

Royal New Year

KEY POINT: As we go into this New Year, let's take a cue from the wise men and focus on seeing where God has been moving, commit to studying scripture, get rid of bad influences, and bring our gifts to God.

January 6th is actually a holiday called Epiphany, Three Kings Day, or as Spanish speakers know it, Día de Los Reyes. Traditionally, it is celebrated on January 6th, representing the day that the Wise Men came, since many people believe that the wise men did not visit Jesus until a while after He was born. It is mostly celebrated in Hispanic regions. In places like the Dominican Republic, it is the day that children actually receive gifts, not Christmas, since this is the day representing when the wise men brought their gifts to Jesus.

Matthew 2:1-12 pg. 471

1 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. 10 When they saw the star, they rejoiced exceedingly with great joy. 11 And going into the house, 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. 12 And being warned in a dream not to return to Herod, they departed to their own country by another way.

Okay, so I know just hearing that probably gets you back in the Christmas spirit, but just as a reminder, we are looking at this as a model for how we can approach our new year.

They saw how God had been working

When they saw the unusual star in the sky, they decided to make the next move and go look for Jesus.

One of the most important parts of springing into any new season, especially into a new year, is to reflect on where you have been. It is so important to see where God has been moving in order to make resolutions or plans for the next steps.

For instance, some questions you can ask yourself are:

- What new things has God taught me this past year?
- What relationships has God given me this year? This can be people you can influence spiritually or that you can be influenced by.
- What opportunities did God give me to serve Him this year?
- Where do I feel like God is asking me to grow?

Where we have been and where we have seen God moving in this past year can be our springboard for the new year ahead of us. If this is a question you are having trouble answering, do not feel shame. Sometimes it can be tricky to see how God is moving in your life. I would encourage you to ask God to give you eyes to see where He has been moving in your life, and try to process this with a trusted friend, small group leader, or mentor.

They had been studying scripture

An important question to ask is how did the wise men know where God was moving? Although the Scripture does not say it specifically here, it is implied in the text that these wise men had been studying the Word of God. They knew how God was going to communicate about the appearance of His Son, because they had been studying the prophetic Scriptures.

This serves as a really good reminder that to know God, we must be learning about Him. Just like if you're dating someone, you spend time with them talking and getting to know them. Similarly, to strengthen our relationships with God, we must get to know Him by His Words, which are found in the Bible. The more we get to know Him through what He is telling us in the Bible, the more we are able to become aware of where He is moving in our lives. Then, like the wise men, we will be able to see where God is moving in our lives.

As you start the new year, this is great time to start a bible reading plan if you don't already have one. The Bible app has tons of great reading plans. Read the NT in a year, about 5 chapters per week, is an easy and great plan to follow.

They removed bad influences

Another lesson that we can learn from the wise men is to rid yourself of bad choices, of the places that are not where God has been moving in your lives.

The wise men had been following Herod's directions and orders. However, Herod was not a good person. When Herod learned from the wise men that a new king had been born in Bethlehem, he wanted to hold onto his kingdom so he sought to have Jesus put to death.

Herod encouraged the wise men to find Jesus and report back to him so that he too could go and worship the baby king. But this was only a lie to learn where Jesus was in order to have the baby killed. So, while the wise men found Jesus with Herod's help, at the end of the story, they didn't go back to Herod.

So, in our new year, we should look back at the false authorities that we listen to in our lives. What are we following instead of God? This can be school, sports, friends, relationships, or anything that has control of your life that is not God.

One very important piece of this point though is how the wise men had the power to walk away. It wasn't them deciding they didn't like Herod. God intervened. He sent them a powerful dream that told them not to return to Herod.

In the same way, as we look at our sin patterns and false authorities in our lives, we cannot look to this new year and will ourselves out of these sin patterns. We cannot make ourselves strong enough to conquer our own sins. We must have the intervention of God on our behalf.

This is way the Gospel is called the Good News – sin messed everything up when we chose to do our own thing, but because God sent His Son to live a perfect life and die on our behalf, Jesus takes the place of our sinful tendencies and allows God to form a relationship with us to help us conquer our sin and look more like Him.

So, as we decide what things we are going to kick out of our lives, we must be like the wise men and have discerning minds, submitting our sins to God and what He says about them, prayerfully working through them in relationship with Him.

They worshipped Jesus with our gifts

Lastly, let's focus on what the wise men did when they got to Jesus. They immediately fell down and worshiped Him and presented Him with their gifts. So, as we think about this new year ahead, what would it look like to present our gifts to God?

The wise men had specific treasures that they were to give to Jesus, God in flesh. Similarly, we have specific gifts we can give to God.

Romans 12:6-8 pg. 552

6 Having gifts that differ according to the grace given to us, let us use them: if prophecy, in proportion to our faith; 7 if service, in our serving; the one who teaches, in his teaching; 8 the one who exhorts, in his exhortation; the one who contributes, in generosity; the one who leads, with zeal; the one who does acts of mercy, with cheerfulness.

We could go through and have several weeks' worth of lessons about what each of these gifts looks like and how we can specifically use them to glorify God. But for the sake of our lesson, it is enough to say that for those of us who are believers, God has given us spiritual gifts. What would it look like for us to give these back to Him this year?

Now, we must admit this is pretty counter-cultural to what we typically think as New Year resolutions. Normally, we think of things we could do for our own betterment and by our own power: floss more, be more organized, workout a certain amount, etc. But what would it look like if our New Year's resolution was instead to, like the wise men, bring our gifts to God?

God has given each and every one of you amazing gifts. I know you all well enough to say confidently that this is true. Let's resolve this year to bring those gifts to God. This can be something simple, like saying that you are going to use your athletic talent to point the glory to God instead of yourself. It might be something that requires more time, like saying you're going to use your gift of serving to be involved in Christian community service unlike you ever have been.

Conclusion

In conclusion, let's take a cue from the wise men as we enter this new year. Let's take time to reflect on how God has been moving in our lives, ask His help to surrender areas we haven't been obeying Him in, and submit our gifts to Him, prayerfully and hopefully expectant to see what big things He does in and through us in this new year.

Small Group Questions

- What are some ways you saw God working last year?
- What is one thing God taught you this past year?
- How do you think God might be asking you to grow this year?
- Why was important for the wise men to study scripture to see where God had been working?
- Similarly why would it be important for us to have regular Bible reading to see where God is or has been working?
- What are some false authorities or bad influences (like Herod for the wise men) that you see in your life?
- What can you do to remove these bad things from you life?
- What might it look like for you to allow God to help you with these things?
- What gifts do you think God has given you and how might you use them to glorify him this year?