

"Behold" That's the title of our Advent series. Behold is a common word, used over 1200 times in the Bible, that means "pay attention," "listen up," "look closely" as in Mt. 2:1, "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." Today we are going to take a closer look at these wise men who came from the east bearing gifts for a newborn king.

One of my favorite gifts came from a former teammate named Greg. When I knew Greg, he was dating a girl named Melinda at the same time I was dating a girl named Jana. Greg and Melinda got married just a few months before Jana and I. They sent us a popcorn popper as a wedding gift. It was a duplicate gift since we received another popcorn popper that looked a lot better than the picture on the box Greg and Melinda sent. So, we had a choice to make; toss it, keep it in a closet as a back-up or we could re-gift it...NOT THAT THERE'S ANYTHING WRONG WITH THAT. Greg and Melinda's gift stayed in the hall closet where it didn't see the light of day for a couple of years. One day we were rushing around trying to get out the door to attend a housewarming party for a friend. Jana said it was proper to take a gift to such an occasion, so with a flash of brilliance I said, "How about a popcorn popper?" I pulled out the gift from Greg and Melinda to be re-gifted...NOT THAT THERE'S ANYTHING WRONG WITH THAT. I put the box on the kitchen table and said, "Let's get this thing wrapped or we're going to be late." Jana asked if I had opened it. "Of course, I didn't open it. It's a popcorn popper...says so right on the box. Let's get it wrapped and get out of here." When you marry well you are given a gift who will often spare you from your own stupidity. Contrary to my objections, she opened the box and pulled out a beautiful hand-woven basket. We almost gave away something we didn't even know we had. But here's the kicker. When Jana pulled out the basket there was a card on it that said, "To Greg and Melinda on your wedding day." We almost regifted a gift that had been regifted!

Jesus is the greatest gift of all. "God so loved the world that He gave His only-begotten, one of a kind, Son." It seems to me that re-gifting is the proper response to the great gift God has given us. What we do with God's gift reveals the condition of our heart. This morning I want you to examine 3 responses to Jesus found here in the first 15 verses of Mt. 2. Which response reflects the condition of your heart? The first is response is...

I. Full ventricular veneration (whole-hearted worship) - The response of the Magi...vv. 1-2. The magi worshipped Jesus with all their hearts. These

guys were not Jewish and they weren't kings. They were gentiles like us. They were from the east as in east of Israel, like where Iraq/Iran are today. They were probably Chaldeans, an influential and highly educated people known for their magi or wise men. The magi studied astronomy and astrology during the time of Jewish captivity in Babylon. In fact, Daniel was "chief of the magicians." (Dan. 4:7-9) A magician in the Bible wasn't someone who did card tricks or pulled a rabbit out of the hat. The word "magic" was used to express the metaphysical or supernatural world. In other words, the Magi were early scientists who explored and explained the natural physical world, but they also acknowledged an unseen world. They sought to interpret dreams and visions. God had sovereignly placed a Jewish man named Daniel in the Babylonian court so that there would be one who would interpret dreams by the power of God and not by the power of demonic forces or human cleverness.

According to Mt. 2:2, they had been guided to Israel by a star. Astronomers speculate that this could have been a triple conjunction between Jupiter, the largest planet in our solar system (11x larger in diameter than earth), Venus, the brightest planet in the sky and Regulus, the brightest star in the constellation Leo. When these stargazers observed this unusual astronomical event, they interpreted it as a sign that the vision of Daniel about a future King or Messiah who would sit on the throne of David and rule over all people forever had come to pass. Maybe Daniel shared the prophecy of Balaam in Nu. 24:17: "A star will come out of Jacob; a scepter will rise out of Israel." Add to that Daniel's own vision recorded in Daniel 9. Jeremiah prophesied that the Jewish people would in captivity in Babylon for 70 years but Daniel says 70x7 or 490 years. Both were right. A star guided the Magi to the front door of the ONE destined to hold the scepter of Israel.

The magi arrived in Bethlehem with gifts fit for a king; gold, frankincense and myrrh. In our day, we'll take the gold. But in Jesus' day, frankincense and myrrh were considered more valuable than gold. Huge caravans featuring as many as 3,000 camels traveled the incense road through the Arabian desert from the Persian Gulf all the way to the Mediterranean loaded with hundreds of pounds of incense and myrrh. The Magi were led right to the child. Notice their response when they find him...vv. 10-11. What good are these gifts to a baby? Little did they know that the gifts of gold, frankincense and myrrh, would be used to finance an unplanned trip to Egypt...vv. 13-15. Joseph, Mary and Jesus, would become a family of refugees fleeing the wrath of a madman. The magi had unknowingly

provided the resources the family would need to return safely so that the Messiah could accomplish His mission on earth. The gifts we offer Jesus in worship, will be used to further the plan and purpose of God in ways we know nothing about.

II. Cerebral Spectatoritis (half-hearted indifference) - The response of the priests of Israel...vv. 3-6. If these learned religious scholars knew where the baby was to be born why didn't they rush to Bethlehem to search for Him so they too could worship Him? They knew all about Him. They knew what the prophets said. They knew the place of His birth, the manner of His birth, His family lineage. But generations had come and gone and still no Messiah. The plan of God became more of an intellectual exercise than a spiritual experience. An unfulfilled promise makes the heart grow cold and calloused. The marvelous plan of God had lost its wonder. It happens. It happens every Christmas. The story can get stale.

Have you ever bought a new car and marveled at all its features? How long did it for that car to lose its wonder? Have you ever watched the teller at the bank counting out large sums of money? Do you suppose she is stunned by the wonder of all that cash? It happens to all of us. I recently read that only 39 percent of young adults agreed with the statement, "Christmas is primarily a religious holiday." When asked what they're looking forward to during the holidays, only 11 percent cited religious reflection and services. \$781 billion will be spent on Christmas presents this month. That's a lot of wealth but not a lot of wonder. Christmas is a time of year when it is easy to lose perspective on what is really important. Going through Christmas without beholding the wonder of it all is like walking through the Sistine Chapel staring at the floor.

The priests and scribes knew the scriptures. But just because you know the writings doesn't mean you know the Writer. Matthew tells this story in a way that shows us the leaders of the Jewish people being put to shame by the actions of the gentile Magi.

III. Hubristic arteriosclerosis - The response of Herod (hard-hearted cruelty). Herod was as hard-hearted as they come. When he heard about the birth of Jesus, he was "troubled" (v. 3). He knew enough to know that the One "born king of the Jews" (v. 2) was "the Christ," the Messiah. This proud, pompous, paranoid, power-hungry King could not tolerate competition, so he sent the magi on a mission...vv. 7-8. Of course, this was a

lie. He was planning to eliminate Jesus any way he could. A man who killed a dozen or so of his own family members would not hesitate to kill every infant in Bethlehem to put a stop to any rumors of a rival king. Herod occupied the Herodion, a man-made mountain he built with the use of 10K slaves. A tribute to human power and might. Perched safely on top of his fortress Herod ruled from on high. Meanwhile, down below in the shadow of the Herodion, a baby born in the back of a cave was everything Herod was not. Herod is rich, Jesus is poor. Herod is powerful, the baby Jesus is powerless. Herod is perched in a palace; Jesus is born in a barn. Herod surrounds himself with power symbols, the sword and the scepter. Jesus will teach his disciples that His power symbols are the basin and the towel. In the end, the one who is exalted shall be humbled. The one who humbles Himself will be exalted. The shepherd will rule as the prophecy says...v. 6.

God has given us the greatest gift of all - the gift of a Savior. How shall we respond? Hard-heartedly? Half-heartedly? Whole-heartedly? What is your heart condition this Christmas? Are you hard-hearted like Herod? Of course, no one here is that cruel but you can do what Herod did, reject Jesus, get Him out of your life so you can still occupy the throne of your life. Many people reject Jesus not because they are unconvinced of His credentials but because they fear that their behavior might need to change if they accept Him. Just because you need a Savior doesn't mean you want a King. I want to be my own king. Every four years, we elect the one who will do the most for us not the one who will demand the most of us.

Second option - the half-hearted response. Just do with Jesus what I did with the popcorn popper - put Him back in the closet until next Christmas. The scribes and Pharisees had the description of the Messiah so they assumed they knew what the gift would look like without ever bothering to open the box and take a closer look. It's one thing to be wrong about a popcorn popper, another thing to be wrong about the Lord of the universe.

The third option is the response of the magi - the whole-hearted response. Let's rejoice at the birth of Christ and courageously offer ourselves up to Him in worship. Everything we bring to Him in worship will be regifted in order to make Him famous.

One of the most inspiring examples of regifting I have ever heard is the story of Peter von Woerden, a nephew of Corrie Ten Boom. The ten Booms were a Dutch family that saved countless Jewish men and women from being shipped off to Nazi death camps in WWII. Peter learned about some Jewish

children who were being held by the Nazis and were scheduled to be shipped off to their death. In a daring move, Peter, with the help of some friends, managed to steal some Nazi uniforms and drove to the place where the children were held and presented some false papers in order to take possession of the kids. They were all spared. Many years later, Peter and his family were visiting Israel when he suffered a major heart attack. A very capable Jewish heart surgeon at Hadassah Hospital in Jerusalem was able to save Peter's life. When the surgeon learned of von Woerden's relationship to the ten Boom family, he asked him if he was the man who had rescued a truck load of children during WWII. Peter acknowledged that he was the man. The surgeon said tearfully, "I am one of the Jewish children that you saved. You saved my life. And now God has allowed me the opportunity to save yours."

God has given us life and this life is in His Son. Let's regift the gift we have been given. If you have never done so, present your life to Him this Christmas and let Him use you to accomplish His purpose on the earth. You never know what God might do with the gift you bring.

Behold, Emmanuel, God with us forever. Jesus, you are Savior of the world, Holy is your name. We lift our voices in never-ending praise. You have given us life and now we offer these lives back to you that you may use us to spread your glory upon the earth until every knee shall bow and every tongue confess that Jesus Christ is Lord to the glory of God the Father.