

**Matthew 2:1-12** After Jesus was born in Bethlehem of Judea, when Herod was king, Wise Men from the east came to Jerusalem. They asked, <sup>2</sup>“Where is he who has been born King of the Jews? We saw his star when it rose and have come to worship him.” <sup>3</sup>When King Herod heard this, he was alarmed, and all Jerusalem with him. <sup>4</sup>He gathered together all the people’s chief priests and experts in the law. He asked them where the Christ was to be born. <sup>5</sup>They said to him, “In Bethlehem of Judea, because this was written through the prophet:

**“You, Bethlehem, in the land of Judah, are certainly not least among the rulers of Judah: because out of you will come a ruler, who will shepherd my people, Israel.”**

<sup>7</sup>Then Herod secretly summoned the Wise Men and found out from them exactly when the star had appeared. <sup>8</sup>He sent them to Bethlehem and said, “Go and search carefully for the child. When you find him, report to me, so that I may also go and worship him.”

<sup>9</sup>After listening to the king, they went on their way. Then the star they had seen when it rose went ahead of them, until it stood still over the place where the child was. <sup>10</sup>When they saw the star, they rejoiced with overwhelming joy. <sup>11</sup>After they went into the house and saw the child with Mary, his mother, they bowed down and worshipped him. Then they opened their treasures and offered him gifts: gold, frankincense, and myrrh. <sup>12</sup>Since they had been warned in a dream not to return to Herod, they went back to their own country by another route.

Grace to you and peace from God our Father, and from our Lord and Savior, Jesus, dear brothers and sisters in Christ. It is amazing how fast news travels in our world today. Almost as soon as a major event takes place, there is a special report on the air telling all about it. It used to be you had to wait for the news paper, then the radio. Eventually the 24 hour news cycle took over and its piped into our homes 24/7. Then smart phones took it a step further. Information, beamed into our pockets, everything that is going on in the world literally at our fingertips, and if it’s important enough, if it’s urgent enough, we’re notified of it seconds after it happens. Earthquake in Chile: Magnitude 5.1 Hurricane making landfall in South Carolina in the next hour. Washington Nationals win World Series...

It wasn’t always this way though. Before the modern age of internet and cellphones, before computers and telephones, before electricity, news only traveled as fast as the messenger’s feet carrying it.

Today in our text, God used a unique sort of messenger. He used a star in the heavens to guide the wise men to the place where the child was, revealing to them the Son of God, their Savior.

It’s a major event in the history of the delivery of the Gospel message because as the Christ was revealed to these foreigners, these Gentiles, so they would reveal it to their people, and to the world.

And so Epiphany is really the celebration of the Jesus, the light of the world, being revealed to all people as the Savior for all people, the Savior of *us*. As recipients of this wonderful news, we too must worship him; we too must give him our best.

The wisemen had come from far away lands. We don’t know a whole lot about them — or even how many there were — just that they were foreigners from the east. They had made a long journey following a star, that somehow announced to them the birth of the Savior. So they came to an unfamiliar country hoping to find the place where the Christ was to be born.

When they finally arrived at the place, they bowed down and worshiped Jesus. They laid face down on the ground before him, presenting themselves powerless before this little child. They humbled themselves before him and with reverence, respect, honor, and awe, they worshiped the child, who not long ago was still considered a baby.

Why? Why did they come so far, why did they put everything else in their lives on hold to make this long journey, to see a baby? Why did these men fall face to the ground and worship this little child?

They were wise in the truest sense of the word. They knew and understood who this child was, and what power this child possessed. They knew that this child was the Son of God in human flesh. That’s why they dropped everything to make their journey, that’s why nothing else mattered to them. That’s why they rejoiced with overwhelming joy. That’s why they worshiped this baby as the King of kings.

How does our worship compare to the worship of the wise men? Are you here in the service, always rejoicing with overwhelming joy? What distances do we travel to get to church? Physical distance? The pillow to the shower? The house to the car? The car to church? Perhaps it’s struggling to get Sunday mornings off for church. Or maybe it’s a trying, emotional journey — getting everyone ready to come. Or trying to get everyone to sit quietly. There are many different obstacles we all face that the devil would use to keep us from being here Sunday mornings.

And then when we do get here, he uses anything to get us to lose our focus and to wonder “why these readings? Why these hymns?” With our sinful nature always in tow, it’s never easy. It’s a struggle, within these walls, and out there in the world.

But it’s a worthwhile struggle. Keep struggling. Keep kicking your sinful nature into gear when it doesn’t want to go to church, when it makes the next excuse – and it will. Keep nudging your sinful nature when it wants you to lose your focus during the service, when it sighs about the last sermon or the next hymn.... For that’s it’s way of trying to nudge you, inch by inch away from strengthening your faith God’s promises, inch by inch away from God to hell.

Keep struggling, because this worship service that we are in right now, we are worshiping the same child, the same Savior, the same King as those wise men were worshiping. The same child who was born on Christmas day, who lived and died for you and me, is right here, right now, listening to your prayers, listening to your praises. Through his Word, through me, his called servant, *he* has announced to you the forgiveness of all our sins, even for the times when our desire to worship him was overrun by some fleeting worldly desire or challenge. He has announced to you that you are his own dear child and promised you strength to live according to his will. Already he has poured out his grace on to you so richly and so generously, and there’s more! We’ll gather before his altar as he gives us the very price he paid to save us from our sins, this sinful world, and open the gates of heaven — his Son’s body and blood, given and poured out for you, in, with, and under the bread and wine in the Lord’s Supper. Here with enthuse walls it’s easy to think we come to him. But he comes to us. This is where he meets us where we are in our lives, in our joy, in our sorrow, in our struggles. This is where he meets us and meets all our needs, again, so richly and generously, week in and week out. So worship him. Be overwhelmed by this good news of great joy and worship him with all your hearts.

**Then they opened their treasures and offered him gifts: gold, frankincense, and myrrh.** After worshiping their Savior they presented him with treasures, expensive gifts. Gold, incense, myrrh, expensive anointing oils, gifts fit for a king. Why? What could a little baby do with such gifts? What good would they do? What purpose would they serve? The baby Jesus had no use for gold, incense, or myrrh. They had no bearing on the work Jesus came to do. But to the wise men, Jesus deserved them just the same. The wise men knew what Jesus had come to

do. He had come to give himself completely for all people. They knew he deserved their very best. And that’s what they gave him.

Whether the wisemen knew it or not, their gifts were matched perfectly for Jesus’ work: What’s more kingly than gold? And the incense, it foreshadowed his priestly work as our substitute whose perfect life was lived for us. His entire life as our substitute stands as one grand intercession spoken to God on behalf of all who put their faith in him — “These sins, too, Father, I have covered.” And myrrh, a spice often used in burials, foreshadowed his own death and burial. Treasures indeed!

Think about the gifts we present to God each week. That’s what we would have them be. Our treasures, our very best to God. Why do we bring them? What does God need our money for? He doesn’t. Just as Jesus didn’t need the gold, incense, and myrrh, God doesn’t need our money. We don’t bring offerings with the mindset that God’s kingdom will fail if we don’t give — and we try so hard *not* to motivate out of fear of future bills or needs of the budget. “I have to give this much per week to fulfill this part or that part of the budget.” Those aren’t the reasons we bring our gifts. We bring them simply to present God our very best. The best fruits of our labor, the best fruits of the faith growing in our hearts, which is really the best from all that God has blessed us with — he’s the source of all our wealth — worldly wealth and spiritual. So we don’t gauge what or how much we give by what the church needs, or on how big the budget is. We gauge it by what God deserves —

Jesus gave up paradise to live with us.

Jesus gave up perfection to live in an imperfect world.

Jesus gave up freedom to be put under the law.

Jesus gave up holiness to be covered with our sin.

Jesus gave up his life, so that we will all live.

When we realize that that is who we are gathered here to worship today and every Sunday, that’s where we find our motivation to give *our best* to God, only, always, out of thankfulness. And when the reason behind our giving is thankfulness for all Jesus has done for us, then we won’t only be giving out of our bank accounts, but out of our hearts. That’s the giving that shows our thankfulness and gratitude to God. That’s giving God our very best. That’s giving God our treasures, as the wise men once did.

2000 years later, this Epiphany, as we celebrate the message of Jesus’ birth *revealed to us*, let us join our hearts in worshiping our God with the joy

and excitement that comes only through the knowledge that we have a God who meets us and serves us where we are, by sending us his Son to save us from sin, death, hell, the devil. And may the power of this Gospel message move us to give to God, from our hearts, our best and richest treasures, today, and always. In Jesus' name, Amen.