

Sermon Series – Some Gifts are More than Just a Gift.

#2 – The Best Christmas Gifts

Matthew 2:8-12

INTRODUCTION: today is the second message in our series: ***Some Gifts are more than Just a Gift.*** So, turn with me to Matthew, Chapter 2, and let's see where all this gift giving started.

1After Jesus was born in Bethlehem in Judea, during the time of King Herod, Magi from the east came to Jerusalem 2and asked, "Where is the one who has been born king of the Jews? We saw his star when it rose and have come to worship him."

3When King Herod heard this he was disturbed, and all Jerusalem with him.

4When he had called together all the people's chief priests and teachers of the law, he asked them where the Messiah was to be born. 5"In Bethlehem in Judea," they replied, "for this is what the prophet has written:

6"“But you, Bethlehem, in the land of Judah, are by no means least among the rulers of Judah; for out of you will come a ruler who will shepherd my people Israel.”"

7Then Herod called the Magi secretly and found out from them the exact time the star had appeared. 8He sent them to Bethlehem and said, "Go and search carefully for the child. As soon as you find him, report to me, so that I too may go and worship him."

9After they had heard the king, they went on their way, and the star they had seen when it rose went ahead of them until it stopped over the place where the child was. 10When they saw the star, they were overjoyed. 11On coming to the house, they saw the child with his mother Mary, and they bowed down and worshiped him. Then they opened their treasures and presented him with gifts of gold, frankincense, and myrrh. 12And having been warned in a dream not to go back to Herod, they returned to their country by another route." (NIV)

The title of today's message is: **The Best Christmas Gifts Let's Pray**

First, have you ever wondered, who were the Magi? They were from the region to the East of Israel located near modern day Iraq and Iran. They were descendants of the Babylonian wise men.

In 605 B.C. the Jewish nation of Israel was overrun by the Babylonians and many of the nation's brightest and best were taken into captivity. One of those was a young man named Daniel. {of the lion's den fame} He was part of the royal court for 66 years.

“Then the king placed Daniel in a high position and lavished many gifts on him. He made him ruler over the entire province of Babylon and placed him in charge of all its wise men.” – Daniel 2:48

I can't imagine Daniel studying the stars with his magi subjects without telling them about the one true God who made the heavens and the earth. Daniel must have also told the magi about the promise God made to send a savior through the Israelites. Numbers 24:17 says that a star will rise out of Israel.

Daniel wrote his prophecies about 500 years before Jesus was born. In chapter 9 he predicted from the issuing of the decree to rebuild Jerusalem until the birth, life, and death of the Messiah (King of the Jews) exactly 483 years would elapse.

These magi knew exactly when Cyrus gave the official decree for Jerusalem to be rebuilt, so they added 483 years and that's why they were looking for a king at that time. They knew when, but not where, so they stopped in Jerusalem to ask, "Where?" The answer was found in Micah's prophecy: ***He would be born in Bethlehem in Judea.***

The entire message of the Old Testament can be summarized in the question God asks sinful mankind, ***“Where are you?”*** Compare that to the message of the New Testament. Instead of a Holy God asking sinful mankind, "Where are you?" Man is asking, ***“Where is He who is born King of the Jews”*** God answers the question unequivocally, "I took on human flesh and came into the world as a baby in Bethlehem of Judea!"

The wise men started it all. I'm talking about giving and receiving gifts.

An article listed some children's letters to Santa. One of them said, 'Dear Santa, you didn't bring me anything good last year. In fact, you didn't bring me anything good the year before that either. This is your last chance. (Signed) Albert.'

Here's another one. It said, 'Dear Santa, there are three little boys who live at our house. There's Jeffrey, who's two, and David, who's four, and there's Norman, who's seven. Jeffrey is good some of the time, David is good most of the time, and Norman is good all the time. I am Norman.'

A lady told her husband that she had dreamed that he had bought her a diamond necklace for Christmas! The husband responded positively by giving her a beautifully wrapped gift at Christmas. As she eagerly tore open the wrapping, hoping to see her diamond necklace, all she found was a little book that was titled, '**How to interpret your dreams!**'

I got to thinking about gifts and I wrote down different kinds of gifts that people tend to give at Christmas.

1. The gift for a gift, gift. You know what I'm talking about. Every one of us has done this before. It's the gift for a gift, gift. And, basically, what the gift for a gift, gift is that we get a gift from somebody and so we figure out how much it was and go down to Wal Mart or somewhere and buy a gift of about the same price and it's a gift for a gift, gift.

Now, the characteristic about a gift for a gift, gift, gift is, this person that does this keeps a picture of what that value of that gift was. Have you ever heard anybody say, "Oh, yeah. I got them something nice and they didn't get me anything in return." They're keeping score.

Every Christmas Eve there are literally thousands of people going to Christmas stores because they just got a gift, and they've got to get a gift for the person who got them a gift, for the gift, gift, gift.

It's the same way with Christmas cards. Every time you get a late Christmas card, it's probably because the person that you got the late Christmas card just didn't expect you to send them a card. Nothing's worse than getting a Christmas card on Christmas Eve from somebody that wasn't on your list. It's called a gift for a gift, gift. And we've all probably given gifts like this.

2. A gift for a favor gift.

People that give this gift don't expect a gift in return, they just give you a gift and by giving you that gift they expect you to do something for them in the future. This is the kind of person that loves to keep score. They love to have I.O.U.s. Every year, companies do that. You know, at the end of the year they give employees a ham or a turkey, or a cash bonus or something and they don't expect the employee to turn around and give them a turkey. They give you the gift and, basically, they are saying, "Okay, I don't expect a gift back, but I do expect you to be a good employee, be nice, be positive. Be smart. Work hard."

If you say something bad about them, come April or May, they say, "Didn't we give you a turkey last Christmas?" Gift for a favor gift.

I would like you to note a couple things about this story just as a way of introduction. I'm impressed by the fact, first, that the Wise Men's gifts were **personally given**.

These were wealthy people. They were from another country. They could have sent the gift. I'm impressed by the fact that they felt that they were on a mission, and they personally brought these gifts to the Christ child.

In fact, when you read this story, the personal part jumps out at you.

Look at verse 2, "***We saw His Star in the East and have come to worship Him.***"

Look at verse 9, "***They went their way.***"

Look at verse 10, "***And when they saw the star, they rejoiced.***"

Verse 11, "***They came into the house, they fell and worshiped Him. Opening their treasures, they presented to Him gifts.***" These gifts were personally given.

HUMOR: We call them wise men, but some women would insist that term is an oxymoron; like "jumbo shrimp" or "rap music" or "civil war." In fact, some women suggest it would have been much better if God had sent wise women instead. They would have asked for directions sooner, arrived on time, cleaned up the stable, helped Mary deliver the baby, made a casserole, and brought diapers and onesie pajamas.

The second thing I noticed is that these gifts were **prophetically given**.

When I say, "they were prophetically given," I mean that the gold, frankincense, and myrrh were more than just a gift, and that's what I want to talk about today.

If you were in a department store and saw gifts in someone else's cart, you could tell a lot about a person based on the gifts.

For example, the camouflaged outfit and rifle are for a hunter.

The baseball bat and glove are for an athlete.

The air compressor and pneumatic nail gun are most likely for a man.

The new microwave and kitchen towels are probably for a lady.

The little baby doll with a miniature stroller is for a little girl.

The bag of plastic army soldiers is typically for a little boy.

Some Christmas gifts are inappropriate. For instance, if you have little toddlers in your family, you probably DON'T want to give them permanent markers as a gift!

In other words, if you saw the gifts, you would know some things about the recipient. With that in mind, what do these gifts of gold, frankincense, and myrrh teach us about the recipient? About Jesus?

Bible expositor, John Stott, confirms these gifts were not accidental: these men were so wise that their gifts teach us about Jesus. He wrote: "Gold is the gift fit for a King. Frankincense was in constant use by the priests in the temple. Myrrh was used to embalm the dead. In those three gifts we see who Jesus is, what He came to do, and what it would cost Him."

1. Gold speaks of His Royalty. It is a gift fit for a king. **(Jesus was the King of Kings)**

Christ is a King! He is King over Creation. He is King over the Christian. He is King of the Church.

Revelation 11:15 speaks prophetically - ***"The kingdoms of this world have become the kingdom of our Lord and of His Christ and He shall reign forever and ever."***

2. Frankincense speaks of His Deity Frankincense is the sap of a tree that was dried and hardened and used as incense to worship God. **(Jesus was the Son of God)**

Christ did not become God at Bethlehem. God became man.

And the unequivocal, unmistakable, and unambiguous truth is that this Baby was God in the flesh. We see that in 3 different ways.

a) The Scriptures tell us:

Philippians 2 - "Jesus existed in the form of God..."

John 1:1- "In the beginning was the Word and the Word was with God and the Word was God.

2 Corinthians 4:4 - "Christ is the image of God." The Greek word here is ICON.

b) The statements of Jesus tell us:

John 1:30 - "I and the Father are One."

John 14:9 - "He who has seen Me has seen the Father."

John 8:58 - "Before Abraham was born, I AM." (Ex. 3:14)

John 6:35 - "I am the Bread of Life"

John 8:12 - "I am the Light of the World."

John 10:7 - "I am the Door."

John 10:11 - "I am the Good Shepherd."

John 11:25 - "I am the Resurrection and the Life."

John 14:6 - "I am the Way, the Truth, and the Life."

John 15:1 - "I am the True Vine."

c) The signs from Jesus tell us:

Luke 7 - messengers came from John the Baptist, ***"Are you the Christ or should we look for another?" Jesus said, "Go tell John what you have seen and heard. The***

blind see, the lame walk, the lepers are cleansed, the deaf hear, and dead are raised up and the poor have the gospel preached to them."

What do you call One who can calm storms, overcome wind, strengthen the lame...you call him "God!"

3. Myrrh speaks of His Humanity. Myrrh is a fragrant perfume that was used to anoint the dead – to embalm and preserve them. **(Jesus was The Sacrificial Lamb)**

a) Jesus was born to ***sympathize***

Hebrews 4:15 - ***"For we do not have a great high priest who cannot sympathize with our weaknesses but One who was tempted in all things as we are yet without sin."***

His ability to sympathize with our weaknesses gives Him the exclusive and unique right to serve as our mediator to God.

1 Timothy 2:5 - ***"There is only one mediator between God and man, the Lord Jesus Christ."***

b) Jesus was born to ***suffer***.

He is the Lamb slain from the foundation of the world.

Isaiah 53 - ***"He was despised and forsaken of men, a man of sorrows and acquainted with grief. Surely our grief He Himself bore and our sorrows He carried. He was wounded for our transgressions. He was crushed for our iniquities. The chastisement for our peace fell upon Him and by His stripes we are healed."***

1 Peter 3:18 - ***"For Christ suffered for sins once for all, the just for the unjust that He might bring us to God."***

c) Jesus was born to ***save***.

Herein lies the gospel: God became a physical man in the person of Jesus Christ. He lived sinlessly and yet was crucified for the sins of mankind. At Calvary, it pleased God to crush His only Son under the full weight of His righteous anger against sin. He satisfies His holy wrath, appeases His own justice, and makes a way for a holy God to forgive wicked men and still be holy.

In light of these gifts, what should you bring to the Lord Jesus?

1. Gold Means—Give Him your first and best

When you make Jesus the Lord of your life, it means He is your King. This involves much more than financial giving. Many folks want to give to God, but each month, they pay their bills and spend on themselves and then if any is leftover, they give God some of it. Proverbs 3:9 says to honor the Lord with your wealth by giving him the first fruits of your income.

2. Frankincense Means—Give Him your joyous worship

In verse 10, it says the magi were “overjoyed.” Eugene Petersen paraphrases it in *The Message*, “***they could hardly contain themselves.***” Their joy was expressed as they bowed down and worshiped the Child.

Incense was used in the temple by priests. They burned the incense so worship would be an experience that affected all the senses. The cloud created by the incense represented the presence of God that was revealed as a cloud that led Israelites to the Promised Land. The incense produced a unique odor people only associated with worship.

Incense speaks of the joy of worship. Like the wise men, when we bow before Jesus, there should be so much joy that “we can hardly contain ourselves.”

3. Myrrh—Give Your life and loyalty

Myrrh was an ointment used on dead bodies to delay decay. This gift reveals that the Magi understood the death of the Messiah would be significant.

At the end of His earthly life, one of the thieves dying with Him looked ahead and believed Jesus was a King who would live. That took faith! But what faith it must have taken for the magi to demonstrate during the first days of His life that this child was a King who would die!

The myrrh represents the need for us to offer Him our lives as living sacrifices because He was willing to die for us.

Because He is King, I bring Him my loyalty.

Because He is God, I bring Him my love.

Because He is the God-Man, I bring Him my life

ONE OF THE THINGS THAT WE GENERALLY ASSOCIATE WITH THE CHRISTMAS SEASON is the exchanging of gifts. Think of it like this! In giving our lives to Jesus, we can exchange....

(1) Fear for faith.

(2) Sorrow for joy.

(3) Despair for hope.

(4) Guilt for forgiveness.

(5) Anxiety for peace. John 14:27: ***“Peace I leave with you; my peace I give you. I do not give to you as the world gives. Do not let your hearts be troubled and do not be afraid.”***

(6) Sin for righteousness.

(7) Confusion for certainty. How comforting it is to know who we are in Christ—forgiven, adopted, cherished, and headed for a glorious future.

A real gift is always motivated by love. For God so loved He gave. Love always gives. “You can give without loving, but you can’t love without giving.”

The Bible says in II Corinthians 5:17, ***“Therefore if anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation; the old has gone, the new has come!”***

The gifts that the wise men gave, teach us about Grace Gifts. These gifts are more than just a gift.

The best way I can describe a grace gift is, it’s unrepayable. I take that term, obviously, from God through his son, Jesus Christ, who loves us so much he gives us eternal life which is a gift of God of grace. We didn’t work for it, and we could never, ever, repay it. **It’s impossible to measure the cost of this gift.**

The wise men teach me 4 things about giving grace gifts.

1. Give an unexpected gift.

No one's going to expect a wise man to give this gift. They're not Jews. They have nothing in this. I mean, you talk about a surprise. I'm here to tell you that the best gifts are unexpected gifts.

2. Give gifts with genuine joy.

When they gave this gift, they did it with such joy. I mean, they rejoiced when they saw the star. They rejoiced when they saw Mary. They rejoiced when they worshipped Jesus. They rejoiced when they gave the gold, frankincense, & myrrh.

Richard Foster said, "Giving with a glad and generous heart has a way of routing out the tough old miser within us. Even the poor need to know that they can give. Just the very act of letting go of money or some other treasure does something within us. That something is it destroys the demon, greed." Isn't that true?

They gave with genuine joy.

3. Give gifts that will last.

This story's been told now for two thousand years, and everyone still knows the gifts that the wise men gave. Give a gift that will last. When I talk about a gift that will last, you will not find it in a store. I'm talking about:

a) The gift of good memories.

Spend your time making memories with the people that you love.

b) The gift of a godly heritage.

c) The gift that will bless someone in need.

Jesus once told a story to illustrate this truth. Luke 14 says, **"When you put on a dinner don't invite your friends and your relatives and your rich neighbors for, they will repay you by inviting you back. Instead, invite the poor, the crippled, the lame, and the blind. Then at the resurrection of the godly, God will reward you for inviting those who could not repay you."**

When you help people who are unfortunate, who are suffering, who are hurting – people that cannot pay you back, you are storing up treasure in heaven.

God gets specific about five groups of people He commands you to care about. There are over 1000 scriptures that talk about these five groups of people that God tells us to care about.

1. The hungry and the homeless poor.

2. Orphans and widows. James 1:27 *“What God considers to be pure and genuine religion is this, to take care of orphans and widows in their suffering.”*

3. People in prison.

4. Foreigners.

5. The sick and afflicted.

James gets blunt, “Suppose you see a brother or sister who needs food or clothing, and you say, ‘God bless you. Stay warm and eat well.’ Then you don’t give that person any food or clothing, what good does that do? The answer is nothing. It’s worthless. It’s just empty emotion.”

Let me say one more thing about giving before I wrap this up.

4. Give grace gifts now.

Don’t wait. Listen to this:

“They were going to be all they wanted to be, tomorrow. None would be braver or kinder than they, tomorrow. A friend who was troubled and wearied they knew, would be glad for a lift and he needed it too, and on him they would call and see what they could do, tomorrow. Each morning they stacked up the letters they’d write, tomorrow. And thought of the folks that they would fill with delight, tomorrow. The greatest of people, they just might have been. The world would have opened its heart to them, but, in fact, they passed on and faded from view and all that they left when their living was through was a mountain of things that they intended to do, tomorrow.”

Those wise men weren’t about to go back home until they got those gifts to Jesus. They pressed through opposition. They pressed through time. The saddest thing in life and I’ve seen it happen many times in the dozens of funerals I’ve done is to

see people look at their loved ones and wish for one day back where they could have said or done something.

The BEST Christmas gifts you can give are Grace Gifts. "For God so loved the world He gave."

CONCLUSION:

When you think about the scene at the birth of Christ, it makes sense for Mary and Joseph to be there. The angels make sense, they're the messengers of God. The shepherds are there because they're the invited guests of the angels. Everybody there makes sense... except the wise men.

In Matthew 2:2, the Wise Men called the star they saw in the east, "**His Star.**" Not the big star, the bright star, or even the eastern star . . .—it was His star.

THE STAR WAS A SYMBOL - It guided them...It told them of a King... It pointed to the future...It was a source of Encouragement - they rejoiced when they saw it.

Gen. 1:16, says, "And God made two great lights, the greater light to rule the day, and the lesser light to rule the night, and he made the stars also." The naked eye can see 4,000 stars; the Hubble telescope can see 400 million stars.

If you are a Christian, you may be thinking, "That's great! I hope someone hearing this is guided to Jesus, but what truth is there for me in this passage? I've already met Jesus, bowed before Him, and given Him my worship." Here's the application for you: God wants to use you to be His guiding star. Who do you know in your universe who needs to be guided to Jesus?

There are two kinds of stars. First stars that shine of their own energy, like our sun. Some stars only reflect the light of other stars, like the moon. Christians are like the latter stars, to truly shine for Christ, it must be Jesus' light that we reflect.

Paul says this in Philippians 2:14–15: "***Do everything without complaining or arguing, so that you may become blameless and pure, children of God without fault in a crooked and depraved generation, in which you shine like stars in the universe.***"

God intends for you to be the star of Bethlehem in a crooked and depraved generation right now. We're to be this light shining, that when people follow us, they find Jesus.

Look at verse twelve with me: ***"Then, being divinely warned in a dream that they should not return to Herod, they departed for their own country another way."***

Isn't it interesting that after they worshiped Jesus and gave Him their gifts, that they could not go back the same way that they had come? I find that to be a fact even today. Once you have met God you will never be the same. An encounter with God changes things – it changes you. We became a new creation.