***THE GIFTS OF THE MAGI***

Good morning and I pray all are safe and doing well. As all should know, Terry and Jennie are away on a sabbatical visiting family in Arizona for three months. Terry has been preaching for some 45 years and is due a break to recharge.

In his absence Rob and I will be presenting the majority of the Sunday sermons. We both encourage other members to consider presenting a sermon if you would like. Just get ahold of Brian and I and we will work you in.

This is the Sunday before Christmas and we have grown used to hearing a lesson on the birth of our Lord. I have chosen this morning to look at this from the perspective of the wisemen that came and visited the newborn King.

These men have been referred to as, Three kings and as Maji or wisemen. First off we are not given a number as to how many they were. The common understanding of 3 is based on the number of gifts they presented. However, we can’t be sure since the bible doesn’t say how many were in this party.

Which is ok because how many Maji made the trip is not all that relevant to the story. What is relevant is that they made the trip and what was given to the Lord and what those gifts represent. Their trip wasn’t an easy one but they felt the importance of what was then transpiring and their need to come and visit and acknowledge this great event!

What is the meaning of those 3 gifts?

The Maji presented to the young Jesus three types of gifts. Gold, frankincense, and myrrh. These were not random gifts that they had handy, they were each significant at the time, and they have important meanings for us today!

All scripture is given for our understanding and learning.

What can we learn from this revelation of scripture?

In our consumeristic culture, it is very easy to see a church service as just another place to “get something.”

And if we think about it, this mindset is not too surprising because church facilities and sometimes even worship services are places and events where we are given refreshments, free childcare, positive messages, and all done in a setting with climate controlled, safe, and well lit facilities with comfortable seating. Some even look at church services as being similar to going to the movies.

While there is nothing wrong with good coffee, kids ministries, and all the rest, if we are not careful we will end up thinking as consumers in our spiritual life instead of coming to God with our offering of worship and “sacrifice of praise,” (Hebrews 13:15)

So, during this Christmas season, the story of the Maji bringing their gifts to the Christ Child can be a helpful reminder of the kinds of gifts that God wants from us as well.

At some point after the birth of Jesus in Bethlehem, several Magi traveled to see Him by following a unique star or light in the sky. These Maji also known as wisemen, were a special class within the Persian empire. This special class was around for quite some time.

 In the book of Daniel around chapter 5 we find that they were religious professors, philosophers, and scholars who were highly educated in many fields, including religion, astronomy, and even astrology. (which is probably why they paid attention to the bright star)

It is possible that Daniel while overseeing the Maji, taught them from the prophecies about the coming Messiah. Such as (Numbers 24:17) and (Micah 5:2)

Quite possibly like the Jewish people the Maji were waiting for the Messiah for quite some time. And after seeing the great star, surmised that this was the sign that marked the arrival of the Messiah.

These men were no doubt well respected for their knowledge and learning by the ruling class. However, these men did not risk their lives to make this journey ( especially considering their interaction with the evil king Herod) in order to make a political move, teach a seminar, or advise a king. They were traveling from the far east to worship, “He who has been born King of the Jews.” (Matthew 2:2).

When the Magi finally found the house where the Christ Child was staying, we are told they “rejoiced exceedingly with great joy.” Fell down on their faces before Jesus and worshiped Him. They know they were in the presence of the King of Kings!

Then they opened their gifts or treasures and presented them to the very young Jesus and His parents. Three types of gifts: Gold, Frankincense, and Myrrh. I often wondered what Mary and Joseph were thinking as these gifts were being presented. They were not of means and lived a very simple life. And yet these respected men came and bowed before their baby and gave such lavish gifts. Probably more gold than they had ever seen and along with expensive and rare offerings must have been overwhelming to them.

**These were not random gifts that they had laying around. They were each significant at the time, and had and have important meanings for us today as well!**

What was and is the significance of each of the Maji’s gifts?

1. Gold is precious metal that has been used for jewelry, ornaments, and currency throughout history.
2. Frankincense is an expensive fragrance or perfume made from trees in India and Arabia.
3. Myrrh is a kind of costly perfume made from rare thorn bushes in Arabia and Ethiopia that is used as an antiseptic oil and embalming fluid.

While these gifts would have been rare and very expensive for the Maji to give to Jesus and His family, they spared no expense for they recognized the world altering event that was now being set in place right before their eyes! The fulfilment of God’s promise to the world was now beginning to take place. They were seeing it revealed with their own eyes!

However, while gold and perfume might make a nice gift, myrrh seems to be an odd gift for a newborn. One person put it this way, “Embalming liquid never appears to top the list as a gift at a baby shower.”

A quote from John Piper fits what we are driving towards this morning. He puts the giving of gifts to the Lord this way:

 “When you give a gift to Christ like these three Maji have, it’s a way of saying, the joy I pursue is not the hope of getting rich with things from You. I have not come to You for Your things, but for Yourself. And this desire I now intensify and demonstrate by giving up things, in the hope of enjoying You more, not things. By giving to You what You do not need, and what I might enjoy, I am saying more earnestly and more authentically, You are my treasure, not these things!”

Almost ironically, though, God is clear through His word that He does not need anything that we have to offer, as relayed to us in the book of (Acts 17:24-28)

With all that said, what is the deeper spiritual meaning behind the gifts of the Maji?

Could it be that these three gifts speak to the identity of Christ Jesus?

The gold points to Jesus’ royalty. The King of kings!

The frankincense to His Divinity! The priests of old would burn frankincense as a sweet aroma to God the Most High.

The myrrh speaks to His humanity. Myrrh was used to cover the dead. Signifying Jesus’ death on the cross in place of and for all who would accept Him as Lord and receive the forgiveness that only He can provide.

The three gifts were actually a sermon on God Himself coming as Jesus the Son to earth from heaven as our King to fulfill His will as High priest and eventually die for our sins! Our King and our Savior.

Remember: Gold = King,

Frankincense = the temple and high priest, His divinity.

Myrrh = death on the cross. And since the gift of Myrrh was the oddest gift it especially points forward to the day that Jesus would die for the sins of the world.

Did the Maji know this when they presented these gifts? They knew enough to make the difficult and dangerous trip. And to make a statement of profound significance through what those gifts represents.

Myrrh was given to Jesus at His birth and at the near end to His earthly ministry as He hung from the cross. (Mark 15:23) and again just after He was taken down from the cross. (John 19:39)

Thankfully for all of us, that savagely agonizing death was only temporary. Three days later He rose from the tomb and because He did, we can have salvation!

Today as we read about the birth of Jesus we can learn two important facts.

First and vitally important is that Jesus the Christ came to earth to die to offer salvation for all sinners! {(Phil, 2:5-8) read from bible} Isn’t it amazing that Jesus not only came in human form, but that of an infant!

Secondly; Just as the Maji responded to the heavenly star by going and worshiping Jesus, we are called through this story to respond to Jesus in one way or another.

This truth is not only clear in the story of the Magi, but we also see it in the stories of the angels, the shepherds, the older saints in the temple, and even Herod (who responded to the news by trying to kill Jesus)

The good news of the Gospel requires us to make a decision to either accept and worship the King Jesus or as Herod, turn from Him.

For Christians, this story from the Gospel that we hear at the Christmas season should call us to worship. To rekindle our hearts and minds to put Jesus above all else.

In closing; More of the good news of the gospel;

 Jesus is King, Lord and Savior and he will never turn from hearts that are open to Him.

Those who seek Him will find Him!

The Maji brought gifts to signify who this child was and is, what can we bring?

What can we give to God?

 What do you give to God who has everything?

What does God want from us?

**He wants our lives.** The greatest gift you can give God this year is yourself! It has been put this way from others.

The greatest gift you can give to God is to say,

 “Lord, I give You my life.

 I give You my talents,

 I give You my abilities.

 I give You my dreams and hopes.

I give You my future.

 I give You my weaknesses.

 I offer to You myself. Here is my gift to You!

Wherever we are we need to bow before the King of Kings and truly offer ourselves to Him. Grasping the truth that Jesus is Lord. Recognize what the Magi were saying with their gifts of gold, frankincense and myrrh. That Jesus is King, Lord and Sacrificial Lamb.

What will you give? Only you can answer that.

If this lesson has touched your heart and you would like to learn more of this Jesus, feel free to contact us and we will discover together what God freely offers you.