

Recovering our Direction for Holiness – Jan. 4, 2026

by Cindy Shomo North

Matt. 2: 1-12

If you take a moment to look far off in the distance I believe you will see a speck beginning to dot the early morning horizon of a sand covered desert dune. There are several people traveling together on camels which is not so common in winter months. They look tired, weather beaten, and hungry. They often have traveled by night as they use the stars for navigation and not a GPS app on a phone. Oh yeah, they don't even have a smart phone. They have no communication device and therefore are quite limited for assistance if something goes wrong on their journey. Why are they doing this? What pushes them on?

Have you ever undertaken a pilgrimage or a long journey?

How would you prepare for that journey? How would you calculate what resources you need? What mode of transportation will you use? Will you use an app or depend on someone else to know the way?

This past year, Rob and I have completely circumnavigated the continent of Australia in a caravan and a land cruiser. We started in Brisbane in December 2024 and did a southern route across New South Wales and on through to Perth arriving just 3 days before Christmas. From Perth we traveled to Broome in the Kimberley in March of 2025. Then in December of 2025 we completed the trek from Broome back to Queensland arriving in Brisbane on 8 December.

In 2023 Rob and I had been serving in Kenya at Africa Nazarene University, when we sensed the Lord was leading us to transition to Australia in order to walk alongside another servant of God, Pastor Jongil Kim, who had been ministering to aboriginal communities in the Kimberley and outback areas of central Australia.

We didn't understand fully what God was doing but decided to listen with the Spirit to determine the signs and directions he would give us along the way. When we arrived in Broome, Western Australia in March of 2025 we were only aware of one person who was interested in helping plant a new Nazarene church in that area. We had prayed and fasted and trusted God to show us more of what he was doing and to lead us to people who were hungry for God to do a new thing.

But when I think of the trip the wisemen took and realize what they went through it is far more difficult than we can imagine with our modern means of travel. I have never started out on a journey and used a star for guidance.

In the Church of the Nazarene we believe in holiness and I would like to share with you a helpful definition of holiness that I heard recently from a minister by the name of Diane Ury. She said, "**holiness is a life of intimate, personal, face-to-face union with God.**"

I believe the wise men represent to us a spiritual journey of holiness. Would you explore this with me today?...

I. We Begin with a longing.

Have you experienced the longing down deep inside for something more? Maybe it is the hope that there is something more to life than what you experience? A hunger to be known fully and deeply and loved unconditionally. Maybe it is the hunger to understand what you were created for or to get rid of all falsehood and pretense... to be real?

I believe God created us to be in relationship with him. That is what we see in the story of God making a covenant with his people, the Israelites, in the Old Testament. He placed that longing deep inside each one of us. It is a longing for being whole when we feel like something is missing. Often times we are trying to fill that longing with other things that will not satisfy us.

God has purposed to be hidden in plain sight in our time in history. We see this in the birth of his only son, Jesus, in Bethlehem. Shepherds come to celebrate and share the news but there aren't grand announcements in Jerusalem or in the palace where royalty reside.

And yet, God makes it plain in His word that for everyone who seeks they will find.

The Old Testament prophet, Jeremiah, (29:13) declares to the people these words from the Lord, *"You will seek me and find me when you seek me with all your heart"*.

The Magi were scholars and they knew the stars (astronomers). They were seekers that were not satisfied with the world as they knew it. They had studied enough to be aware that there was a promise of a king who would bring peace. I believe they, too, had the longing to know God intimately and be known by God.

So, when something unusual was happening with a new star in the cosmos, they were alerted. They believed in the supernatural and God was somehow revealing more to them about himself.

Notice who is the one who is initiating the action in all this drama... (God himself... yes, God is acting and people are responding. It is his love in action for us and with us.

The longing on our part is a response to God's movement first. A full-blown longing and desire will lead us to seeking and seeking indicates movement. It will involve energy and determination.

II. Trust is in the person...

Trust is in the person. Note again the word that God is speaking through the prophet to his people... "you will seek me and find me" and we notice in these words that it is a person we are seeking not a religion, not a creed, not a doctrine, not an experience to make us feel good, but it is another one that we seek.

The Magi were on a quest to meet the baby Jesus. They did not send someone else in their place (although they could have paid someone to do it). They wanted to worship and meet this baby King themselves.

C.S. Lewis describes what faith is like for a child who needs a thorn extracted from a finger or when we need to get a frightened beginner over a nasty place on a mountain. We are often asking them to believe that what is painful will relieve their pain in the long

run or that what looks dangerous is actually for their only safety. In that moment they need to trust even though they don't understand or it could be fatal for them.

Faith is trusting God's goodness despite what might apparently look like evidence against it.

III. Let there be questions...

I am sure the Magi had many questions when they started their journey yet it did not stop them from going. Why are we going in winter when most caravan lodgings are closed? What kind of perils will we face on the road (bandits, storms, lack of food) What if our camel drivers get sick or give up and run away?)

Flannery O'Connor says, "Don't expect faith to clear things up for you. It is trust, not certainty."

IV. Risk it!

The wisemen accepted that there would be risk on their journey and still believed it was worth it. The danger of bandits would have been very real to these wisemen. They were carrying expensive gifts for Jesus in their mudstained saddlebags.

Erwin Raphael McManus in his book *Seizing Your Divine Moments* talks about the risk of faith. He says,

To the best of my understanding, faith is trusting God enough to obey what He has said, and hope is having the confidence that God will do everything He has promised. One pushes and the other pulls you. They lead you into the wonder of experiencing divine moments. But without question, in between faith and hope, there is risk... You cannot have risk and guarantee safety.

V. Keep the End Goal commitment but focus on the present...

Our focus and energy is in the present moment.

The wisemen had to keep taking one step at a time

We receive the promise from Jesus that

(Gal. 6:9) Let us not become weary in doing good, for at the proper time we will reap a harvest if we do not give up (NIV)

Phillip Yancey says, "A record of God's faithfulness in the past combines with hope in a better future for one end: to equip us for the present."

These wise men were willing to wager their money and energy to seek out this King of peace. Their trip was a long and difficult one. It is hard for us to imagine the danger, the personal sacrifice and the hardship of a desert journey. Their trip took several months and possibly years and covered maybe a thousand miles.

You may be the only one who can see the star that God is calling you to follow. There were probably other Magi who made fun of these Magi going on a long journey because they saw a star. Yet they were willing to endure the ridicule as well as the physical hardships because they were convinced that this king would meet the longing of their hearts for peace.

One author, Morton Kelsey writes that, "The gifts that the Magi brought to baby Jesus were of great value but their greatest gift was in the journey itself, the courage that prompted it and their faith in their vision."

On our journey of holiness in Christ we must have a similar commitment to follow the star that God has given us. We worship Christ Jesus face to face as the wisemen did. Christ's presence will change us.

VI. Companions will steady us...

We really do need each other on this journey. The Magi could have given up and turned back a thousand times but they encouraged each other on the way. They shared a common vision and they had each other to lean on.

One of the great values of the church is to be in company with those who are following the same star, the Risen One, the divine child of Bethlehem. We gather together for corporate worship to see that we are a part of something bigger than ourselves. This is not just my personal worship. I do not get to decide this life with Christ completely on my own. I am accountable to others who are also following Jesus. I can easily get off track and get distracted. We come together to celebrate and encourage each other in the very presence of Christ.

We really do need each other.

We are called to encourage one another in Hebrews 10:24-25 (NLT) :

24 Let us think of ways to motivate one another to acts of love and good works. 25 And let us not neglect our meeting together, as some people do, but encourage one another, especially now that the day of his return is drawing near.

For Rob and I this year's journey to the Kimberley region of Australia brought us to new vision of God's love of people. When we saw God bring together this handful of committed people desiring to see God do a new thing in the next generation of aboriginal youth we were overjoyed because the evidence of the Spirit's preparation ahead of time (his prevenient grace) was real. I kept hearing the Spirit say, "you have found my pearls in Broome." God's great treasure was there and He so loved these people that he called us from Africa to come and show them His love. I was overwhelmed to hear that message from Jesus. It brought so much joy in that moment.

Remember our definition for holiness...

"holiness is a life of intimate, personal, face-to-face union with God."

This is our basic human need because we were created for this.

Invite Rob to share his testimony...

When you have seen Jesus. When you have known his love for you prayed, committed yourself, physically moved into the space God has called you to, and joined hands with others who are also living in the presence of Jesus. When you do it one step at a time trusting even through the questions and the risk that God is doing something greater than we can imagine. Then... then... This is a joy filled journey, my friends! Come, let's re-discover our holiness direction. It is beholding Jesus. It is allowing Him to fill us with himself. Then we will know love. His full love for us will free us to fully love the other.

Behold and Become...

Conclusion:

Let's take some time for reflection and prayer...

Are you hungry for deep meaning and relationship? If you are not that is something you can ask the Holy Spirit for... a deep hunger to really know Jesus in fullness and reality in your life.

What does it mean for you to be fully human and fully alive on this holiness journey with Christ? Do you need a recovery of your holiness direction for your journey? What are you moving toward? Who around you needs strengthening and whose hope needs encouraging?

Song...

Oh Come let us adore him...

We'll give him all the glory...

For He alone is worthy...

We'll praise his name forever..

Can't you picture the wisemen after their visit with Jesus? They had to be changed. I wonder what their life looked like after they returned? Who might they have shared with?

Do you need to come and sit in Jesus' presence and look into his face. See him beholding you and allow yourself to stay focused on his face, don't turn away.

What does that look like for you? Are there distractions that you need to let go of in this coming year in order to focus clearly on Jesus? What steps could you purpose to make right now? Who could you share that with and ask them to pray for the Spirit to bring strength in your life.