The same faith that had imprisoned Christians in a dogmatic geography lured pilgrims and crusaders from Europe to the East. The Star of Bethlehem, which drew the Three Kings, guided countless faithful in later centuries to the Holy Land. These journeys of faith became pathways to discovery.

When the First Crusade triumphantly entered Jerusalem in 1099 they found a city rich in middle eastern and eastern culture. During the next two centuries of crusades, spices, exotic gems, pearls, tea, fine china and silks began to appear in many European homes. Wishing to cast aside their heavy woolen cloaks and bland meals for beautifully embroidered silk robes and delectable foods, the kings and queens of Europe soon found themselves in a maritime race for domination of eastern trade. Many of the sea captains who undertook these explorations received their inspiration from the travel accounts of a young man from Venice named Marco Polo, who journeyed with his father and uncle in the 13th century to the court of the Great Kublai Khan in far off Cathay.