

Gifts for the Child.

Reading: Matthew 2:1-12; Romans 12:1-8

Text: Matthew 2:11

We are a little over a week away from Christmas and I'm sure some of you are stressed by the fact that you have not purchased gifts for all those on your Christmas list. I would guess that some of those who are still on the list are those who are difficult to buy for.

In our day and age people are increasingly hard to buy for because they have everything.

Look through the catalogues that come in the mail...
Foot and calf massagers!

The wise men started it all. When I talk about starting it all, I'm talking about gifts.
Giving gifts, receiving gifts.

Here we have this incredible story that pops up in the Gospel of Matthew about men travelling from the east to see this king that had been born.

The truth is we don't know a great deal about the Magi.
It is easier to list what we don't know than what we do.

We don't know how many there were.
Tradition says three because of the three gifts.
It may have been more.
The entourage was certainly bigger than three people.

We don't know their names.
Tradition says that their names were Gaspar, Mechior and Balthazar (only tradition)

We don't know about the star they followed...
Speculation it was Jupiter, aligned with Saturn; or a comet.

We don't know where they came from other than that they came "from the east".

We don't know when they arrived to see Jesus.
It was sometime after he was born and before he was 2 years old.
We do know that it wasn't at the same time as the shepherds...
Because they found the baby in a house...not a stable.

Many legends have grown around this mysterious arrival of men from the east.

Much of what has been written about the Magi is based upon speculation or traditions that may have no basis in fact.

They were not kings but were rather advisors to kings.
The word Magi comes from the Greek word magoi which is in turn a Persian word for a select set of priests.
These priests functioned as the religious, civil, and political counsel to the kings of Media and Persia.

In time their power grew to the extent that they became the “king-makers” whose duties included the election of the king of the realm.

Their education included a mix of astronomy, astrology, science, and religion.

What I find amazing about the story is that when the star appears they respond intentionally and deliberately...travelling many months to see this king.

We call them ‘wise’...

But I’m sure it was a trip that many considered foolish.

A trip across harsh environments...

no air-conditioning, no 5 star hotels, no Macca drive-throughs.

But they made the trip intentionally.

A difficult trip through a difficult land.

The facts are the Biblical record says little about WHO these men were.

I think because the emphasis is upon WHAT they did:

"We have come to WORSHIP Him." (Mt 2:2,11)

What is important is that Jesus is worthy of worship.

Matthew is more interested in the fact that, from the very beginning of Jesus birth, Gentiles came to worship the Jewish Messiah.

These were wealthy people...they could have sent the gifts with servants...

But they wanted to personally come and bring these gifts.

They personally wanted to come and worship.

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. Opening their treasures, they fell down and worshiped Him. Opening their treasures they presented to Him gifts."

And Matthew is also more interested in the significance of the gifts they bring.

They brought Jesus gifts also of gold, incense and myrrh.

They then presented their gifts as an act of worship of the child (the Greek word for presented indicates an offering made to God).

The three gifts the Magi brought foreshadowed the person and ministry of Jesus.

Gold for His royalty.

In the Scriptures gold was a symbol for royalty, the metal of kings.
So when they present to Jesus gold it was an acknowledgement of his right to rule.
So gold was an appropriate gift to give to God the Son...the king of kings.

Incense for His deity.

Incense was used in the offerings in the temple. They added a fragrant aroma to the sacrifices. Incense also was added to the oil that anointed the priests.
It added a dimension of beauty to the worship...it's aroma rising to God as a prayer.

Myrrh for his humanity.

Myrrh is an interesting gift.

In the New Testament we see it used in two different ways.

In Mark 15:23 we see that Jesus was offered wine mixed with myrrh while he was on the cross.

He refused . . .why? It's because myrrh had a medicinal use as a mild anesthetic.

Jesus refused this because he wished to endure the full extent of suffering in his death for us.

In John 19:39 we see Nicodemus and Joseph of Arimathea preparing Jesus for burial using a mixture of aloes and myrrh.

Myrrh points to the sacrificial death of Jesus.

It signified the fact that Jesus was born to die.

Now I don't believe that these Magi understood the significance of these gifts.

But they were designed by God to carry a symbolic meaning.

William Barclay rightly says, "Gold for a king, Frankincense [incense] for a priest, myrrh for one that was to die- these were the gifts of the wise men, and, even at the cradle of Christ, they foretold that he was to be the true King, the perfect High Priest, and in the end the supreme Saviour."

There is so much more that we can say about these wise men...like what actually makes them wise.

Wise enough to seek Jesus.

Wise enough to seek information and direction.

Wise enough to worship him when they found him.

But in the light of the greatest gift God has given you and me...

We need to focus today on our gift giving to God.

What is the greatest gift God has given you?

Conclusion

The Magi demonstrated their faith in Jesus by bringing Him gifts.

Their story's been told now for two thousand years.

People still know the gift that the wise men gave.

But just like the wise men, we have gifts to give Jesus as well.

Yet you might say...what do I have to give the one who made and owns everything?

One Christmas hymn, "In the Bleak Mid-Winter," goes like this:

"What can I give him, poor as I am?
If I were a shepherd, I would bring a lamb
If I were a wise-man, I would do my part
Yet what can I give Him?
I can give my heart."

Maybe you don't feel you have much to give to Jesus.

Maybe you can't imagine being able to give him something of value.
Maybe you think, "It's Christ who has given me immeasurable gifts.
What could I possibly bring him?"

Maybe like the little drummer boy, you think,

"I have no gift to bring that's fit to give the king."

But the most valuable gift is the gift of yourself—your new self in Christ that God has given you.

You can bring him are your obedience and loyalty,
your trust and worship, your service and sacrifice.
We all come before this king, our king, as poor people.

In our society two of the most valuable things we have are our money and our time...
So we can give the gift of ourselves.

Paul tells us to offer our bodies to Him as living sacrifices (Romans 12:1).

The passage we read together from Romans 12 highlights some of the gifts we bring.
We are urged to give our bodies to Jesus as a holy sacrifice.

Obviously we are not being told to kill ourselves.

We are being asked to give ourselves.

One of the best gifts we can give to our children is our undivided attention.

Perhaps a similar gift would be appropriate for the Lord.

Maybe you can give time each day to prayer or study.

Maybe you can start a daily journal, take aim at a wicked habit,
find a quiet place to sing songs and worship to the Lord.

We have spiritual gifts to offer, which we give to Jesus by serving one another (Romans 12:3-8).

Keeping our minds and bodies pure are gifts to Jesus.

Paul says we shouldn't let the world shape our minds, our thinking.

We should instead let Jesus Christ make us more like him.

Your purity is a gift...

refusing to look at certain magazines, movies or websites,
deciding against pre-marital sex...are your gift to Jesus.

In Matthew 25: 31-40 Jesus spoke of gifts too.

He promised that when we give our time or money to the poor, the lonely, the hurt, or the downtrodden...we are actually giving gifts to him.

When you befriend an unpopular person,

When you sponsor a needy child

When you comfort people when they are hurting...

Your love reveals Christ in you.

We show God love when we treat those around us in a loving way.

So this year maybe you can:

fix a quarrel; extend forgiveness; listen; sit with one who is lonely

Maybe you can:

tell someone you love them; give someone a second chance

even bake some cookies anonymously

Our love for others is our gift to Christ.

What will you give the Lord Jesus Christ this Christmas?

The Wise Men worshipped Jesus with their gifts.

We have been given gifts with which to worship Him.

This story invites each one of us to consider what we need to give Jesus.

What gifts are you willing to bring to him?

How are you going to respond to the God revealed in Jesus?

And for all that he has given us, what are we willing to give in return?

The point is that it is easy for us to forget the guest of honor this Christmas.

It is too easy to get so wrapped up in the activity that we forget the Savior.

Friends, how do you plan to honor Jesus this Christmas?

Is He still on your Christmas list?

Is the problem that He is so big that you don't know what to give Him?

Any gift that expresses sincere love is priceless.

When my children came home from kinder with a picture for the fridge...it was, and is precious.

We still have some of them locked away from their 21st party.

We wouldn't swap that for anything...because of the love in which it was made,

Because of the thought that goes with the gift.
It is precious
The same can be said of the seemingly insignificant things we can offer God...
They are precious when given in the right attitude.

Is it because you don't know the Lord?

There is no time like the present to change that.
Why not use this Christmas to declare your trust in the Lord's provision, Jesus, for your salvation.

Make this the Christmas you bow at the manger and honor the one who alone can save you from sin.

Is it because you don't really want to honor him?

If that's the case, you don't understand Christmas at all.
The commercial has pushed the message from your heart.
Jesus has come into the world because He wanted to relate to you.
He wanted to stand in your place and pay the price for your sin.
Don't push him aside.

As you buy, wrap, give and open during the next couple of weeks,
remember that Jesus is the centre of our celebration
Like the wise men, bring your gifts to him.