



**North Shore
Congregational
Church**
FOX POINT, WI

From the Pulpit...

“What Will Be Yours?”

Rev. Dr. Martin Hall – Preaching

Matthew 2: 1-12

January 6, 2018

So, I got thinking about navigation this week. When I was first in ministry, I moved to metro Detroit and served a church with members from all over Oakland County, Michigan. Now, I had never been to the area prior to that ministry, I had no clue where things were and no idea how to get around. Even worse, there were no numbered streets moving north to south, or east west roads that stretched directly across the county as we have here. No, Oakland County was a web of bending and winding roads that were circling and splitting the dozens of inland lakes in the region. So, as soon as I moved in, I went out and got a county-wide atlas that was a spiral-bound book an inch-and-a-half thick. Indexes and gridlines could guide you from one page to the next as you deciphered how to get from point A to point B – and that atlas was my life-line for the first year of my ministry.

What struck me this week, however, was that if I put that book in front of my children today, it might as well be written in hieroglyphics – they wouldn't have a clue what to do with it. Kids see all kinds of maps in school...world maps, national maps, physical maps, topographical maps...but if you put a road map in front of toady's 16 year-old driver and ask them to get themselves from where they are to where they want to go, the vast majority of them will be at a complete loss. They very well may not even be able to find where they are, much less plot a course to where they are going. We just don't use maps anymore. Whether it's built into the car, on our phone, or on a device mounted to our windshield – we type in the address or name of a location, and it tells us where to go.

That thought, however, got me headed down the rabbit's hole of navigation techniques that would seem equally (if not even more) foreign to me. I started picturing the sailor on the bow of the ship with a sextant in his hand – measuring the angle of the stars and estimating his course and location. Then I looked it up and found that that technology is less than 300 years old. So, I started imagining the caravan in the wilderness with nothing but a compass to guide their general direction and found that even that wasn't invented until the 12th century. Today, we've become so accustomed to devices that can guide our every move – some will even tell us to turn right at the McDonald's and not pass the Shell station on the left. Today, we live in a world in which all we really need to think about is where we want to go and we have tools that will fill in all the blanks for us as we get there. What I found remarkable as I looked at it a bit this week, however,

was that even the ancient technologies of sextants and compasses really haven't been around all that long.

That's what made it interesting to think about the journey of these magi. There was no GPS. Sextants and compasses didn't exist. There were some maps of the known world, but not with the kind of detail that would allow you to plot a specific course from A to B. No, in their world navigation came down to choosing a focal point and guiding your path on the basis of your relationship to that point of focus. It might be a river that you are following, a mountain range that stays to your west, or a celestial constellation towards which you travel – but short of 'Go that way and see what happens!' the only real navigational tool of the time was to hone in on some fixed position or another in your greater surroundings and to allow that focal point to guide you to where you want to go.

That, for me, is the real strength behind the star the magi followed – a star that has been called The Star of Bethlehem. There's a lot of talk and conjecture about how these individuals might have been astrologers of a type because of how they noticed the star rise – and that may or may not be accurate, we really don't know – but, what stands out to me was that they saw the star that would guide them to the miracle of Jesus, they rose up and followed that star, and despite the detours and deviations that erupted on the journey, they held their sights on that star until it brought them to the feet of Immanuel and into the very presence of God incarnate.

I was drawn into this notion of navigation this week because I think it is hard for us to imagine trying to travel from one destination to another with nothing but a focal point and a 'go that way' mentality. In a world of satellite imagery available on our phones and step-by-step instruction by GPS, we don't have any real sense of the experience of travelling in the manner of these magi – and yet their lesson on navigation speaks volumes to the very journey we travel in faith.

How many of our choices are being driven by that thing we've set our sights on? How many of our days are guided by that focal point we've chosen? How much of our life and perspective is shaped by that which we have chosen as the guiding point of our very existence? And, more importantly, how much thought have we put into what that is?

The simple truth is that, in a world in which our literal navigation can be dictated step-by-step by computers that know where we are, where we are going, and how to get there, the grander scope of our existence is constantly influenced by the navigational anchors we've both consciously and subconsciously set as our own Star of Bethlehem. Financial aspirations, professional accomplishments, material possessions, social status, public persona, pride, ego...the list goes on and on of those things that serve not just as distractions and temptations, but as both intentional and unintentional Stars of Bethlehem that guide our every step, every decision, and every day. The list is endless of those things that serve to upend our journeys and guide us astray – and the result is that in this world of GPS directions that can dictate our every turn our grander lives wander in directions hopelessly distant from the foot of Immanuel because we replace the true Star of Bethlehem with the star of our own choosing.

Scripture, prayer, consistent engagement with God through the gift of the Spirit – that's the Star of Bethlehem that rises for us today. That intentional focus on embracing our relationship with

God – that's the fixed point that can continue to lead us to the glorious presence of God incarnate. But, we have to choose to make that our Star of Bethlehem. Today, tomorrow, each day...we have to decide to make this thing we call faith the basis on which the course of our lives are charted. We have to thoughtfully and intentionally point our lives in the direction of God, or before we know it, our Star of Bethlehem will have been replaced with another star of our own subconscious choosing.

The magi had their hiccups along the way – but they made it to the foot of the Christ-child because saw the star, they followed the star, and they mercilessly held their focus on that star as the guiding point of their journey. What we often fail to realize is how often we have supplanted that Star of Bethlehem in our own lives. So, it's worth considering, as we enter into 2019...today, tomorrow, each day in the year ahead – as our moment to moment is dictated by the GPS's and the calendars that regulate so much of our every day – in the wider scope of our living, what will be that focal point by which the course of your life will be plotted? In the grand scheme of our journey, what will serve as our Star of Bethlehem?

In this time of setting our sights on all sorts of resolutions for the year ahead – perhaps in 2019, we ought to start with that one!