

Scripture: Matthew 2:1-12

Sermon Title: "Follow the Signs"

Rev. Josh Fitterling

Have you ever been in the midst of making a decision of some kind in your life, and said to yourself, "if only I had a sign?" "If only I had some sort of assurance from God that my decision was the "right" decision. And with that sign, would come an ease of being able to step into a future that may feel unknown but that we were confident was the step that were supposed to take – a confidence instilled within us by a sign.

During my first year of college, I attended a World Missions Conference known as Urbana, held in St. Louis the week before Christmas, and I have spoken of this conference once before. It was a gathering of primarily college-aged youth from around the nation and the world excited about living out their faith. Now, I did not go there alone, in fact a friend of mine at school who was already planning to attend with a group from college, asked if I would go. So I thought about it. I knew about this conference coming up through the Christian group that gathered on campus, but it had not really struck a chord of interest with me at the time. But when my friend Alex asked, I thought, "Maybe this is a sign". Maybe his asking is a sign that I am to go and experience this conference for myself. Now, side note, later I found out, the reason he asked me to go was because he wanted a roommate to split the cost of the hotel room with! No hard feelings, just not the motive I thought.

But I digress. So the group of 6 of us from Lebanon Valley College headed on a 12 or so hour bus ride to St. Louis. Now, our registration included our dinner each night and our hotel had a complimentary breakfast, but throughout the week, we would be on our own for lunch. As a group of cash-strapped students, we decided that we would pool our money and buy bread, peanut butter, jelly, pretzels, other snacks, some fruit, and things like that to make up our own lunches rather than eating out each day. And this ended

up working out very well, so well in fact that by the end of the week, we still had some food remaining. So on our last day in St. Louis, we made up extra peanut butter and jelly sandwiches, grabbed the extra fruit and snacks, and decided to start doing some mission work right then and there (no time like the present, right?) – We wanted to provide lunch for someone homeless on the streets of St. Louis.

With a bag of lunch in hand and a desire to live out the love of God in our hearts, we hit the streets of St. Louis on what was the coldest day of the week – today actually reminds me a lot of that day. We started walking up the street in busy, downtown St. Louis, waiting to see someone who may like to have lunch with us. We came to an intersection, still searching for a lunch guest to invite to our meal, and were faced with a decision – do we go straight, left, or right. Not the hardest decision in the world, but being new to St. Louis, we didn't know the best answer. And so standing on that corner, trying to make up our mind, I looked up and saw a sign – it said, "One Way", pointing to the left. And so we followed that sign.

A few minutes later, we came upon a couple, a husband and wife, who were living on the streets of St. Louis. And we heard their story and shared lunch together – I guess the sign led us to right where we were supposed to be.

Today, as we celebrate the searching and the arrival of the Wise Men to greet the Newborn King, we realize that in their searching, they were looking for and following the signs. They first saw the star appear on the night when in the manger Jesus was born. Being astrologers of the time, they studied the heavens, and they knew that this meant great things for the world. And so they set out to follow that sign, coming to Herod looking for guidance and help in their search, when their sign, the star, again appeared and they followed to where they met the Christ Child. And then again, after giving their gifts they had a decision to make as to whether or not they would go back to Herod as he requested, and in another sign, this time a dream, they realized that he

met ill-will toward this little one, that he wanted this little one dead. And so again, they followed the sign, not returning to Herod and going home by another road.

For the Wise Men, the signs were clear and they followed. In our lives, we may experience signs that too are clear or we may find ourselves questioning them? Is this really the sign I'm looking for? Is this really God reaching out to me to guide my path or am I reading into something a little too much? These are questions that only you can answer, but what we learn from the Wise Men is this - if the sign leads to light (to goodness, to mercy, to grace), as the star led them to the Light of the World - the giver of goodness, mercy, and grace, follow it. If the sign leads to life, as the dream that the Wise Men had did, follow it. When I look back at my time in St. Louis, I knew the first sign of my friend Alex inviting me would led to, if nothing else, a good time with friends - that's life. And I knew that our "one way" sign would keep us moving toward our mission of feeding a hungry friend - that's light. Beloved in Christ, as we look for the signs in our lives, one thing is clear. If you are headed like the Wise Men toward light and life, trust that you are following the signs in the right direction and keep on going. Amen.