

The Nativity

The Three Wisemen

Fairview Missionary Church | Angola, IN

Scripture: Assorted

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Last year, Americans spent over \$964 billion on holiday purchases. That is almost \$1 trillion on stuff that I like to tell my kids and my family will end up in a landfill at some point, right? They don't appreciate that, but it's true. Usually by February, most of the stuff that we have given or received doesn't mean much anymore.

It seems that as a society, we have become very good at buying things and giving things, but we have often lost the ability to give the gift of ourselves. In the clip this week, the Magi are frustrated that no one has brought a gift for baby Jesus. But it is Mary who ends up reminding them that the greatest gift that you could give to Jesus is not a gift that you can put in a box and can be wrapped.

She reminds us that you could give Jesus the most expensive and extravagant gift possible, but if you haven't given him your heart, you've missed the point entirely. And so that's what we're going to talk about today. What does it look like to give Jesus your heart? The original Magi understood something that many of us often forget today. The Magi did not travel thousands of miles to deliver a care package.

The magi delivered thousands of miles to worship the king of kings and the Lord of lords. Today I want to look at what Scripture teaches us about authentic worship. And as we think about the journey of the Magi, as we are on a similar journey, what does it look like to worship the king?

My desire is that you and I would respond in a similar way as the magi I did 2,000 years ago by recognizing the gift for who He is, by responding to that gift in worship, then releasing our hearts to Him and learning to reflect the gift in such a way that when others look at our lives, they would also be encouraged to give their hearts.

Today I want to be reminded of what God desires most from us and why that should change our view of Christmas. Let me pray and then we will jump into the Christmas story. Heavenly Father, we come before You today, and it is so easy to lose the real meaning of Christmas.

In our culture, we have gotten really good at giving gifts, even being present at times, spending time with family and friends, maybe even attending a church service out of tradition. But Father, my prayer for us is that we would not lose the true meaning, that we would not forget to recognize the greatest gift that was ever given, the gift of Jesus Christ.

Father, that you decided to step into your creation to take on flesh in order to communicate with us in a way that we would understand. Help us to give the gifts of our hearts. We ask this in Jesus' name. Amen. Matthew chapter 2 verses 1 and 2, we read this.

"After Jesus was born in Bethlehem in Judea, during the time of King Herod, Magi from the East came to Jerusalem and they asked, 'Where is the one who has been born king of the Jews? We saw His star when it rose and have come to worship Him.' We jump down to verse 10 and we read that when they saw the star, they were overjoyed. On coming to the house, they saw the child with his mother Mary, and they bowed down and worshiped him.

Then they opened their treasures and presented him with gifts of gold, frankincense, and myrrh. Our first response in worship to the king is to recognize the gift that has been given. The Magi weren't just a group of nomadic men who happened to stumble upon Jesus while they were wandering around in the Middle East. They were scholars. Many theologians believed that they would have been from Persia or Babylon.

They would have been trained in mathematics and astronomy. They certainly understood ancient prophecies. They actually were the ancient elite. They were the ones who were used to answering questions, not asking questions. These men saw a star in the sky that changed everything for them. They must have been familiar with David's prophecy of a coming king who would be like no other.

This star that they saw in the sky was unusual. It was actually supernatural. It was a divine announcement that God was going to do something unprecedented in human history. It wasn't just another star, it wasn't just another story. And following this star wasn't just going to be a weekend getaway for the Magi. This was a life-altering pilgrimage.

This is something that the Magi understood and we often miss that the recognition, understanding who Jesus is and what He has come to do should change what we are willing to do for Him. They recognize that someone worthy of a supernatural announcement in the heavens was worthy of a supernatural response.

This Christmas, you and I need to ask ourselves the question, do we truly recognize Jesus as the greatest treasure? This divine announcement that was given for the birth of a child? Does my calendar show that the birth of that child and the gift that we received has changed? Does my bank account show that my life has changed?

What does my thought life indicate is my true joy in knowing that Jesus has come? True recognition of Jesus as Lord means that He should get the best of our time, the first of our attention, and the freshest of our energy. And so if you're here today or watching online or joining us and you recognize Jesus as your greatest treasure, the question for you is, "How are you helping others to follow the star towards Him?" The Magi's trip wasn't a secret.

They didn't go about their journey in private. They were asking questions of others to help them find the child. They included others in their search and in their journey. It's important that as we look to include others in our journey, as we continue to seek this greatest gift, that we don't include others in our journey through manipulation or guilt, but instead we encourage them to join us through our curiosity and our excitement.

As the Magi were looking for this child, imagine the excitement that was building as they were getting closer, as they were trying to find the exact place where the child would be. The beautiful truth is that God still reveals Himself to those who are truly seeking Him. God is not hiding from people who genuinely want to know Him, but recognition requires intention.

The Magi were students of the sky because they believed that God communicated through His creation. Scripture says that the heavens declare the glory of God. When you and I look at the world around us, when we see the stars in the sky, when we see the amazing animal kingdom and the world in which we live, they cry out for God's glory. And so the Magi knew to look in the sky, understanding that God does speak to us in that way.

And so we have to ask ourselves, are we prepared to hear from God through His creation, through a card from somebody, through a Word from somebody? Are we ready to hear from God? Psalm chapter 96, verses 8 and 9 says, "Ascribe to the Lord the glory to His name. Bring an offering and come into His courts. Worship the Lord in the splendor of His holiness.

Tremble before Him all the earth." The Magi's response to finding Jesus teaches us something profound about this idea of worship. Authentic worship should match the worth of the one who is being worshipped. Our

response to Jesus should be the same as the Magi that we respond to Jesus coming in the flesh with our worship.

And worship is not defined as just singing songs on Sunday morning. Worship instead is defined as a posture that you and I take before someone of supreme authority and worth. When we worship God, we are acknowledging His greatness, both through our words and our deeds, including offering something that is of value, that reflects His value.

And so the Magi, when they came to worship the King, they came with gifts that were deeply symbolic and theologically rich. I know we've talked about this before, but when they brought their gifts of gold and frankincense and myrrh, they weren't just random things that they decided to bring. The gold represented kingship, acknowledging that Jesus was the rightful ruler. The frankincense was used in temple worship.

It was an incense that was used, and it recognized Jesus' deity that He was God in the flesh. He was the rightful ruler. He was God in the flesh. And then possibly the greatest gift, Myrrh, the most prophetic gift for sure. Myrrh was used for burial preparation, anticipating his sacrifice. How amazing is it that one of the Magi would bring Myrrh, understanding that Jesus was going to offer Himself as a sacrifice.

These weren't just random gifts that the Magi picked up at Walmart before they arrived. They were both costly and meaningful. There was a cost to them, and there was a meaning behind them. It's easy for us to fall into the trap that when we worship and we bring gifts, that it's actually about us. It's about the songs that we like to sing. It's about my emotions. It's about my feelings.

But true worship isn't about what you get, it's about what you give. It's about what you offer. And so when we come before our king, we are giving our praise, our worship to our God. And so here's a question that we should ask ourselves during this Christmas season. Is my worship costly or is it leftover from other priorities?

When we bring our gift of worship to our Savior, does it actually cost us something, or is it just the leftovers? We've already mentioned the Magi's worship cost them, not just physically in the sense of buying the gold and the frankincense and the myrrh, which were expensive gifts, but it cost them months of their lives. A significant financial investment, yes, but they had to leave if they had family, if they had friends, to make this journey.

Not an easy trip. And so the question is, what does our worship cost us? Does it cost us extra sleep on a Sunday morning? Does it cost us extra sleep on a Monday morning where you choose to set your alarm early so that you can get up and spend some time with God before you begin your day? Does it cost us our comfort? Maybe it means getting out of bed and out of our house on a day when the wind chill is negative seven degrees, right?

Certainly comfort does it cost us our pride. We have to acknowledge that we're sinful human beings before a holy God, and so we willingly offer ourselves before Him. Today I want to be reminded that giving of my time and my resources and my talents is an act of worship. Don't just tell people that God is important in your life.

Show them He is important by the decisions you make and by what you do. When we decide to worship, after we have recognized the gift and we decide to offer Him our worship, the next step is learning to release our hearts, to release our hearts. Proverbs 23:26 says, "My son, give me your heart, and let your eyes delight in my ways." Of all the things that God could ask for, isn't it interesting that He asks for our heart?

He doesn't ask for our performance. He doesn't ask for our perfection. He doesn't even ask for religious achievements that we get so many stars next to our name in Sunday school class. Instead, He wants your heart. How beautiful is it that of all things God desires us? He desires our hearts. He wants a relationship with us.

He doesn't desire us because of what we can give to Him. He desires us because He loves us. The religious leaders of Jesus' time were experts at these external offerings, doing things on the outside, but internally still being damaged. They had elaborate systems for sacrifices, detailed rules for tithing, and complex requirements for ceremonial cleanliness.

If you ever have the opportunity to go to Israel, you will notice at almost all of the historical sites there are remnants or remains of these baths that are made into the ground, these ceremonial cleaning places where the Jews would have to clean themselves before they could go into the temple, before they could go into the synagogue. There were all of these rules and regulations about cleaning themselves externally. It was all about this religious practice.

And these religious leaders were able to perform all of these rituals perfectly while completely missing the heart of worship. God is not opposed to our obedience. Of course, He desires our obedience. He's not opposed to our external practices, but He knows that external practices without a heart commitment only leads to religious performance. And you and I are not here for religious performance.

That is not what God desires. God desires a heart that loves Him. He wants us to want to worship Him, to desire Him, to have that relationship with Him. And this should not be new for us. Every man in here who is married today has probably heard their wife say, "I want you to want to fill in the blank, right? I want you to want to go shopping with me.

I want you to want to give me a foot rub. I want you to want to watch a Hallmark movie with me." Women, let me just tell you, I don't know any guy that actually wants to watch the Hallmark movie with you, but he will because he loves you, all right? You want somebody to desire that. God wants us to desire that relationship with Him. Releasing your heart to God means moving from external compliance to internal surrender.

It means that your obedience comes from love, not obligation. It means that your service flows from gratitude, not guilt. It means that your worship emerges from joy, not duty. So how does this practically look in our lives today? It means that you obey God even when nobody is watching, because your obedience is about your relationship with Him, not your reputation among others.

It means you serve others because you see them the way God sees them, not because serving makes you feel good about yourself. It means you give generously because you realize everything you have belongs to God anyway. It means that you forgive because you are forgiven, not because forgiveness benefits you. It means you pursue holiness because you want to be like the one you love, not because you are trying to win or earn His approval.

The Creator of the universe who owns everything and lacks nothing considers your freely given love to be precious. The final step in our act of worship is to learn to reflect that gift in our lives.

2 Corinthians 9:15 says, "Thanks be to God for His indescribable gift." When you and I truly receive the gift of Jesus, when we receive His forgiveness, His love, His mercy, His grace, His acceptance, it naturally produces in us a gratitude, a thankfulness that overflows and naturally results in giving and serving others.

The most natural response as human beings when we receive an incredible gift is to tell others about the gift we received. When someone gives you something that changes your life, you can't stop telling people about it. You want everyone to know. Probably the best example we have of this in our culture would be women. When you get engaged to a man and he asks you to marry him and you first get to wear that ring, you can't wait to show everybody. You can't wait to tell everybody about it.

Why? Because the direction of your life has changed now. You are going to move in a different direction. Hopefully, it's for the better, and so you're excited about it. You can't wait to share the news with friends and family, and the same should be true when you and I receive the gift of Jesus. The gratitude of that gift should flow into every area and aspect of our life. It means that I learn to be generous with my time when others need help.

It learns that I learn to be generous with my words when others need encouragement. It means that I learn to be generous with my money when others have financial needs. It means that I learn to be generous with

forgiveness when others hurt me. It means that I learn to be generous with my patience when others frustrate me. In the story of the Magi coming to visit the king, we know that the Scripture says they returned by another route after encountering Jesus.

And rightly so, we know this to be true because they were afraid that King Herod may take their life. But what if it also was a beautiful metaphor that you and I would understand that when you encountered Jesus, you can't go back the same way you came. That when you and I have an encounter with the gift of Jesus Christ and we recognize who He is and what He has done, that it makes it such a huge impact in our life that we can't possibly go back to life the way it was.

And so this Christmas, the encouragement for us all is to bring God our hearts, to bring Him our dreams, but also to bring Him our fears and our disappointments, to bring Him our plans and our hope, to bring Him our whole life. We live in a culture that has often complicated Christmas beyond recognition.

It's easy during the season to live a life of stress and expectations and obligations that have nothing to do with the simple and profound truth of Christmas that God gave us His Son, and the most appropriate response is to give Him our hearts. And so this morning, if you are here watching online or listening on the radio, if you've been going through the motions of Christmas, buying the gifts, wrapping the presents, putting up the decorations, maybe even plans to come to a Christmas Eve service, but you have not engaged your heart with Jesus.

May today be your invitation to true worship. To truly worship the reason that we celebrate Christmas. Not perfect worship, but authentic worship. Every season I convince myself that I am not going to get caught up in the busyness and I'm just going to enjoy and take some time of solitude with God. And I'm just going to rest in His presence.

And every season, this one included, every year, I fall into the trap and I get busy and my focus begins to wander at all of the things that need to get done at the church and in my house and with my family. And so this Christmas, this is a good reminder for me to take a deep breath and to remember what it is that we are celebrating during Christmas and to be reminded that the best gift I can give is my heart to Jesus.

And so this Christmas, before you wrap another gift or attend another party, spend time considering what it would look like to give Jesus the gift He actually wants your heart. Let me close in prayer. Heavenly Father, we ask for forgiveness for the times that we make this season more difficult than it needs to be.

We fall into the trap of getting so busy that we don't take the time to share the greatest gift with others. And so, Father, with the few days we have left, I pray that we would find those moments of quiet and we would find those moments of peace with you to recollect our hearts, that we would not just perform acts and duties externally, but Father, internally, we would truly worship You because You are the greatest gift that has ever been given.

It's in Jesus' name we pray. Amen.