

The Gifts of Christmas: Gifts Fit for a King Matthew 2:1-12¹

INTRODUCTION:

Good morning, Trinity! It is good to see you this morning. For those of you that are guests, my name is Chris Wigley, and I serve as one of the Pastors here at Trinity. And whether you are in the room or you are joining us online, we are certainly glad you are with us today. And on behalf of our church family, we welcome you.

We would love the opportunity to get to connect with you. If you would, simply text the keyword, "TBCMP," that stands for Trinity Baptist Church Mt. Pleasant, to 94-000. You will then be prompted to click on a link that will provide us with basic contact information to follow up with you. And here's our promise to you... we promise not to bombard your inbox. Again, we would love the opportunity to connect with you and to pray for you.

SERIES OVERVIEW:

We are in the middle of a sermon series that we have called, "The Gifts of Christmas." So far, we have talked about A Gift Promised, The Gift of Good News, and today we are looking at Gifts Fit for a King.

So, I want to invite you to take your bibles and turn with me to Matthew, chapter 2 as we zoom in on verses 1-12 this morning.

OPENING ILLUSTRATION: Christmas Spending

According to a study published by the National Retail Federation, Americans are expected to spend between 843 and 859 billion dollars this Christmas. That includes purchases on gifts, decorations and travel. That amounts to an average of \$997 per person.ⁱⁱ That's a lot of spending.

In another survey done by the Simon Property Group, children are the most favorite group to shop for during Christmas. That's no surprise. But do you know who the least favorite person to shop for is, according to this survey? Dads. 40% of the respondents said children are fun to shop for and only 2% said dads.ⁱⁱⁱ

I searched in google, "Christmas Gift ideas," and one of the reoccurring titles that I saw was "47 Unique Gift Ideas for the Person who has Everything." I

think that's what makes it hard to buy gifts for our parents, right? I mean, what do you get a guy that has amassed every possible tool, is good with only a couple outfits, and has a hard time wanting to learn new technology?

Today, in our study, we are going to look at the gifts that the wise men brought to Jesus. The question they must have pondered as they prepared for their journey to meet Jesus must have been, "What gift do you get for the one that created the world?"

When we take a look at this story, I think the conclusion that we come to is that these wise men understood Jesus to be The King and brought gifts that expressed their view of Him.

MESSAGE:

I want to examine the Christmas story in the Gospel of Matthew by looking at the cast, the contributions, and the change. Then I want to draw a couple of application points from Matthew's account. First...

1) The Cast

Read with me Matthew chapter 2, verses 1 through 9.

*Now after Jesus was born in Bethlehem of Judea in the days of **Herod the king**, behold, **wise men from the east** came to Jerusalem, ² saying, "Where is he who has been born **king of the Jews**? For we saw his star when it rose and have come to worship him." ³ When Herod the king heard this, he was troubled, and all Jerusalem with him; ⁴ and assembling all the chief priests and scribes of the people, he inquired of them where the Christ was to be born. ⁵ They told him, "In Bethlehem of Judea, for so it is written by the prophet: ⁶ "And you, O Bethlehem, in the land of Judah, are by no means least among the rulers of Judah; for from you shall come a ruler who will shepherd my people Israel." ⁷ Then Herod summoned the wise men secretly and ascertained from them what time the star had appeared. ⁸ And he sent them to Bethlehem, saying, "Go and search diligently for the child, and when you have found him, bring me word, that I too may come and worship him." ⁹ After listening to the king, they went on their way. And behold, the star that they had seen when it rose went before them until it came to rest over the place where the child was.*

Let's first look at **Herod**. In verse 1, he is labeled "the king." He is also referred to as "Herod the Great." Herod ruled under Roman authority from 37

to 4 B.C. His sons then ruled Judea during Jesus' earthly ministry.^{iv} One of the reasons scholars believe Jesus was actually born between 6 and 4 B.C. is because of the time period of Herod's reign.

We learn in verse 3 we learn a little bit about how Herod ruled. Verse 3 reads, *"When Herod the king heard this, **he was troubled, and all Jerusalem with him.**"* All of Jerusalem was troubled because Herod was troubled. He ruled in a way that ultimately struck fear in the people but that fear was rooted in his own fear. But why was Herod troubled? Two reasons.

First, he feared losing the throne. When Octavian, Caesar Augustus, became victorious of the civil war in Rome, Herod, who reportedly sided first with Antony and Cleopatra, convinced Octavian of his loyalties so that he could remain king in Judea.^v He wasn't exactly a man of conviction. He was only looking out for himself and what kept him on the throne.

The second reason Herod was troubled at the visitor's news is because he feared losing order and drawing the attention of Caesar.^{vi} So, the news of a new King disturbed him to such a degree that his fear of Caesar and his fear of losing the throne led to his ordering of the killing of all male children in Bethlehem two years old and under.^{vii}

So, that's a little about Herod. Now, let's look at **the wise men**. All we really know about these wise men is that they are from the East. There are many things that we have assumed about these men.

We do not know how many wise men there were. There had to have been at least two because of the plural use of the term, "men." Now, we have assumed there were three because of the three gifts they brought; gold, frankincense and myrrh. But the mentioning of these gifts does not limit the number of wise men that showed up. The famous Christmas Carol, "We Three Kings," is built solely on the myth that there were three.

These wise men belong to a group of people most believe were from the Medo-Persian empire, and they were special advisors to a king.^{viii} They were not themselves kings. They were the experts of the day in astrology and the interpretation of dreams. In fact, this is not the first time we have mention of wise men in the Scriptures. Daniel 2:12 reads, *"Because of this the king was angry and very furious, and commanded that all the **wise men** of Babylon be*

destroyed." This, of course, was in reference to the negative interpretation of Nebuchadnezzar's dream. But we see the mentioning of wise men prior to Jesus' birth.

We do not know when they arrived. They were most likely not there for Jesus' birth. They followed the appearing of the star. There was not air travel in those days and the distance they would have traveled from would more than likely have placed them worshipping a two-year-old Jesus. There are two reasons why I believe that.

First, verse 9. ***After listening to the king, they went on their way. And behold, the star that they had seen when it rose went before them until it came to rest over the place where the **child** was.*** The announcement to the shepherds in Luke's gospel was that they would find a baby wrapped in swaddling cloths. I think Jesus is referred to as a child because I think He was a toddler.

The second reason I think Jesus is around two is because of Herod's command to kill male children two and under. Setting an age range of 0-2 had to be more strategic than just an arbitrary number.

My point is that I believe by the time the wise men arrive on the scene, Jesus is no longer a baby.

So, we've talked about Herod and the wise men. But the main cast member in this story is **Jesus**. It is the Christ child that stirs us all the events of the story. The wise men followed a star announcing His birth. They show up to worship Him. Herod feared Him. It was the birth of Jesus that caused Herod to issue the command to kill males two and under. Make no mistake, Jesus is always the main character. At Trinity, we say this all the time, it is our desire to make Jesus the hero of the story. That's because He is! Amen?! Jesus is the hero of our salvation, but we must continually make Him the hero of our lives.

We've looked at the cast. Now, let's turn our attention to...

2) The Contribution

When I say contribution, I am referring to the gifts brought by the wise men. Read long with me Matthew 2:10 and 11.

10 When they saw the star, they rejoiced exceedingly with great joy. 11 And going into the house [the family has moved from a stable to a house by this time], they saw the child with Mary his mother, and they fell down and worshiped him. Then, opening their treasures, they offered him gifts, gold and frankincense and myrrh.

What's so special about these gifts that Holy Scripture would make note of them? More than make note of the gifts, the Scripture draws attention to them. I read this week a quote by a theologian, "A literary critic would draw special attention to the gifts, for they occur at the end of the story after the child has been found and thus occupy a place of prominence."^{ix}

So, in light of that, let's examine each gift. First, ...

A) Gold

Gold is mentioned more than any other metal in Scripture. The Bible often refers to its worth. It is referenced to be amassed by kings and kingdoms. Gold does not rust or tarnish. Fire does not destroy gold, it purifies it. And gold is known to last forever.^x

The gift of gold recognizes Jesus as King. In addition to that, gold was often representative of God. Take for example the Ark of the Covenant. It was constructed out of wood but was overlaid with gold. The Cherubim, whose wings formed the Mercy Seat, was made out of pure gold. The Ark, we know, to be representative of God Himself. Jesus being given the gift of gold connects us to his Deity.^{xi}

The gold given would have been a tremendous financial blessing to the young couple, Mary and Joseph. While we do not know for certain what the gold was used for, it quite possible could have financed the family's trip to Egypt. Scripture tells us that when Herod issued the decree to execute males 2 years and under, Joseph and his family fled to Egypt. The gold would have helped with expenses incurred.

Another item that I believe is worthy of mentioning is the grammar surrounding the word "gold." The part of speech in a masculine noun. When used in this manner it carries the idea of having profound purchasing power.^{xii}

If we were to tie the prophetic aspect of these gifts to that specific application, we can come to realize that the ultimate purchasing power given to Jesus was not in the gold given, but the purchase of the forgiveness of sin. Jesus' sacrifice on calvary purchased for us our salvation, being a display of God's most generous gift which was given to the world.

The second gift given to Jesus is that of...

B) Frankincense

It is a resin from a particular tree that is native to Saudi Arabia, Somalia, Oman, and Yemen. So, it was not something that was readily available in Jerusalem. The sap would be harvested, ground and then burned. It gives off a fragrance.

Frankincense was used in a couple of ways. First, to anoint priests when they were ordained into that role. Secondly, it was used in the observance of the meal offering. It was considered a sweet aroma to the Lord.^{xiii}

These applications are very important in considering who Jesus is. Jesus is labeled, by the writer of Hebrews, as the Great High Priest. Hebrews 4:14-15 says, *"14 Since then we have a **great high priest** who has passed through the heavens, **Jesus**, the Son of God, let us hold fast our confession. 15 For we do not have a high priest who is unable to sympathize with our weaknesses, but one who in every respect has been tempted as we are, yet without sin."*

Furthermore, Jesus is crucified, buried in a tomb, raised on the third day, and then ascended into Heaven. This, just like the burning and rising of frankincense, is a sweet aroma to the Lord on our behalf. No longer does God count our sin against us, but instead, because of the finished work of the cross, is pleased to not count our trespasses against us.

So, we've discussed gold and frankincense. Now, let's look at...

C) Myrrh

We are very familiar with gold and maybe somewhat familiar with frankincense. But what is myrrh?! That's a good question.

Myrrh is very similar to frankincense. It is also a resin from a tree or plant. It is a gum like substance. It also had a good smell.

Myrrh was used in a couple of ways. It was a perfume, but it was also a pain killer. In Mark 15, the drink offered to Jesus on a reed was wine mixed with gall, or myrrh. This was offered to him to ease any pain and Jesus refused the drink.

Myrrh was also used for those that had passed away. The Egyptians used it in the embalming process. Jews used it as a spice applied to the outside of the body. In fact, before Jesus was laid in the tomb, he was taken down from the cross and Joseph of Arimathea prepared His body for burial. Myrrh was among the spices listed in John 19 used to prepare Jesus for burial.^{xiv}

The gift of myrrh communicates that those the Messiah has arrived, and that is cause for celebration, He has ultimately come to die. That, too, is cause for remembrance because it is by the death of Jesus that we can be forgiven of our sin and enjoy eternal life.

Scripture teaches in Hebrews 9:22 that, "Without the shedding of blood there is no forgiveness of sin." This is why Jesus is the only way to the Father. By no other religious leader has the shedding of blood led to the forgiveness of sin.

In these three gifts, these three contributions, we come to know Jesus as prophet, the great high priest, and king. So, we've looked at the cast and the contribution. Now, let's examine...

3) The Change.

Look at verse 12 of Matthew 2. *And being warned in a dream not to return to Herod, they departed to their own country **by another way.***

They encountered God and heard from God. These wise men that had traveled far to encounter the Messiah not only worshipped Him, but left differently. Simply put, true worship and surrender to Jesus as Lord always causes us to leave differently than when we came.

The cast, the contribution, and the change.

APPLICATION:

Now, in the time we have left, I want to talk through, quickly, two application points. What does this aspect of the Christmas story speak to us today? Two things.

1) It's All About Jesus

I mentioned earlier that Jesus is the main character, the focus of this story. But in the other two cast members, we see different approaches to Jesus. Think about how Herod approached this news and how the wise men approached this news.

Herod said, in verse 8, *"**And he** [being Herod] **sent them** [the wise men] **to Bethlehem, saying, "Go and search diligently for the child, and when you have found him, bring me word, that I too may come and worship him."**" Herod said that he wanted to worship Jesus but he didn't truly desire to give praise to Him.*

The wise men, on the other hand, expressed a desire to worship Jesus and truly did worship Him. We have a tendency to read our passage of study this morning and get all wrapped up in the gifts given that we often miss something of vital importance. Notice the order in verse 11. ***And going into the house, they** [being the wise men] **saw the child with Mary his mother, and they fell down and worshiped him. Then, opening their treasures, they offered him gifts, gold and frankincense and myrrh.*** Before they gave their gifts, they gave their hearts. The giving of gifts was a reflection of their adoration of Jesus.

When we stack the responses of Herod and the wise men up against our lives, which one would we say is more reflective of us? Herod offered mere lip service. The wise men truly made it all about Jesus.

When we give our lives to Jesus as Lord, it means we give everything to Him. Our marriage, our job, our thoughts, our time, and so forth and so on. For Herod, Jesus was an inconvenience. But for the wise men, He was everything.

The Christmas story is all about Jesus. The second application point I want to share is...

2) Be Obedient

The wise men received multiple promptings. They saw a star in the sky and decided to follow it. They were warned in a dream to not go back to Herod. They decided to be obedient to that.

Think about what would have happened had the wise men dismissed those promptings? We would have this account in Scripture. And Herod would have

known exactly where Jesus was and more than likely the family would not have had the time to flee to Egypt to escape Herod's decree. That would mean that there would be gifts given, no disciples called, no miracles performed, no cross, no church, and most importantly, no salvation.

I believe we are often prompted by the Holy Spirit of God. There are star moments that we ponder. There are thoughts prompted. And there is no telling how many times I dismiss the prompting of God in my life. And I wonder, what is it that I am missing out on?

The wise men could have seen the star and admired it from afar. They could have chosen to return back to Herod. But not only would they have missed a prompting of the Holy Spirit, millions upon millions of followers of Jesus would have missed out, too. Perhaps the deepest pondering on my heart is who is missing out because of dismissing the promptings of the Holy Spirit?

I want to share with you one of the many ways that I believe The Lord prompts me. From time to time, I will have someone randomly pop into my mind. When that happens, I pause and pray for that person and then I reach out to them whether by text or a phone call. I can't tell you the number of times that person replies with, "I know why The Lord laid me on your heart." And I get to pray specifically for them and minister to them.

How does the Lord prompt you? Perhaps there is something that is weighing on your mind even now. Maybe it's a relationship that needs repair. It could be an opportunity you have been weighing. Perhaps it's a neighbor that you are concerned about. Or even a calling you are wrestling with.

Listen, the story of the wise men is that God takes little promptings and uses them to impact generations. Be obedient to The Holy Spirit. Walk by the Spirit and God will use your obedience as a blessing to many.

CONCLUSION:

What is it that The Lord is stirring in your heart this morning?

If you are here this morning, or you have joined us online, and you have never come to a point in your life where you have bowed the knee to Jesus as the Lord and Savior of your life, I can tell you that today is a star moment for you. God is pointing you to Jesus. To place your faith and trust in Him and the Lord

and Savior of your life. Will you be obedient to that prompting of the Holy Spirit?

The Bible says that we are all sinners and we have fallen short of the glory of God. And that falling short, that missing the mark, that sinfulness of our hearts has welled up in eternal death. Romans 6:23 says, "For the wages of sin is death, BUT the GIFT of God is eternal life through Christ Jesus our Lord."

Have you trusted Jesus as Lord? Have you placed your faith in Him for the forgiveness of your sin? If not, you can today. Simply come, our elders will be at the front ready to receive you, and surrender your life to Jesus as Lord.

Perhaps you are here today, and your response is different. Do you have something that you are praying through? Desiring to hear from God? Will you allow us to pray with you and over you?

Whatever it is that The Lord is laying on your heart, that's what I want you to be obedient to. Maybe you don't fully know what it is that God is laying on your heart, you just feel the tug on your heart, you come and we will walk through it with you.

I'm going to pray, we are going to sing, and I simply want you to respond to Jesus' working in your life. [Pray]

ENDNOTES:

ⁱ Works consulted in study for this message include: David Guzik, "Study Guide for Matthew 2," Blue Letter Bible; John MacArthur, "The MacArthur New Testament Commentary: Matthew 1-7," Moody Bible Institute of Chicago, 1985; John MacArthur, "Fools and Wise Men part 1," sermon preached on February 12, 1978 at Grace Community Church, Sun Valley, CA; John MacArthur "Fools and Wise Men part 2," sermon preached on February 19, 1978 at Grace Community Church, Sun Valley, CA; Skip Heitzig, "The Gift: The Gift of Gold," taught at Calvary Church Albuquerque, December 7, 2014; Skip Heitzig, "The Gift: The Gift of Frankincense," taught at Calvary Church Albuquerque, December 14, 2014; Skip Heitzig, "The Gift: The Gift of Myrrh," taught at Calvary Church Albuquerque, December 21, 2014.

ⁱⁱ Information about this study was found at: <https://www.alliantcreditunion.org/money-mentor/how-much-are-americans-spending-this-holiday-season>

ⁱⁱⁱ Information for this data was found at: <https://www.businessinsider.com/dad-gifts-2014-11>

^{iv} <https://www.biblegateway.com/blog/2017/12/who-was-herod/>

^v *ibid.*

^{vi} Conclusion drawn from the same resource listed prior.

^{vii} Matthew 2:16

^{viii} <https://www.christianity.com/wiki/holidays/who-were-the-wise-men-of-the-christmas-story.html>

^{ix} Nancy Guthrie, Editor, *Come Thou Long-Expected Jesus: Experiencing the Peace and Promise of Christmas*, Crossway Books, Wheaton, Illinois, 2008.

^x <https://answersingenesis.org/geology/rocks-and-minerals/gold/>

^{xi} Details regarding this discussion were found: <https://reasonsforhopejesus.com/significance-of-the-three-kings-gifts/>

^{xii} Discovery Bible, *HELPS Word Studies*, Cognate: 5557 χρυσός (a masculine noun) – gold, used also as a symbol of profound purchasing power ("potential acquisition").

^{xiii} <https://reasonsforhopejesus.com/significance-of-the-three-kings-gifts/>

^{xiv} *ibid.*