

I Bring, I Bring Rich Gifts to Thee

Mt 2:1-12

I. INTRODUCTION.

- A. There is an old story about a woman shepherd who saw the wise men hurrying to the home of Joseph & Mary with their gold, frankincense & myrrh.
 1. She asked them about their gifts, and she learned that their gifts were for a King, and she wept because she had nothing to give the king.
 2. An angel took pity on her, touched the ground & up sprouted a rose, which the woman took and joyfully laid before the Child King.
- B. While that story is nothing but myth, it well illustrates how many might have reacted to the events narrated in this morning's text. The common people in Judea, even if they had known the great events taking place, could never have brought to Jesus the gifts the magi bring.
 1. In the first century, gold, frankincense & myrrh were worth (in today's value), six hundred, five hundred, and four thousand dollars *per pound*, respectively.
 2. The magi bring to the King of the Jews the greatest items of monetary value in their time.
 - a. But, these were also gifts of health & long life.
 - 1) Frankincense was believed to cure everything from bad breath to skin infections & was highly valued in the ancient world. In fact, modern researchers have found that frankincense has wonderful antiseptic, antifungal, & anti-inflammatory properties.
 - 2) Myrrh was used in antiquity for diaper rash, baldness, obesity, and as an anesthetic.
 - 3) Gold has always been believed to have supernatural healing powers. Gold injections have been used as a treatment to help people suffering from rheumatoid arthritis.
 - b. Therefore, we see the magi bringing great, great gifts to Christ.
- C. In fact, the importance of these gifts likely has much to do with why Matthew records this visit.
 1. Matthew writes to demonstrate that Jesus is the King of the Jews, and the visit of the magi demonstrates that Jesus is truly the King of the Jews.
 2. In the ancient world, people expected a birth of a king to fit a set of criteria:
 - a. Signs in the heavens announcing that the king had been born.
 - b. That the king would be visited by counselors to a king & presented with gifts fit only for a king.
 - c. That the new king would be involved with power struggles with other so-called great kings (e.g., Herod the Great).
 3. Matthew writes something like a great attorney in this Gospel.
 - a. He stands before the audience, his jury, and declares emphatically that Jesus is the Christ, the King of the Jews. He begins his book with such an affirmation: "The book of the genealogy of Jesus Christ, the son of David, the son of Abraham" (1:1).
 - b. He then presents evidence throughout the book to demonstrate that Jesus Christ can be none other than the Christ.
 - 1) Jesus' royal descent from David is Exhibit A; his birth of a virgin as the fulfillment of prophecy is Exhibit B.
 - 2) And this morning's text is Exhibit C—the birth of this great King takes place just as the first readers of this Gospel would have expected any king's birth to take place.
 4. The magi in this text bring gifts that were only meant for a king in Jesus' day—the gifts of gold, frankincense, & myrrh.
 - a. However, today, we cannot give Jesus gold, frankincense, and myrrh.
 - b. But, I submit that the magi bring three other more important gifts, and that we can give those same gifts to Jesus. Let's take a look at the rich gifts that we can bring to Jesus.

II. GIFT ONE: THE GIFT OF EFFORT, vv 1-2.

A. Wise men came from the east to Jerusalem.

1. Quite frankly, I was a little surprised to find that the ESV retains “wise men” to refer to these visitors.
 - a. The Gr is “magi” from which we get the English terms “magic” & “magician.”
 - b. The evidence we have suggests that magi were part of a priestly class in what is now modern day Iraq.
 - 1) Kings often consulted magi for their skills in divination, astrology, magical powers, and predicting the future.
 - 2) Because most kings firmly believed that comets, meteors, & other heavenly phenomena were omens, these magi would have kept a close watch on the heavens & immediately noticed this star.
2. The magi men come to Jerusalem.
 - a. On the one hand, that shouldn’t surprise us one bit, for as the capital of Judea, where else would the magi expect to find the King of the Jews?
 - b. On the other hand, it’s very surprising that they come to Jerusalem.
 - 1) They have been following the star, and they get within six miles of where Jesus is, & they must stop and ask directions. The star then picks up pace again & takes the magi the ten miles from Jerusalem to Bethlehem.
 - 2) There have been many attempts to ascribe this star’s appearance to simple scientific fact.
 - a) Haley’s Comet has often been seen as this star; however, Haley’s Comet appeared in this region in 12 BC, about 5-6 years too early to be the star.
 - b) Jupiter & Saturn appeared together in the night sky in 7 BC and Venus & Jupiter appeared together in the night sky on August 12, 3BC.
 - c) From 5-4 BC, a birth of a supernova was visible in that part of the world.
 - 3) If I were to pick an astronomical phenomenon which fit this, the supernova best fits the evidence. But, this is no ordinary event.
 - a) We’re not talking about several astronomers seeing some brilliant event in the heavens; we’re talking about pagans from Iraq knowing that the Messiah has been born.
 - b) If this were some astronomical event, the star would have had to be only a mile off the ground in order for the magi to follow it from Jerusalem to Bethlehem, an event that seems quite unlikely.
- B. When the magi arrive in Jerusalem, they inquire as to where the King of the Jews was to be born.
 1. Herod brings his the chief priests & the scribes together. The Jewish leaders answer that, according to Micah’s prophecy, the Christ was to be born in Bethlehem.
 2. Matthew’s purpose in recording that the wise men needed directions seems to demonstrate the two ways God reveals himself.
 - a. God has revealed himself in nature—like the star the magi saw.
 - b. God has also revealed himself in Scripture—like the quotation from Micah.
- C. What do we learn from the magi?
 1. We see that the magi put forth a lot of effort to go from Iraq to Bethlehem.
 - a. If they came from Baghdad, the magi would have traveled nearly 550 miles by camel, donkey, foot—across a desert—to get to Jesus.
 - b. When the magi can go no further, they stop & ask directions.
 2. How much effort are we really to put forth to serve the Lord?
 - a. What if we would need to travel over 500 miles to lay our gifts at Christ’s feet? Would we be willing to go, or would we rather sit at home?
 - b. God expects us to be people who put forth some effort.
 - 1) “We are his workmanship, created in Christ Jesus for good works, which God prepared beforehand, that we should walk in them” (Eph 2:10).
 - 2) Js 2:14-17.
 - c. Are we putting forth effort to do the will of God?

III. GIFT TWO: THE GIFT OF WORSHIP, vv 9b-11.

- A. The star led the magi to the place where the child was.
 1. I have been taught from a very early age that the magi did not go to the stable in Bethlehem.
 - a. That is certainly possible. Matthew does not even mention that Jesus was born in a stable.
 - b. Furthermore, many have believed that Jesus was likely about two when this took place, since Herod gathered information from the magi & then killed all the males two years & younger.
 2. That is, I will readily admit, quite possible. But, it is not the only explanation.
 - a. Matthew certainly seems to imply that the magi did go to Bethlehem.
 - b. It could be that the star appeared about two years prior to the birth of Christ & the magi arrive in Jerusalem shortly after the birth of Christ.
 - c. In the second century, Justin Martyr said that Joseph & Mary took up temporary residence in a cave near Bethlehem. That is certainly possible since so many people lived that way in the first century.
- B. Regardless of where the family was, the star the magi had seen led them to the house where child was with Mary his mother.
 1. While we might be somewhat surprised to find no mention of Joseph here, Mary was Jesus' primary caregiver, of course, and in the Jewish world, she would have been the one most likely to have been mentioned.
 2. When the magi saw the Christ Child with Mary his mother, they fell down & worshiped him.
 - a. The Gr term used for worship here is the term that means to fall down before one greater than yourself & to give him homage.
 - b. We do not know what the magi might have understood about Jesus at this point.
 - 1) We know that they understood him to be the King of the Jews, for that is exactly for whom they were looking.
 - 2) Because they learn his birthplace from prophecy, the magi very likely understood precisely who Jesus is.
 - 3) The magi understand that this Child is greater than they, and they fall before him in worship.
- C. Jesus often received worship.
 1. When Jesus walked on water & calmed the storm, "those in the boat worshiped him, saying, 'Truly you are the Son of God'" (Mt 14:33).
 2. After the Ascension, the apostles "worshiped him and returned to Jerusalem with great joy" (Lk 24:51).
- D. How is our worship of the Christ?
 1. Do we worship him as faithfully as we should?
 - a. Quite frankly, we need to do a better job in worshiping the Christ.
 - b. There are some who come if they're in the mood, if they don't have anything else going on, or if it's not too inconvenient.
 - c. There are some of you who do the best you can with the circumstances you have.
 - 1) Some of you have trouble driving after dark. You're not here on Sunday nights because of it, but you worship faithfully otherwise.
 - 2) Some of you have health difficulties that make being here on Sunday morning a gigantic effort.
 - 3) While you may not understand the example you leave, your life of faithfulness encourages those of us in better health to follow your pattern.
 - d. But, there are others who have no physical difficulty, worship with the people of God is just too much—there's always more to do than worship.
 - e. Jesus is far greater than he. He deserves our worship. How can we deny him what he is so due?
 2. But, being here physically is just part of the equation.

- a. While we must worship outwardly as God desires, our heart must also be attuned to God. Jesus put it this way: “God is spirit, and those who worship him must worship in spirit and truth” (Jn 4:24).
- b. Where are our hearts as we worship?
 - 1) Do we—like the magi long ago—fall down before Christ & acknowledge him as so much greater than we?
 - 2) Or, do we mouth the words of the songs thoughtlessly? Do we allow our minds to wander during the Lord’s Supper to how long the preacher is going to go? Do we concentrate on the inspired pages of Scripture as they’re proclaimed, or do we think about the big game this afternoon?
- E. Are we giving to Christ the gift of worship?

IV. GIFT THREE: THE GIFT OF OBEDIENCE, v 12.

- A. Like Joseph, the magi were instructed on the right thing to do.
 - 1. Herod had every intention of destroying the Christ.
 - a. Herod told the magi, “Go and search diligently for the child, and when you have found him, bring me word, that I too may come and worship him” (2:8).
 - b. We know that was nothing but a ruse, for when Herod realized the magi went home a different way, he “became furious, and he sent and killed all the male children in Bethlehem and in all that region who were two years old or under” (2:16).
 - 2. God, however, had sent his Christ into the world with a set purpose & he was not going to allow Herod to stand in his way.
 - a. He sent a dream to the magi to instruct them to return to their country a different direction.
 - b. He sent a dream to Joseph to instruct Joseph to take the Christ Child to Egypt until the threat was over.
- B. The magi get their dream & they go a different way to get home.
 - 1. Think about the meaning of the magi’s obedience.
 - a. I know fully that God sent Jesus into the world to redeem mankind & nothing was going to detract him from that mission.
 - b. But, what if the magi had not obeyed their dream?
 - 1) The magi go back to Herod & inform the king precisely where the Christ is & Herod doesn’t need to slaughter all the male children two & under—he just kills one.
 - a) The Christ doesn’t grow & have the normal human experience—full of temptation, suffering, & hardship—he doesn’t die at Golgotha and doesn’t rise from the dead three days later.
 - b) We would gather this morning as people full of sin & headed straight to Satan’s hell.
 - 2) However, the magi obey the dream & thus play a small part in moving the story of man’s redemption moving forward.
 - 2. We, like the magi, need to be those who obey God.
 - a. Jesus says, “Whoever does the will of my Father in heaven is my brother and sisters and mother” (Mt 12:50).
 - b. “And the world is passing away along with its desires, but whoever does the will of God abides forever” (1 Jn 2:17).
 - 3. It’s obvious that the magi’s obedience keeps God’s will moving as he desired.
 - a. Granted, God in his power & sovereignty would have saved man regardless of what the magi did. Yet, the magi’s obedience plays an important part in that scheme of redemption.
 - b. We must never underestimate the power of our obedience.
 - 1) If I refuse to lie when my supervisor wants me to, I might lose my job, but I could also bring a co-worker to Christ.
 - 2) If I come to Wednesday night Bible study, although the weather’s not good & I have much to do, I can teach my children that God must be priority one.
 - 4. How is our obedience this morning?

V. CONCLUSION.

- A. Like any good author, Matthew writes this passage with irony dripping off the pages.
 - 1. Here are pagan astrologers—something God has forbidden among his people—and they come to worship at the feet of the Christ.
 - 2. The Jews, the ones to whom the Christ had come, ignore his entrance into the world altogether. Even when the earthly King of the Jews was made aware that the Messiah had come, he only wants to know where he is to kill him, not to worship him.
- B. With whom do we identify more in this passage?
 - 1. Are we those who should know so much about the Christ since we have been redeemed by his blood but we do not give him the gifts he so rightly deserves?
 - 2. Or, are we willing to give Jesus the gifts of effort, worship, & obedience? Do you need to give him the gift of yourself this morning?