

## **“God Guides the Wise”**

Date: December 11, 2016

Place: Lakewood UMC

Texts: Psalm 19:1-6; Matthew 2:1-12

Theme: Prevenient Grace, guidance, wisdom

Occasion: Advent 3, Max Lucado series

Back in the olden days, before technology, I used to use a fold-up map to find my way to a new destination. Nowadays I plug the GPS into my car and listen as Suzie, as I call her, tells me where to go.

Today we want to talk about finding our way to Jesus, and we won't be using either a map or a GPS to do it. The story of the wise men tells us how. Matthew loved the magi. He gave their story more room in his gospel than he gave the birth story of Jesus.

He never mentions the shepherds or the manger, but he didn't want us to miss the star and the seekers. It's easy to see why. Their story is our story. We're all travelers, all seekers, all on our journey. In order to find Jesus, every one of us needs directions. God gives it. The story of the wise men shows us how.

The first clue the wise men had was the star in the East. “We have seen his star in the East and we have come to worship him.” You see, God uses the natural world to get our attention. The earth and the stars form the first missionary society, telling the good news of God's love for the world.

Psalm 19:1 proclaims: “The heavens declare the glory of the Lord.” God has used stars in the sky, sunrises and sunsets, majestic mountains and beautiful scenes of nature to get our attention. “Hey world! I'm here. Look at what I've created. Behold the glory of God.”

Listen to what Paul wrote to the Romans: “What may be known about God is plain to people, because God has made it plain to them. For since the creation of the world God’s invisible qualities - his eternal power and divine nature – have been clearly seen, being understood from what has been made, so that people are without excuse.” (Romans 1:19-20, NIV)

God led the wise men to Jerusalem with a star. But to lead them to Jesus, he used something else. The star brought them to the court of King Herod, who consulted with the leading priests and teachers of the day.

They consulted the scriptures and told both king and magi that that Jesus would be born in Bethlehem. ‘And you, o Bethlehem in the land of Judah, are not least among the ruling cities of Judah, for a ruler will come from you who will be shepherd for my people Israel.’

The star was enough to lead the magi to Jerusalem. But it took Scriptures to lead them to Jesus.

People see signs of God every day: Sunsets that steal their breath; Newborns that bring tears; Gentle snowfalls that please the eyes. But do all who see signs draw near to God? No. Many are content simply to see the beauty of nature and sigh.

But they never realize, the riches of God are intended to turn us toward him. The wise men, however, understood the purpose of the sign. They followed it to Jerusalem, where they heard about the scripture. The prophecy told them where to find Christ.

It’s interesting to note that the star reappeared *after* they learned about the prophecy. The star “came and stood shining right over the place where the child was.” (Matt. 2:9) It is as if the sign and

word worked together to bring the wise men to Jesus. The ultimate aim of all God's messages, both miraculous and written, is to shed the light of heaven on Jesus.

“They came to the house where the child was and saw him with his mother, Mary, and they bowed down and worshiped him. They opened their gifts and gave him treasures of gold, frankincense, and myrrh.” (Matt. 2:11)

Behold the first Christian worshipers. The simple dwelling became a cathedral. Seekers of Christ found him and knelt in his presence. They gave him gifts: gold for a king, frankincense for a priest, and myrrh for his burial.

They found the Christ because they heeded the sign and believed the scripture.

But did you notice who was not at the manger? Noticeably absent were the scholars of the Torah. They reported to Herod that the Messiah would be born in Bethlehem. Did they not read the prophecy? Of course they did. But they didn't respond to it.

You would have thought, at a minimum, they would have accompanied the magi to Bethlehem. Didn't they want to meet the Messiah? The village was near enough. The risk was small enough. At worst, they would be out the effort.

At best, though, they would have seen the fulfillment of the prophecy. But the priests showed no interest.

The wise men earned their moniker because they did. Their hearts were open to God's gift. The men were never the same again. After worshiping the Christ Child, “they departed to their country another way.” (Matt. 2:12)

You might think that means they went home by a different route, not going back to see King Herod. And, that is true. But Matthew uses the word *way* in other places to suggest a way of life. He speaks of the “narrow way,” and “the way of righteousness.” He may have been telling us the wise men went home as different men.

Called by a sign. Instructed by Scripture. And directed home by God. All the forces of heaven cooperated to guide the wise men.

It’s no different today. God uses every possible means to communicate with you. We United Methodists use the word *prevenient grace*, to talk about the ways that God reaches out to us, even before we know that God is looking for us.

The wonders of nature call to you. The promises and prophecies of Scripture speak to you. God himself reaches out to you. He wants to help you find your way home.

When God sends signs, be faithful. Let them lead you to Scripture. As Scripture directs, be humble. Let it lead you to worship. And as you worship the Son, be grateful. He will lead you home.

Who knows? Perhaps before Jesus comes again, we’ll discover why men don’t ask for directions. Maybe we’ll learn why women apply makeup while they’re driving. But those are questions for ones greater than I.

Pay attention to the signs. Heed the words of Scripture. Listen for the still, small voice of God, as he calls each of us home, home to himself. And know, that if we get lost along the way, he will come looking for us. He wants for each of us, to find our way to Jesus.

This sermon borrows heavily from the book *Because of Heaven – Love is Born, Hope is Here*, by Max Lucado. Thomas Nelson Publishers, 2016, pp. 75-80.