changed; what I saw changed.

Like the windows at the seminary, sometimes I saw a color - a quality or an ability - that shined more intensely. Sometimes I saw a piece of the whole that I had not seen before. And sometimes it was a familiar part that I saw again. I felt reassured and proud of what I saw.

Whether the window was the unchanging stained glass of the chapel or the ever-evolving glass of a person, what I saw depended to a great extent on me. I as the viewer was as much a part of the experience as what I viewed. And then the truly powerful question occurred: when the people on the other side of my window looked back, what did they see?

Steve Fontaine

December 8

“And as you journey from this place, may you find yourself surrounded by the breadth and length and height and depth of God’s love for you, now and forever.” Dorisanne heads down the aisle, and I dab my eyes once again. If you watch me in worship these days, you’ll see that I spend much of the service in tears over one thing or another. I cry when I see the children whom we taught in Sunday school reading prayers fluently, remembering when they stumbled over their first-grade words. I cry when we sing any of my dozen favorite hymns. I cry over--well, just about everything. Ashley laughs at me: we’ve been in our transition to Fort Worth for almost four years now, and she thinks that I’m just the tiniest bit overwrought about it. But I know that when we move to Fort Worth full-time after Tom retires from Baylor (at a time yet to be decided), leaving Lake Shore will be the hardest part. I love my work at TCU, and I’m ready for a different house.

I’ll manage, somehow, without El Conquistador and Lady Bears basketball. E-mail, cell phones, and Facebook will help keep friends close in heart, if not at hand. But how will I ever find another church home that will mean all to me that this one has? Missions trees and trips and empty soup bowls and incredibly crafted worship services and hanging the chrismons on the tree and—well, you know. (Pause. Wipe eyes.)

I’ve always loved the prayer known as St. Patrick’s Lorica:

*Christ be with me, Christ within me;
Christ behind me, Christ before me;
Christ beside me, Christ to win me;
Christ to comfort and restore me.
Christ beneath me, Christ above me,
Christ in quiet, Christ in danger,
Christ in hearts of all that love me,
Christ in mouth of friend and stranger.*

And while I can't quite substitute "Lake Shore" wholesale for "Christ," I know that I will in fact always carry Lake Shore with me, whether the path leads only ninety miles to Fort Worth or beyond. If I learned anything from the fiftieth anniversary celebration, it is that one never truly leaves Lake Shore, and that people learn to find God in new, different places.

On some Sunday in the future, you will send us out, daring us to love and to serve in a new place as we have loved and served at this one. Our new church home will not be Lake Shore. But I know that, when we go there, part of Lake Shore will be there too. And so, I trust, will be God's kind of love.

Becca Sharpless

December 9

Last March, Troy and I were baptized at lake Shore. As I prepared my heart to be immersed in the baptistry at Lake Shore on this new step of my Christian life, I also wrote my faith journey to be shared with the church in worship. Here is what I said:

My earliest memories of church and the wonder of God's grace were formed in a small country church in mid-America. Remembering through the eyes of a child, McCroskie Creek Baptist Church seemed to be a central location for all things fun and social. Weddings, pot luck dinners, ice cream socials, Bible school, Christmas pageants, baby showers, 4-H club and, of course, REVIVAL which interpreted by a child translates to: you get to sing as loud as you want! And what a mighty thing to be seven years old and get to sing "Power in the Blood" as loud as you want!

Fast forward through the years. Farms collapsing, families uprooted and relocated to wherever work could be had. In our case that was Waco, Texas. Churches were visited, Bible school occasionally attended, but it was never the same—until Lake Shore.

As most of you know my first experience here was as an employee in the Children's Center. On a daily basis I gained insight as to what went on behind the scenes of this church. Could it be possible this really was a church built on the foundation of community and acceptance as well as God's grace? As days and months went by, I noticed that the glow had not worn off. Things did not happen at Lake Shore on a whim. Projects did not start with a burst of enthusiasm and then play out with lack of support. Meals on Wheels, Wednesday night suppers, Sojourners, the food pantry, Christiana's Shalom Children's Center in Ghana . . . the list goes on and on. I saw the word "Shalom" on the wall . . . it spoke to me. Topics of discussion were not conventional; books on the shelf were not only open-minded, but mind-opening. Could it be possible, after all these years, to find a place where I can be comfortable with some of my unconventional thoughts as my spiritual path unfolds before me? I think yes.

What lies before me, I do not know. What I do know is that I am not alone in it. Jesus Christ who watched over me as a child, blessed my life with his grace and love, carried me during times of sadness and sorrow, continues to walk with me, talk with me and live within my heart!

Not many months after our baptisms we came “home” to find our house on fire. All but the shell could be salvaged. Seven months later, we are making progress toward rebuilding, but we are still grieving that loss, still displaced, still longing for our house-that-is-home.

How grateful we are that this was the year when though we had great material loss, we found a spiritual home surrounding us with love, encouraging words, and weekly reminders that we are never alone in the midst of loss.

The words plural from the Sunday of our baptism rang true: “What lies before us, we do not know. What we do know is that we are not alone in it.”

Lori Jones

December 10

*"In the beginning was the word
And the Word was with God,
And the Word was God. . . .
The Word became flesh and dwelled among us,
And we beheld His glory . . ."*

It was a rainy October morning in 1986 when the transit bus I was riding made a stop outside a monastery near Wallingford, Vermont. I was winding up part of a vacation I took alone that year — something I had never done before, a different kind of journey for me.

Two monks stood waiting there at the bus stop, one holding an umbrella for the other who carried a suitcase. As I peered through the rain-streaked window by my seat, my writer's mind instantly swirled with possible story lines: perhaps the monk had visited this monastery on spiritual retreat and now was returning home . . . or maybe he was being called to a mission far away.

Then, in another instant, all my musings ceased as the two men turned to one another and embraced. I was close enough to see their faces and found myself transfixed by the love they obviously shared. It seemed that time stood still, and I sensed that I, too, was being embraced by a holy and lasting love. Out of the gray that day had come a flash of brightness. And so it is whenever we are in the presence of authentic love and goodness, wherever we are on our journey — God opens a window on eternity.

Like lightning that streaks unpredictably and awesomely across a stormy night sky, break through my finite existence, O God, and startle my soul awake this Advent, holding me breathless in the blissful Now of your being. Amen.

Deborah Harris

December 11

I have never thought of myself as a particularly co-dependent person. I have always thought of myself as a strongly autonomous being who does not define herself by her relationship or give herself away. However, this year I have had to really look at the truth of those statements as I watched a relationship I thought would develop into a lifelong commitment ended.

And that is where the journey began. I did not know I was lost. I did not know that I had been missing for a while. I did not know until I took my first steps down a hard road.

The beginning of the end was like surviving a loved one's death. I would wake up in the morning and for a moment forget the loss, and then remember it all over again.

I cried my way through work days.

I cried my way through rehearsals.

I cried my way through dinners.

I said a prayer every morning and evening that I cut out from a Lake Shore program:

"For all that has been, Thanks! For all that will be, Yes!"

Having faith that at some point I would believe it.

I cried my way through finding out he was seeing someone new.

I cried my way through remembering the holidays when the spent Christmas together.

I cried my way through January after finding out he was engaged.

I said my prayer every morning and evening.

"For all that has been, Thanks! For all that will be, Yes!"

And it became easier.

I cried a little less into the spring.

I cried even less into the summer.

And I did not cry on his wedding day.

Because with each step I took I found little piece of me I had left by the side of the road.

I found new friends and embraced old ones.

I found a renewed spirit in the artistic work that is my life's passion.

I found joy and grace and peace.

I found that I did give Thanks! for all that had been, and I did say Yes! to all that would be.

The divine shined into my life with clarity and said that I am held and that while this journey has held so much hurt, I have stepped into the light. I was blessed to let go of a relationship that was no longer allowing me to be my true self. I was given the gift to journey home to myself. And I was embraced.

"For all that has been, Thanks! For all that will be, Yes!"

Gillian Bellinger

December 12

If you've ever spun a car on ice, you know that grace can feel terrifyingly aimless. It begins and ends like love: Autonomically. Each spin has a life of its own.

Almost seven years ago, the three tons of steel that composed my pickup simply began to float. I'd previously survived a few scary wrecks, but this was different. However horrifying, spinning was quiet and gentle. It's difficult – even embarrassing – to admit that an existential epiphany gurgled under my adrenaline-soaked panic. For years, I'd driven forward and backward; yet here I was, propelled along fanciful axes.

My crash course ended abruptly. A signpost folded my door inward, and though my glasses had flown, I could see that my left arm was badly broken. Snow settled on my sleeve.

A couple of hours later, a doctor in Ardmore, Oklahoma, told me that the bones in my forearm had shattered. He pieced them together that night with eight-inch stainless plates. My body would heal. The truck would not. My father drove up the next day and put me on a plane back to my home in St. Louis. I remember that he made me laugh once or twice in spite of myself. Sara and my good friend, Joe, met me at the airport. I got home by the grace of my family and friends.

Months passed, slowly at first. My arm healed well. We replaced the truck. (This one has four-wheel drive and a few hundred pounds of gravel in the bed.) I became a more patient driver.

Still, driving in snow, rain, even wind made me feel like a cornered animal. I wasn't worried that I'd spin; behind the wheel, I relived that aimless, terrifying float. I dreaded that bizarre, graceful feeling.

My dread permeated my dreams. Whenever my life felt out of control, I'd dream myself back into a topsy-turvy car. Everywhere I went, I winced at crumpled cars. Wrecks in movies

nauseated me.

One day, the dreams started to change. I was seeking my master's in ceramics. My pots had grown. They tottered under the weight of large bellies. Their skins folded and creased. They began to stray from the vertical/horizontal axes of the wheel. Sometimes my clumsy intuition pushed them too far, and they tore, cracked, or collapsed. A few survived; these guided me a little bit further. In my dreams, cars still spun on fanciful axes, but now I knew how to influence, and almost enjoy, the spins. And when I began to teach art, I dreamt of teaching others how to influence their own unsettlingly aimless cars.

"You can never step in the same river, for new waters are always flowing onto you." When the Magi returned after a journey of several months, how had home changed? How had they changed? I now live in Minnesota, where snow covers the ground for a third of the year. Early each winter, I choose a day to take the gravel out of the bed, find a wide-open parking lot, and spin a few times. It's a thrill, really. Sometimes I laugh, in spite of myself.

Daniel Gardner

December 13

When Buddy and I moved into our current home in 2007, we promised each other it would be our last move. This was going to be home for good. After thirty-plus years of accumulating, I embraced the opportunity to edit our lives, packing only what was worth keeping for the rest of it. One “keeper” is a memory of a move we made fifteen years ago when our children were small.

We had decided to sell our home in favor of one that required less maintenance. In early December we got a buyer, and much of Advent that year was spent sorting, packing, and labeling. Because it was the only home he had ever known, our younger son Keith resisted the decision from the start. Of course, we put up a tree and exchanged gifts, but I had my one-foot-in-front-of-the-other attitude and a long to-do list, so I ignored many of my little boy’s feelings—along with any of my own that might distract me from the task at hand.

Christmas was past before we actually moved. On the early spring morning the movers came, his big brother Kevin had to be coaxed away from the excitement, but Keith—disturbed by the dismantling process—slipped away early to school.

Twelve hours later when the four of us sat down for a late-night supper at Jack in the Box, his dad and I were weary to the bone. The boys, however, had not seen the house since morning, and by the next afternoon it would belong to someone else. Tired as we were, we knew they needed a chance to say their good-byes.

Keith walked from room to vacant room before quietly saying, “I want us to sit in a circle and each tell a good time we had in this house. I’ll go first.” So we sat on the recently swept hardwood floor in a strangely bare living room as our nine-year-old son led the family in a ritual of farewell.

“I remember one Sabbath Sunday,” he said, “when we talked about our favorite seasons. Dad liked winter best because he

didn't have to mow the grass."

We laughed. And then we laughed again when I recounted how we had put the Christmas tree in the playpen during their toddler years to keep them from turning it over on top of themselves. Kevin's memory was discovering his first bike on Christmas morning, and his dad and I moaned about Santa staying up half the night putting it together.

"I'm glad we're laughing," Keith said with eyes shining. "I don't want to just cry. I've been happy here."

Then it was Dad's turn: "I remember the boys waving to me each morning through the big window." As we shared that memory, my pent-up feelings came. The boys had made a ritual of waving to both of us through "the big window" anytime we left them. And how much of life we had watched together from that window — thunderstorms and harvest moons and the sweet gum tree that stayed red through each Advent. It had been our home for nine years, and we had all been happy in that house.

Before we left, the four of us held hands around an imagined table in a vacant dining room and sang our blessing one last time: "Oh, the Lord is good to me, and so I thank the Lord..."

I thank the Lord indeed. And I thank God that sometimes, if we pay attention, a little child can lead us. For the Prathers, a very wise nine-year-old led us home by another way.

Judy Prather

December 14

"We shall not cease from exploration, and the end of all our exploring will be to arrive where we started and know the place for the first time." T. S. Eliot

Early one November evening in Istanbul, Nancie Wingo and I stood outside the Turkoman Hotel in the old Sultahnemet district of the city and hailed a taxi to take us to dinner. Nancie handed the driver a slip of paper. He nodded, smiled, evidently recognizing the name of the restaurant our concierge had highly recommended, and pulled out into the rush hour traffic of the fifth largest city in the world.

Soon we were crossing the bridge spanning the Bosphorus, leaving the lights of the Europe behind us. "He's taking us to Asia." Nancie said. "The concierge didn't say the restaurant is in Asia!" I sort of liked the idea of driving to another continent to eat, but as quickly as we had arrived on the eastern side of the river, we were on the bridge again, this time heading west, the outlines of the Blue Mosque and Hagia Sofia fading into the sunset.

Our taxi driver sped past the seafood restaurants by the river, through crowded neighborhoods and posh shopping districts. We were out of the range of our tourist map, totally lost as far as we were concerned. An hour later the taxi screeched to a halt in front of the restaurant where we wanted to go. We paid dearly for the ride.

No sooner had we stepped out of the taxi than we started wondering how long it would take us to get home after dinner. What taxi driver would ever want to come this far to pick us up? We considered foregoing a Turkish meal so that the driver could retrace his journey to take back to our neighborhood.

We had absolutely no idea where we were and how we got to our destination. Neither of us had a clue where we'd been other than on a ridiculously long and circuitous ride in the dark. But

we were hungry, and the smells of shish kebobs enticed us into the restaurant. We took our chances on both the food and a late taxi ride, dismissed the driver and went inside.

Midway through our meal, we asked our waiter if he would call a taxi to take us back to the Turkoman Hotel. He looked puzzled. I wrote the hotel address on a slip of paper and showed it to him.

“A taxi? To the Turkoman?” We nodded. He still looked puzzled. “You don’t need a taxi. Turn left when you walk out of the restaurant. The hotel is two blocks down on your right.”

Oh.

Really?

That close?

I wouldn’t recommend the practice of getting lost as a travel tip for someone in a foreign place.

On second thought, it’s always been my experience that I have to be lost for a while before I find my way home.

Sharlande Sledge

December 15

My sacred place is in the place where I was born, in the small village called Owe in Southwestern Cameroon. More especially, it is the workshop where my father and I did blacksmithing for many years until I left home. While in Cameroon I often returned home to visit my parents and to reconnect with the occupation that contributed so much to my upbringing. Watching my father heating and shaping iron, it reminded me of the heating and shaping that went into making me into what I was becoming. As I watched the strong glow of the fire and the gentle smoke and ashes rising from it, it reminded me of hard work and the stories my father used to tell me as we worked – stories about the importance of work, of integrity, and responsibility. That workshop played as much role in my upbringing as the school and the church did.

It was for that reason that after having wandered the world for just over ten years, upon returning to Cameroon last year, just in time for Christmas, I quickly went to the place. It was an attempt to remind myself of who I am, to reconnect with the wisdom of our ancestors which my father had passed on to me in that place. It was my attempt to reconfigure how far I have come, to see whether the place still makes sense. In many ways it did not. The place was no longer the same. No one worked there since my father had passed away. The strong glow of the fire, the heating and shaping of iron, had gone. But my memories of the place were still very vivid. I could still see all the work we did there. I could still see the men and the women who came there to place their orders for hoes, spears, axes, and other farming tools. I could still remember how some customers would press my father to make their work urgently for more money but how my father would insist that they must wait in line because he had promised to do someone else's work first. He would always advise customers to come for their product at a time when he believed their product would be available. "One way to maintain trust with your customers," he used to say, "is to keep your

promises to them. If I tell them to come for their product at a particular time and they come only to discover that I have not made their product, they would begin to learn not to trust me.”

As I already said, when I went back home the workshop was no longer there, the fire and the iron were no longer there, and my father was no longer there; but I felt like I was regaining my bearing. I felt like I was becoming myself again. Remembering the time I spent in that place, and the formation I received there, I felt that I had come home to myself, as the Ghanaian theologian Mercy Amba Oduyoye says. I had come home to the place where I was born and where I was taught how to be a human being living among other human beings. I thought of all the education I had received since I left home and it dawned on me that what my father taught me in the blacksmith’s workshop was still unsurpassed.

So I took it all in and returned to the United States to continue to be my father’s son away from the blacksmith’s workshop. I left Cameroon after Christmas by “a different way.”

David Tonghou Ngong

December 16

The first time I saw *The Wizard of Oz* was in 1981. I was five years old, living in New Orleans. I was spending the night with my friend Laura from down the street. We quickly ate supper, took our baths, put on our pajamas and plopped in front of the TV with our blankets and pillows. We were so excited to watch this movie our parents kept saying we would love. And love it we did. How could we each get a pair of ruby slippers like Dorothy's? The slippers have been the subject of a life-long search for me.

On a middle school class to Washington, D.C., I was elated to finally see the actual ruby slippers on display at the Smithsonian. Still, how could I get a pair of my own? My second trip as an adult landed me a Christmas ornament of these coveted shoes. It would do for the time being.

Then, a few months ago I was walking through Target when I came upon ruby slippers. Of course they were made for little girls – not their mothers. I would just have to live vicariously through my girls, break down and get them each a pair of these glittery, ruby red shoes. They would look so pretty with their Christmas dresses.

I'm pretty utilitarian when it comes to shoes. I don't believe I have ever bought a shoe that did not have a very specific purpose. I bought hiking boots for a college trip to the Grand Canyon. I have black shoes I wear with my black robe for Sunday morning worship. I have two pairs of sneakers – one for exercise and one for street wear. I have a pair of sandals I call my "summer ministry sandals," and I have a pair of black strappy sandals for date nights with Mike. Thinking "outside the box" does not come naturally to me when it comes to shoes, so the thought of wearing fancy ruby slippers for the rugged purpose of skipping down the yellow brick road is foreign to me.

Surely the shoes gave Dorothy blisters from walking miles on an unforgiving brick road. All-terrain soles would have been

more helpful for the mountain climbing bit, but Dorothy was focused on the task at hand – get to the wizard then get home. Dorothy came to some powerful truths in her ruby slippers, perhaps the most important truth being that the power to go home was always inside herself. She says, “If I ever go looking for my heart’s desire again I won’t look any farther than my own backyard because if it isn’t there I never really lost it to begin with.”

Or as Meister Eckhart said, “God is at home, it is we who have gone out for a walk.”

So standing there in the shoe aisle at Target, staring at these glorious ruby slippers, I had to come to terms with what I was about to do. I knew the girls would use them for everyday wear - running on the playground, digging in the sandbox, walking through oil-stained parking lots - and I vowed to myself I would let them. Who knows what truths they would discover - what beauty, joy, friendship, courage, and creativity? Perhaps even God.

Rachel Sciretti

December 17

We are all searching for home. We are all going somewhere.
Are you headed in a new direction? Are you ready to go home
another way?

This way is home

Typing thinking
mind flustered with endless words
scrambling emotion in hundred
i write what feels right
with the key of awareness i
unlock the treasure chest i keep hidden
in the cave of my mind
a piece of me i find meaning in
the wisdom, i repeatedly ponder on.
The click of unlock inspiration
and insight..
out comes the vision of a story,
a past wounded by wrong turns, the
choices made into experiences, and
of love lost and gained . . .
This is where i stand amazed of the
home that lay in me
always and forever i shall write
the meaning, the truth, and passion
the music that stirs the heart
the distant clouds and future hope
that spur me to great heights
in my words, of ink...i fly
in seeping in this favor of mine
I find, this beauty that lay in me
my blessing in disguise
founded amongst the ashes of bitterness
that blazed my soul and decoded
The beginning of an end . . .

Louise-Marie Morin

December 18

When I try to think of a comforting dwelling place, my mind rolls back to my childhood bedroom. My parents built the house when I was an infant. I don't remember any other home. For twenty years, until I was married, the bedroom was my private place. Then it was time to pack up and start the great adventure that marriage to Steve has been. In those last days, while filling boxes, I was overcome with the impossibility of the task.

Sure, I could pack clothes and shoes and posters and ticket stubs and books, but there was so much I could not put in a box. I wanted to take the alcove between the two closets where I could put anything on the walls. The pictures of the seven dwarves had been replaced by teen models, and finally by posters with "a message." How could I leave my sanctuary under the bed, back under the bookcase headboard, where I would hide to eat stolen cookies? I loved the amber glow of the room when, sunlight streamed through the orange drapes I hung during my "radical" teen stage.

The places where I cried and laughed, how could they be packed, or how could I leave without them? But leave I did with the U-Haul filled and overflowing, ready for the excitement of a fulfilled dream. Now I know that it's all still with me. The room has been redecorated, but I can close my eyes and see the amber light.

I think a dwelling place for Christ is like that. We all have had special times or places where we felt close to God - places where we felt at peace with the knowledge of God's presence. When life leads us to a new place, a different era, we fear some separation, some loss. However, the tabernacle moves with us. It travels with us on our way with God.

"Lo I am with you always, even unto the end of the earth," in a new place, a new time, or a different stage of life.

Kathy Gardner

December 19

We each think of home differently. The place you grew up or the house where parents or loved ones currently live. It may even be all the cities where you have lived. You may even say that home is being around the ones you love. Whether it is a house or your proximity to others, most of our way of thinking about home revolves around a location. This past summer I encountered some people who thought about home another way.

On the youth pilgrimage last summer we traveled to Philadelphia. The best thing that I enjoy about that city is the attention they give to the arts and to their heritage. One place that these two realms collide is in the Mural Arts Program. There are thousands of murals in Philadelphia, and each one is meant to represent the struggles and delights of a particular neighborhood.

All of these murals cross socioeconomic and racial divisions. On one corner there is a mural of music; on the next there is one celebrating women's suffrage, there is one for gay rights, the declaration of independence, murals representing trees of life coming from broken neighborhoods, beautiful garden scenes, and the shadow of a missed church building.

We met a group of people who realized that all these murals represented the heritage of people who called a location home. However, there was no mural that represented the large homeless population in Philadelphia. So they decided to do something about it. And we had the privilege of helping.

They let all those who are homeless have an opportunity to write their thoughts about what home means to them on a strip of cloth. After their thoughts were written on the cloth strips they were woven together to create a 30 ft by 30 ft canvas so each person's story was part of the art. On the large canvas there would be a mural painted to represent all those without a home. As for where to hang the mural, the idea was to allow the canvas

to travel around the city for a period of time so that everyone could see it and for it to represent the movement of the people it represented and all the ways they thought about home.

Charles Conkin

December 20

When both our parents died, we realized that we were now the “adults.” Those dear folks who buffered us from whatever was out there were gone. Now, they had not buffered us against anything since we were in college, but conceptually, they were still the adults and we were the children. If something happened, they would handle it.

We had another revelation not too long ago that more years had been spent away from North & South Carolina, than actually lived there.

Why am I putting these two thoughts together? Basically, I think it is because it was from our parents that we got a sense of home. When we returned to the Carolinas, we returned to them and to the small towns that gave us our roots. But, they aren't our “homes” any longer. We would not want to move back to either town. We would not want to live in our parents' homes even if that were still possible. We moved on in our journey by another way.

Those folks that I called “the adults” have all moved on in their journeys. They have returned to their ultimate homes. They have reached their reward and are at rest...no worries, no pain. They have gone home through the ultimate journey.

We are asked, “When are you going to retire and move to your mountain house?” “Not for a long time!” we reply. And, even when we do retire, we have decided that the system being used by Bill and Thelma Cooper and Tillman and Carolyn Rodabough is the one we want to put in place – the summer months, we leave Texas; the winter months, we return to Texas.

We have consciously made this plan because of our friends and church here. We hold dear relationships with others who populate this place and find it hard to picture our lives without them in it. We also can't picture our lives without Lake Shore Baptist Church.

Since the 50th Anniversary has occupied a great deal of our time and thoughts this past year, we have given deliberation to our connection with this body of faith. Lake Shore is unique. We have not experienced better, consistent worship anywhere else. We haven't experienced a church that even when it argues, gets along with each other without splitting or driving off the preacher. We have not experienced another church whose committees work as well as Lake Shore in guiding the life of this congregation. And, we have not experienced anywhere else the notion that "we would like our funerals to be Lake Shore funerals." Every time we attend a funeral somewhere else, we always end up saying, "but it's not a Lake Shore funeral." Lake Shore is home.

Whether it is away to a mountain house for retirement or back again to a community of faith that offers us family, we are all going towards home.

Libby Bellinger

December 21

“Pop, pop . . . pop. . . pop, pop,” the acorns burst under my tires. I relish the promises that fall offers: the clear night sky, the brilliant leaf colors, the crisp morning air—not to mention the sound of the acorn snaps as I drive down the street home. Home.

What is it about home that makes everything OK? Is it safety, belonging, family, warmth? Is it all of the above? Waco, Texas, certainly was never on the map as home for me. It was no more than a visiting place. Gary and Beth lived here; we came for an occasional birthday party or Thanksgiving celebration. Then, a few years ago Waco became home, not out of choice but out of desperation. When we moved here, it was a move of hope: the hope of starting over, the hope of feeling safe, the hope of things unseen.

I think of the young family two thousand years ago. Why were they sent on their journey? What was their purpose? Surely neither Joseph nor Mary had intended for life to become complicated. Yet life happens, and complications arise. So, with blind hope the Holy family listened to God’s instructions and followed God’s directions. Their journey became something extraordinary: a birth that would change humanity.

Seven years ago my journey dropped me in Waco, and I reluctantly—no desperately—hoped that Waco would become home. And something extraordinary happened. God patiently provided flickers of light in the darkness. Slowly, I felt safe and got excited about starting over. And the things unseen became quite exciting.

Without a doubt, I know that my journey won’t lead where I think it should. Without a doubt, I know that God will provide instruction on the journey. It’s a promise . . . just like the acorns.

Caryl Miller-Compton

December 22

My first time, I arrived very out of breath and on the verge of losing my breakfast. I had missed a turn and ended up in heavy traffic. It took about three times as long as driving, seemed at least three times as stressful, and left me sweaty. Was it really worth it? Did I stink? What about the helmet hair and the fluorescent shirt? I remember seeing all those happy bicyclists when we visited China: dressed for work, balancing their children so effortlessly. . . I thought again about trying the bus.

Fortunately, I had friends who used bikes as their main form of transportation, and they helped me learn the ways of urban commuting. I discovered the hidden routes of Kansas City – the ways around hills and traffic, which were different depending on if I were headed to or from work. I added bells, lights and fenders to my old bicycle. I learned how to take my lane, so that cars gave me more than a few inches when they passed.

Georgia O' Keefe once said, "Nobody sees a flower, really — it is so small, we haven't time — and to see takes time, like to have a friend takes time." This inconvenient way of commuting awakened me to new friendships. Although I was whisking by the flowers, I could track trees changing in the fall. I felt the cool breezes of the early morning and the gift of the afternoon sun. I noticed houses that had recently been boarded up or burned. I saw gardeners and roofers, dealers and wanderers. I heard cardinals and Red-winged Blackbirds. I smelled damp leaves and fresh-cut grass. I raced squirrels and chased them up trees with my bell. I waved to porch-sitters at the group homes and apartment complexes.

My new job requires me to drive rather than ride. Although I try to bring some of my bicycle awareness and tempo to my commute, I know that it's not the same. I discovered that when I went by bike, I was more energized when I arrived. I had missed the latest on NPR, but I had absorbed a different kind of news

about the rhythms and realities of beauty and suffering in the world.

I wonder if the Magi's directions were born out of their deep connection to the stars and the sand. They were clearly aware of changes in the night sky; traveling slowly by foot or by camel, they must have also been awake to the daily groans of the people. Surely they knew in their bones that the land was longing for liberation. What if the warning in the dream was delivered not by an angel in shining robes, but by the birds and beggars, the gardeners and widows along the way? How then should we travel?

Chris Brennan Homiak

December 23

When our kids were little we set out on our yearly Christmas visit to my folks' house in Texarkana, travel warning of inclement, icy weather were issued. At the time Brad was nine months old and Jeffrey was three.

Optimistically, Don and I thought we could beat the bad weather. From the outset, however, travel was slow due to heavy holiday traffic plus the icy roads. I'd never been away from "home" for Christmas, so turning back was not a consideration. A trip that normally takes five hours total, mounted to seven hours when we were still 100 miles from our intended destination.

As the hour grew late, bumper to bumper traffic slowed to a 10 m.p.h. crawl, and impassable roads finally forced us to pull over for the night in Sulphur Springs, a task that initially sounded simple. But there was "no room in that inn" or *any* inn for miles around. Instead we were directed through town to a shelter at Wesley United Methodist Church.

Thanks to the caring pastor, kind church members, and the Salvation Army, we were given good and drink as well as a place to lay our heads for the night. Their compassion was bestowed on over 200 people that night. Some of the recipients admitted that they had not been inside a church for many years.

In our hurried world, we often get side-tracked, but on that night, our priorities were quickly realigned. For Don and me it was imperative that we find a safe, warm place for our children to sleep. Rather than disappointment since we didn't make it to Texarkana that year, I was filled with a sense of awe and peace. Due to that experience in Sulphur Springs, Texas, we gained a small glimpse into the struggles Mary and Joseph faced on a similar night in Bethlehem many years ago.

Kristi SoRelle

December 24

I never thought I would travel with a string of Christmas lights in my suitcase . . . especially not in mid-July. But our son Patrick's Christmas lights have journeyed with us all year.

Last December, heavily pregnant, I strung the tiny colored lights along the windowsill beside the dresser in our bedroom. They softly lit an empty changing pad, and each day I ran my fingers over it, wishing for our son's arrival. When Patrick came home from the hospital on December 20, we discovered that the Christmas lights offered the perfect amount of light for nighttime feedings and diaper changes. December drew to a close and January arrived. We put away the other Christmas decorations, but the string of colored lights remained in active service each night. Patrick began to gaze at them in quiet fascination during our nightly rituals.

Our decision to keep the lights up was partly based on our experience traveling without them when Patrick was six weeks old. In a hotel in Washington, D.C., the night before my job interview, Patrick was up every hour needing to eat, be changed, or just wanting to chat. Not wanting to make his wakefulness worse by turning on the lights, we struggled to meet his various needs in the dark. After that, we began traveling with our string of lights. Patrick came to love them, smiling at them and reaching for them. When we moved out of our apartment in Oregon in July, the Christmas lights were one of the last things into the suitcase, and we strung them over lamp shades in the hotels we stayed at on the way to our new home in Maryland.

One night in August, rocking and feeding Patrick in his new room, I noticed that he was staring at the lights, now strung along his dresser. My thoughts had been preoccupied with the usual anxieties associated with a new job, but as I followed my son's gaze to the Christmas lights, I momentarily imagined that it was December again—Christmastime again—and my worries melted away as the comfort and joy of Christmas washed over

Me. Looking back down at my son, I saw the tiny lights reflected in his big blue eyes.

The Christmas lights are showing me what it means to make Christmas last all year: to have light to see by in the most challenging moments; to have light that doesn't hurt your eyes when you are weary and need rest; to have light that you can take wherever you go and count on in familiar and unfamiliar places alike. Christmas offers us the opportunity to stop and dwell in the light, to let our sorrows and anxieties fade for a moment as we hear the story once again. And letting the light of Christmas in doesn't weigh you down or take up too much space, but it can make all the difference . . . much like traveling with colored lights tucked in your suitcase.

Erin Cline

Christmas Day

*Del Verbo divino
la Virgen preñada
viene de camino:
¡Si le dais posada!*

If you want,
the Virgin will come walking down the road
pregnant with the holy,
and say,

“I need shelter for the night,
please take me inside your heart,
my time is close.”

Then, under the roof of your soul,
you will witness the sublime
intimacy, the divine, the Christ
taking birth
forever,

as she grasps your hand for help,
for each of us is the midwife of God,
each of us.

Yes, there, under the dome of your being does creation
come into existence eternally, through your womb,
dear pilgrim –
the sacred womb in our soul,

God grasps our arms for help; for each of us is
His beloved servant
never far.

A poem by Daniel Ladinsky, inspired by a
“Christmas Refrain” by St. John of the Cross, in
Love Poems from God: Twelve Sacred Voices from East and West

submitted by **Mike Sciretti**

New Year's Prayer

Christmas tinsel awkwardly spelled the words "Welcome to Egypt" in child-like English letters. By way of American Express tours we embarked on our journey into the land of pyramids and pharaohs, feluccas drifting lazily on the Nile, the chaotic bazaars of Cairo's *khan el-khali*. In the six-hour trip from Israel's Rafah crossing to the Suez Canal, the bus's window was a lens which cleared the wind and sand from my eyes to sink me into the world of Abraham and Sarah, Rebekah and Leah, Miriam and Moses, Mary and Joseph.

While others slept, familiar with the roadside scenes in the Sinai, I committed to memory these Sunday School pictures come-to-life: a Bedouin woman bending to gather straw, her bright, tribal dress splashing color onto a mostly ochre and gray-green landscape; a donkey burdened with four enormous buckets of water; two "preschoolers" and a dozen goats walking from the unknown desert beyond the horizon toward the highway; tomatoes and peppers in a young girl's basket, like spots of primary colors in a child's painting.

That Sunday afternoon in May I was tourist in the land of Egypt, but I was also pilgrim in the land of my ancestors, seeking some connection with my spiritual home. As newcomer to the physical places where the story of God's incarnation through Jesus Christ was first acted out, I tried to comprehend the journey Mary and Joseph made with their baby. Like them, I was a sojourner in a strange land.

*O God, like Mary and Joseph I move from familiar surroundings,
crossing the border to enter the unknown of new times and places.*

But I study maps and guidebooks, not stars.

I pack a suitcase, not a saddlebag for a donkey.

*I am guided by passport officials and planned itineraries, not by
faithful attention to dreams.*

I travel in comfort, not in a caravan of refugees, seeking safety.

God, I enter the new year as a sojourner, searching for the shelter of your presence in all my comings and going.

Transform the foreign geography of my life into a land of promise.

Sit by the side of my tent. Repair the torn places with stronger fabric.

Guide my heart as I sort through my possessions for the things I will carry on my trip - mediators of my formation, symbols that my feet have been planted in places where I belonged, reminders that people have loved me with a love of which I am very sure.

Enlarge my tent. May I welcome guests with your hospitality, offering a place for them to tell stories of places where I have not traveled or to rest their voices as they rest their souls.

Make of my heart a sanctuary. Acquaint me with the pain of those who seek a refuge, a safe place from harm. Remind me that your children do not have to be physically homeless to be without a home.

Extend my table. Multiply my invitations. Guide me to the persons who need to share a meal rather than eat alone. Hear my thanks for those whose table-sharing is an act of family blessing for me.

Move me into the landscape of your world. Change me from observer of ancient scenes to lively participant in the drama of today. Remind me that the Word is not confined to an address, a country, or a government, but you became flesh and pitched your tent in the place where I live...full of grace and truth and humanity and hospitality.

Remind me that I do not travel alone. Guide me through the stretches of desert to the oasis of your love. Shine your Light on my path, showing me the way to those who sit in darkness.

And help me carry with me the memory of home, dropping it like breadcrumbs in the laps of those along my journey, so that they, and I, may find our way back to you, our eternal home.

Bring me home "by another way."

Sharlande Sledge

