

Look Up

January 4, 2009

(Christmas 2 - Year B)

Matthew 2: 1-12

St. Alban's Episcopal Church, Waco, Texas

There are many things that Susan and I have learned by having a son who plays varsity basketball.

And one of the things that we have learned is the location of many high school gymnasiums throughout Central Texas.

On the Friday night before Christmas, Scott had a basketball game against the Bastrop Bears.

However, since the town of Bastrop is over 125 miles away, the 2 schools agreed to play at a neutral site, at Rouse High School in Leander, Texas.

In the rush before Christmas, Susan and I had not yet gotten directions to this brand, new high school in Leander.

So, before we walked out the door to begin our pilgrimage to another Central Texas gym, Susan quickly got onto the website mapquest.com to get the correct directions.

We printed out the directions from the computer - then we all hopped into the car.

Traveling down I-35, we got off just past Georgetown.

We turned right onto a dark Farm-to-Market road while our family sang along to a CD of Christmas music.

Our mapquest directions told us exactly where to go, so that all we had to do was to keep the printout in front of us.

After going 8.6 miles, we turned left into a subdivision of new homes. Then, right, then left, then right again for 1.7 miles, then we arrived at our destination -

Which was a barricade at the end of dead-end residential street.

We reviewed the computer-generated driving directions again, step by step.

And we had followed the directions exactly.

But here we were, at a dead end in Leander, with the school gymnasium no where in sight.

Luckily, a man came out of his house to turn on his Christmas lights. So, we rolled down our window and shouted out to him:

“Do you know how to get to Rouse High School?”

And he answered back:

“You must have used mapquest.com!”

Then, the man walked over to our car and began to give us directions the old-fashioned way.

We pointed into the sky toward the general direction of the high school.

He told us to back track until we saw the 7-Eleven.

Turn left at the 7-Eleven, then look for a BBQ stand on the right.

The school would be just ahead of us, behind a grove of trees.

After thanking this kind man, we were on our way.

Except this time, instead of burying our heads into a computer printout, we looked up -

And when we looked up, we noticed each landmark and CVS and gas station, until we finally reached our destination in time to see the basketball game.

If the wise men from the East had logged onto mapquest.com and typed in information to find the newborn King of the Jews, I wonder what directions would have spit out onto their computer printout?

I bet that mapquest would assume that the King and Savior of the world would probably be born somewhere big and important.

So, I would imagine that the website would have led the wise men on the most direct route via the interstates to

The United Nations or to the Texas Motor Speedway or to the Washington National Cathedral, or to that other national cathedral, the American shopping mall.

However, instead of using the directions provided by a computer website, the wise men looked *up* - and they saw a new star at its rising.

And while looking up, the wise men followed the star to a little podunk

town called Bethlehem.

And, upon entering the house, the wise men saw the child named Jesus, and his mother, Mary, and they knelt down and worshiped him.

You see, the wise men would have never found Jesus by keeping their heads buried in a computer print out.

Instead, the wise men found Jesus - because they looked up.

This coming Tuesday, on January 6th, the twelve days of Christmas will be over, and we will celebrate the Feast of the Epiphany.

At St. Alban's, we will celebrate this holy day of Epiphany with a short communion service, with music, at noon.

On the Feast of the Epiphany, we celebrate that the wise ones from the East were the first non-Jewish people to ever recognize that the little child in Bethlehem was the king of the world.

On the Feast of the Epiphany, we celebrate that the real wise people in this world are not the ones who keep their heads down,

Because the real wise guys are the people who look up - and who follow the star of wonder.

For centuries, ship captains guided their boats by studying the position of the stars and looking up to the stars for guidance.

However, global positioning systems and satellite technology have now rendered star gazing unnecessary in order to guide a ship.

Even the U.S. Navy has now stopped teaching the subject of astronomical navigation because looking at the stars is no longer crucial in order to steer a ship.¹

As technology marches onward, it seems that we look up to the heavens less and less in order to chart our path on our earthly pilgrimage.

And, as I examine my own life, it seems rare today for us to steer our *spiritual* pilgrimage by looking up, by navigating our life by the star at its rising - and by following that star to Jesus.

Yet, we have a choice as to how we will journey through this life:

We can keep our head down.

Or, we can look up.

¹ From an article in *Christian Century*, December 18, 2008, page 45.

We can keep our head down -

And see life as a monotonous series of days and nights, which begin with Matt Lauer on the Today Show and end with Jay Leno who lulls us to sleep.

Or, we can look up -

And see life as a new adventure each day, with risks and challenges and twists and turns of sufferings and joys.

We can keep our head down -

And worry ourselves silly about rising unemployment and shrinking 401(k) statements and declining stock markets.

Or, we can look up -

And see how we are more wealthy than 90% of the world and we see how we should give and give and give our money away, just like Jesus told us to do.

We can keep our head down -

And follow the crowd into a life of consumerism and alcoholism and materialism and shop-oholism.

Or, we can look up - and be one of the very few wise ones who sees that bright, new star of wonder rising in the East.

And when we look up, the star that we follow is the star of daily prayer, the star of Bible study, the star of weekly worship, the star of generous giving, the star of love and service to others.

And we will follow that star all the way to a brand, new life.

So, don't follow the crowd on your life's journey.

Get your head out of those pre-printed directions.

And look - up.

AMEN.

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