

Matthew 2:1-12

In the time of King Herod, after Jesus was born in Bethlehem of Judea, wise men from the East came to Jerusalem, asking, 'Where is the child who has been born king of the Jews? For we observed his star at its rising, and have come to pay him homage.' When King Herod heard this, he was frightened, and all Jerusalem with him; and calling together all the chief priests and scribes of the people, he inquired of them where the Messiah was to be born. They told him, 'In Bethlehem of Judea; for so it has been written by the prophet:

“And you, Bethlehem, in the land of Judah,
are by no means least among the rulers of Judah;
for from you shall come a ruler
who is to shepherd my people Israel.” ’

Then Herod secretly called for the wise men and learned from them the exact time when the star had appeared. Then he sent them to Bethlehem, saying, 'Go and search diligently for the child; and when you have found him, bring me word so that I may also go and pay him homage.' When they had heard the king, they set out; and there, ahead of them, went the star that they had seen at its rising, until it stopped over the place where the child was. When they saw that the star had stopped, they were overwhelmed with joy. On entering the house, they saw the child with Mary his mother; and they knelt down and paid him homage. Then, opening their treasure-chests, they offered him gifts of gold, frankincense, and myrrh. And having been warned in a dream not to return to Herod, they left for their own country by another road.

What Do We Offer Jesus?

What did you get for Christmas? Any toys? I got a toy. It was an Amazon Fire Stick. I didn't ask for it, and when I got it I had no idea what it was – it looked like a remote, but I had no idea how to work it until my son, who bought it for me, showed me how to use it. Since then I've played around with it – talked to it. I panicked when I lost it; spent awhile looking for it before finding it deep inside the cushions of the sofa. Anyways, I loved it.

I wonder how Jesus felt about his Christmas presents, the one's the wise men brought him. Gold, frankincense, and myrrh. Great presents for a baby, eh? I'm sure baby Jesus spent hours in his playpen handling that gold, frankincense, and myrrh. I wonder which one he liked the most. The gold was the shiniest. The frankincense and myrrh were the smelliest. Not sure which Jesus would have liked the most, or if he liked any of them. It makes you wonder just how wise these wise men were bringing these strange gifts to a child. But we shouldn't be too hard on them; there weren't many toy stores around in those days.

And actually the gifts that the wise men brought Jesus were very practical under the circumstances. What do I mean by that? Well, what happens after the wise men present their gifts to Jesus? They head back east, but they are told in a dream not to go back the way they came; they're told to avoid King Herod. Why? Herod wanted to kill Jesus, and the minute that he would know where Jesus was would be the minutes he sent out his assassins to kill this child. So the wise men, by avoiding Herod, buy some time for Mary and Joseph to get out of Dodge. They

need to run. And where do they go? All the way to Egypt. That's over four hundred miles...on foot. That's about the distance from here to Niagara Falls...on foot. Keep in mind that Joseph didn't have the money to afford a stay at the Holiday Inn in Bethlehem. So back to those gifts. What could Joseph and Mary do with gold, frankincense, and myrrh? Well it's easy enough to transport, and easy enough to trade. They could probably afford to arrange safe travel to Egypt to escape Herod's assassins and maybe get themselves settled somewhere where Joseph could find work, they could find a home to live in, and settle in for awhile, until the danger is past and they can return to their homeland. So those gifts really came in handy.

But you know what? The reason the wise men left their homes in the East in search of Jesus was not to bring him gifts. Yes, the gifts were nice, and they helped Jesus' family get safely out of the country, but the wise men were coming to Jesus for another reason, and the answer is in the text. What was the first thing they did when they found Jesus? Deliver their gifts like they were UPS drivers? No! The first thing they did was **WORSHIP HIM**. The translation we read said "paid him homage" which is what a servant does to a master. You bow down, you kiss their hand – you show extreme reverence. That's why we have those cushions up in front of the altar; it's the place we go to show Jesus our deep reverence.

And my question today is, "Do we worship Jesus, or do we just bring him gifts?" I don't think that there are any King Herods in here; none of us are out to assassinate Jesus, but I also wonder how many of us are truly here to worship him. And I'm not saying this to put anyone down; I'm just saying that worship is not such an easy thing to do. Paying homage is not so easy, either. I remember, shortly after marrying Hyesun and learning one of the Korean New Year's customs: everyone dresses in their traditional Korean dress, and families come together, and children pay homage to their parents...or grandparents, by making a deep bow – not just a polite bow, but a deep-put-your-head-on-the-floor bow. And you do this three times. And I still remember my reaction when Hyesun told me about this. My deep American pride just sprung up, and I don't know if I said it out loud, but I was clearly thinking a line that I heard in the Lord of the Rings movie, "I bow to no man!" And that was just a deep bow. How good could I really be at worshiping when I have so much pride?

Which brings me back to the question, "Do we worship Jesus, or do we just bring him gifts?" Do we come here today with an attitude of, "Oh, well, it's a only a couple of hours of my day. I guess I can afford that." Do we think of Jesus as someone important in our lives, someone we'd buy a nice present for, or do we think of him as someone we'd offer our lives to? Jesus says something very profound in the Gospels: "Those who seek to keep their life will lose it; those who lose their life for my sake will gain it." I think those words explain what worship is all about. It's about complete surrender, complete sacrifice. And Jesus, as God's own child, show's us precisely what that surrender and what that sacrifice look like. Jesus surrenders his life to the will of the Father – obedient in every way, even to death, death on a cross. And sacrifice, for us, giving his own life willingly for us out of love. Not because we deserved it. Not because we earned it, but simply because that's what love does. Young ladies, when you fall in love, fall in love with someone who takes care of you even when you act like a real jerk. That's what Jesus did for us. That's what God does for us every day.

I think all people have a hard time worshiping Jesus because we simply hold back from full surrender, from dying to ourselves and being born into Christ. We look at our lives like a pie and say, "This much is for God, and the rest is for me." And we console ourselves by looking around us and recognizing others who seem to give *nothing* to Jesus and we tell ourselves, "Well I'm giving a lot more than he is." But Jesus told us not to judge, because we can always find someone who seems worse ourselves (and if they aren't worse than us we'll convince ourselves that they are). Worship requires us to focus on God alone, not on the people around us – they may be worshiping Jesus with us, and believe me there is nothing more beautiful than a gathering of people who are all focused completely on worshiping God, but true worship puts God front and center in our hearts and in our lives.

And not just on Sundays. Church is the place where we worship *together* as a family, and where we help each other so that we can worship better, but if you know Jesus for who he is, if you know his love and his strength and his grace and his wisdom, you worship him all the time.

My prayer is that we would worship Jesus in all that we do. That means that we are pretty much praying all the time, and you can do that. When you get up in the morning, you say, "Good morning, God, and thanks for another day." You brush your teeth, and you thank for your teeth. Thank God for your clothes, for the music you're listening to. You go downstairs and thank God for your family, and for breakfast. Thank God for your school bus driver, your classmates, your teachers, for all those smart people who gave you something to study and learn about. The list goes on, but if you recognize God as the author of all life, as the redeemer of all souls, you have plenty to worship him for. True worship means following Jesus. Don't just bring Jesus gifts; give him your life.