



*“Home By Another Way” Virginia Brooks*

**January 3rd, 2021**

*Twin Towers United Methodist Church*

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## WORSHIP GUIDE

*Before you begin your time of worship, find a comfortable place to be and gather whatever you might need: your Bible, your Advent candles, something to write on and with, your computer/connected device (if you intend to listen to music online), etc. Feel free to adapt this worship guide in any way that makes best sense to you and those you might be gathered with. (Consider inviting someone – a friend, a family member – to worship with you.) Commit to spending the next hour with God.*

**PRELUDE** - Listen and sing along to a song or hymn that blesses and centers your spirit!

**WELCOME** - (*Adapted from the Sisters of Saint Martha of Antigonish*)

A new year stands on our doorstep ready to enter our life's journey.

Something in us welcomes this visitor:

**the hope of bountiful blessings**  
**the joy of a new beginning**  
**the freshness of unclaimed surprises**

Something in us rebuffs this visitor:

**the swiftness of the coming**  
**the boldness of the entrance**  
**the challenge of a year's good-bye.**

Something in us fears this visitor:

**the unnamed events of future days**  
**the wisdom needed to walk love well**  
**the demands of giving away and growing.**

A new year stands on our doorstep.

With fragile caution we move to open the door for its entrance,

Our heart leaps with surprise, joy jumps in our eyes,

**for there beside this brand new year**  
**stands our God with outstretched hand!**

God smiles and gently asks of me:  
**can we walk this year together?**

And we, so overwhelmed with goodness, can barely whisper our reply: **“Welcome in!”**

**CENTERING HYMN** - “Jesu, Tawa Pano / Jesus, We Are Here” TFWS 2273  
Listen here: [https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=1d50rgH\\_QF0](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=1d50rgH_QF0)

Jesu, tawa pano (x3)  
Tawa pano, muzita renyu

Jesus, we are here (x3)  
We are here for you.

**CENTERING PRAYER** – *You are invited to take a deep breath as you pray:*

Lord, as this new year dawns, welcome.

Welcome into our world and into our lives.

Sow light in our hearts.

Let it germinate and grow and bring forth fruit.

Birth in us something new.

Let your peace take root.

Nurture it, encourage it to flourish.

Let your love blossom with the fragrance of patience and compassion.

Let it strengthen forgiveness and understanding and a commitment to justice.

Let your life emerge in us, through us, around us, bringing newness to all it touches.

We pray this in your powerful name. **Amen.**

*Christine Sine, <https://godspace-msa.com> |*

**SCRIPTURE** - Isaiah 60:1-6 / NRSV and Matthew 2:1-12 / CEB

Arise, shine; for your light has come,  
and the glory of the Lord has risen upon you.

<sup>2</sup> For darkness shall cover the earth,

and thick darkness the peoples;  
but the Lord will arise upon you,  
and his glory will appear over you.  
<sup>3</sup> Nations shall come to your light,  
and kings to the brightness of your dawn.  
<sup>4</sup> Lift up your eyes and look around;  
they all gather together, they come to you;  
your sons shall come from far away,  
and your daughters shall be carried on their nurses' arms.  
<sup>5</sup> Then you shall see and be radiant;  
your heart shall thrill and rejoice,  
because the abundance of the sea shall be brought to you,  
the wealth of the nations shall come to you.  
<sup>6</sup> A multitude of camels shall cover you,  
the young camels of Midian and Ephah;  
all those from Sheba shall come.  
They shall bring gold and frankincense,  
and shall proclaim the praise of the Lord.

After Jesus was born in Bethlehem in the territory of Judea during the rule of King Herod, magi came from the east to Jerusalem. <sup>2</sup> They asked, "Where is the newborn king of the Jews? We've seen his star in the east, and we've come to honor him."

<sup>3</sup> When King Herod heard this, he was troubled, and everyone in Jerusalem was troubled with him. <sup>4</sup> He gathered all the chief priests and the legal experts and asked them where the Christ was to be born. <sup>5</sup> They said, "In Bethlehem of Judea, for this is what the prophet wrote:

<sup>6</sup> *You, Bethlehem, land of Judah,  
by no means are you least among the rulers of Judah,  
because from you will come one who governs,  
who will shepherd my people Israel.*"

<sup>7</sup> Then Herod secretly called for the magi and found out from them the time when the star had first appeared. <sup>8</sup> He sent them to Bethlehem, saying, "Go and search carefully for the child. When you've found him, report to me so that I too may go and honor him." <sup>9</sup> When they heard the king, they went; and look, the star they had seen in the east went ahead of them until it stood over the place where the child was. <sup>10</sup> When they saw the star, they were filled with joy. <sup>11</sup> They entered the house and saw the child with Mary his mother. Falling to their knees, they honored

him. Then they opened their treasure chests and presented him with gifts of gold, frankincense, and myrrh. <sup>12</sup> Because they were warned in a dream not to return to Herod, they went back to their own country by another route.

This is the Word of God for the people of God. **Thanks be to God!**

**LISTEN** - Happy New Year, Friends! We made it! We made it through a year unlike any other year any of us have lived through. We made it through a year of ongoing collective disasters: the global pandemic, wildfires, police brutality and reckoning around racial justice, a collapsing economy, a contentious and ugly presidential election, and more. We made it through loss upon loss upon loss, change upon change upon change, and chaos upon chaos upon chaos. We made it through fear, loneliness, depression, exhaustion, bewilderment, boredom, anger, frustration, and anguish. We made it through Zoom, masks, gloves, six-feet of distance, gallons of hand-sanitizer, lining up at the grocery store, eating at home every single day, and countless other new habits. We made it through birthdays, anniversaries, births, deaths, Thanksgiving, and even Christmas, separated and online. We made it through all that and so much more. Thanks be to God!

And truth be told, despite the sheer awfulness of the year, there was also much to be grateful for, wouldn't you agree? In late November, the New York Times asked its reader to submit, in six words, what made them grateful in 2020. More than 10,000 people replied. I share a few that highlights from the list they published:

The crinkling eye above the mask.  
More homemade pasta, no more jeans.  
Teenage son still likes to snuggle.  
Postcards crossing the country — real mail.  
Never been social; now I'm good.  
Ambulance took him. He came home.  
Hearing granny laugh on the phone.  
Reached age 92, grandson reached 3.  
My wife gave me her kidney.

Got sober during 2020, stayed sober.  
Wasn't too late to say sorry.  
Aunt's Jell-O salad not gonna happen.  
Solitary Thanksgiving means no turkey.  
LOBSTER.  
Pandemic baby after years of trying.  
Water cooler chats with six-year-old son.  
Rediscovering myself by reading the Bible.  
There's really more kindness than hatred.

What a varied list that belies all the small and big graces that were gifted to us through this past year. I wonder what your six words of gratitude for 2020 might be?

As we think back over the past year with ragged hearts that are both tender and grateful, one thing seems apparent: our world has changed so dramatically that it has forced us to learn, adapt, and pivot to new ways of doing things that we had never imagined for ourselves, wanted, or thought possible before. We've learned new ways of being church (who knew worship could be as vibrant and meaningful online as it is in person?), new ways of being family (how many of us now hop on Zoom and gather with our families - our whole family - more frequently than ever before?), new ways of connecting with neighbors (who knew weekly porch concerts or neighborhood sings would be a thing?), new ways of activism and justice-making (who knew car caravans and virtual protests could be organized?) Just as the magi had to find another road, a new route as it were, to return to their own country, their homes, so have we. 2020 disrupted us as we went along familiar paths and, depending on how you responded, invited/dragged us on new ones. And therein lies an important but challenging lesson that I urge us to grab hold of and take with us from 2020 into 2021 - the lesson of finding new ways, new roads home. Let's pray.

I recently read that "most people take the same route to work every day." I assume the same is for their trip home. Interestingly, they do so even when "another route will be faster or more scenic" than their regular route. My guess is that we do so because taking the same route - rather than a new route - is easier, requires less (brain) effort, feels safe, and comes with reliability and predictability, things we like. But there are also dangers and downsides to doing so.

In our scripture today, Matthew tells us how wise men or magi "from the East" observed a very special star that drew them, at least initially, to King Herod's palace in Jerusalem. They were looking for "the child who ha[d] been born king of the Jews". A palace made sense as the first place to look. This news of course "troubles", even "frightens" King Herod who was, after all, at that very moment, happily enthroned as the King of the Jews by Rome. In fact, Herod had been ruling some 30 odd years by this point and was in no way interested in or ready to give up his throne. Matthew paints a picture of a conniving, manipulative, and violent man who is wed to his power, so much so that he would massacre "all the children in and around Bethlehem who were two years old or under" when he finds out that the magi have disobeyed his command to locate the child and bring him word of his whereabouts. But it is precisely because the magi have been "warned in a dream" that they choose not to return by the same road, not to return to Herod, but instead, "[leave] for their country by another road."

This story is, of course, about many things. It is about how God's light has arisen, not just for a specific group of people - the Jews - but for everyone, signified by these utter outsiders, these astrologers from the East, who see a special star and follow it, who find Jesus, a newborn baby, and kneel down and pay homage. It is about how God's light and salvation are not found in the halls of power, in the palaces of kings, in the capitals of the world, but in lowly stables, in out of the way places, in ordinary and faithful folks like Mary and Joseph, and in the vulnerable and helpless like their newborn. This story is also about how we might bring our best gifts to celebrate God's divine presence and hope: gold, frankincense, and myrrh. But this is also a story of how we must be ready and willing to return home by another way, a new way.

In Matthew's story, the magi returning home by another way shields Jesus and his family, protects them, just long enough for them to escape to Egypt, avoiding the wrath and destruction of Herod. Like so much in the gospel according to Matthew, it also serves to fulfill an Old Testament prophesy found in Hosea (11:1), "Out of Egypt, I called my son." The magi's obedience to the warning that comes in a dream and disobedience to Herod also serves as a stark reminder to us: the world's power and authority can be (and perhaps often is) at odds with God's dream and will. Returning home by another way then isn't as simple or innocent as finding a faster or more scenic route home. It is about listening carefully to all the ways that God might speak, and about being willing to set off onto unfamiliar ways / in order to stay aligned with the Light, with God / and find our way home. And it is about resisting and rejecting all that Herod represents: self-interested, self-serving power and violence. Friends, sometimes as we are going along on autopilot on those familiar roads we fail to see that what feels easy and convenient to us, serves the Herods of our time and plays into plans that harm others and endanger life. Returning home by another way then is about finding other roads, new roads, that protect God's dream and forward God's purposes.

God invites us, directs us even, onto these new roads in all kinds of ways. Sometimes it happens as it did with the magi through dreams and warnings. Sometimes it happens through global shifts like pandemics, or personal shifts like illnesses and accidents. Sometimes it is prompted by the most fleeting of senses and at others by hard punches to our guts. These shifts are rarely easy. Traveling by an unfamiliar, unpreferred, and unchosen road requires something of us. It requires an openness to changing plans, to new timing, to experimentation and to

uncertainty. It requires of us flexibility and curiosity and humility! It requires patience. And it requires trust and courage.

We've had a lot of practice traveling new paths, charting new ways in 2020, haven't we? It has been a grace and a blessing to me time and time again to witness and experience the collective openness, the gracious flexibility, the continued curiosity, and the generous patience of this community as we seek home, seek God, together on new and unfamiliar roads. I am grateful to have you as traveling companions! As we enter into 2021, I know that we all have high hopes that we can finally get back to "normal", finally take our familiar routes. But I pray that we might hold that longing with open hands and instead be guided by the star, the light, that is Jesus. I pray that we might continue to listen intently for and to God's dreams and warnings. And that we might be so bold as to set off in new directions whenever God calls that lead to more hope, more healing, more justice, more joy, and more wholeness for ourselves and for God's world in this new year. Happy New Years, Church! Amen.

**PRAYERS of the PEOPLE** – *Spend time in prayer. What did you hear for yourself through today's scripture and reflection? Talk to God about it. Then lift up the joys and concerns that are in your heart. You might write them down, speak them aloud, or pray them in silence.*

*I would be honored to pray with you and for you.*

*Please send a note via text, mail, or email or give me a call if I can do so.*

**SHARING OUR GIFTS**— *How might you offer yourself and all that you have to God this week? How are you being invited to practice generosity? Spend a moment listening for God's direction.*

*You are invited to contribute financially towards the purpose and ministry of TTUMC. We are a congregation committed to being conduits of God's healing in our neighborhood and beyond, and in so doing, impact the last and the least. You can contribute by mailing in a check, dropping off cash, or giving online via PayPal (visit [www.twintowersumc.org](http://www.twintowersumc.org)). Take a moment and do that now. Please also be sure to return your Stewardship Response Card via mail or online [here today!](#)*



**CLOSING HYMN** - "Covenant Prayer" W&S 3115

Listen here: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=xwkq1dZm01A>

"I am no longer my own, but thine.  
Put me to what thou wilt, rank me with whom thou wilt.  
Put me to doing, put me to suffering.  
Let me be employed by thee or laid aside for thee,  
exalted for thee or brought low for thee.  
Let me be full, let me be empty.  
Let me have all things, let me have nothing.  
I freely and heartily yield all things  
to thy pleasure and disposal.  
And now, O glorious and blessed God,  
Father, Son, and Holy Spirit,  
thou art mine, and I am thine. So be it.  
And the covenant which I have made on earth,  
let it be ratified in heaven. Amen."

**BENEDICTION** - *\*Cheryl Lawrie, <http://holdthisspace.org.au/>*  
we leave today going into a future as yet unmapped

take faith with you as you go;  
into the parts of your life not yet traveled by love  
into the parts of the world unexplored by grace  
let compassion and hope be the roads that you follow  
today and always  
amen.

**NOW GO AND PASS CHRIST'S PEACE!**

**SCRIPTURE** for Jan 10th, 2021: Mark 1:4-11

**PRAYER INVITES:**

- For our deep listening to God's dreams for us individually and as a church.

- **Ruth B.** is scheduled for surgery on Jan. 7th. **P. Bob** is scheduled for surgery on Jan. 11th.
- For the healing and wholeness of **Gary B.** and **Doug M.**