

Gifts for Jesus

Sunday, January 9, 2022 at The First Congregational Church of Marshalltown, Iowa
Matthew 2:1-12; Ephesians 3:1-7

Matthew 2:11 And when they had come into the house, they saw the young Child with Mary His mother, and fell down and worshiped Him. And when they had opened their treasures, they presented gifts to Him, gold, frankincense, and myrrh.

- Introduction: I am a bad gift giver.

Every year the Christmas season reminds me that some people are good gift-givers. They observe people and note their preferences and likes and give careful thought to the gifts they give at Christmas. Usually, the gift is received with delight. Then there's me. I'm terrible at giving gifts. I gave Jeanne a new crock pot for Christmas, at least that is what she told me when she bought it. Every year I call our daughter Nicole and ask her for help with gifts because I have no clue. When I was much younger, my parents gave me the great privilege of an international trip, mostly spent in Russia, then the USSR. During the trip I was inspired to buy my dad a bust of Lenin as a gift. I thought it would be a good conversation piece. Dad had it in a corner of his home office, and years later I learned that it moved to the basement as soon as I left home for college. I was never good at giving gifts.

- Set the stage

Some time after His birth, Jesus, Mary and Joseph are still in Bethlehem but no longer in a stable. Apparently they were able to buy or rent a house. Wise men from the East came to Jerusalem and created quite a stir with their desire to meet with the newborn King. They desired to visit and present gifts of gold, frankincense and myrrh to Jesus. The current king, Herod, as ruthless as any man ever, feigned interested and asked that they return once they finish their visit and brief him on the significance of this event. After their visit, the wise men are warned in a dream not to cooperate with King Herod and so they leave using a different route home, and with that they fade into the mists of history. We're not really sure from whence they came and we never read of them again, but their visit was notable.

- They came because people of all nations will worship Jesus.

The Magi came bearing gifts.

We really don't know from whence the wise men came though they brought products that were produced in Arabia, and some scholars think that they may have descended from a tradition of wise men that included Daniel, from the Old Testament. They came bearing gifts, and the choice of words is significant. The word, in the Old Testament, as well as its equivalent in the New, was used to describe offerings to God, not just the giving of a gift as we understand it. It was an act of worship.

They represent the worship of people from all over the world.

The first worshippers of Jesus were Jewish shepherds, who, despite the Biblical symbolism of their profession, were not people of significant social status who often missed the high holy days at the Temple because they had to tend their flocks. The second group of worshippers in the Gospels are these wise men, who were not Jewish at all. They stand in token of the prophecies in Psalm (72:10-11) and in Isaiah (60:6) as well as in Ephesians, that non-Jewish peoples, Gentiles, would

join in following the Messiah, for His was a ministry and a gift to all nations. Indeed, Revelation tells us that there will be people from every nation that call Him Lord. .

A Note about the Gifts Themselves

Over the years, many have speculated about the symbolism of the gifts given. Gold, of course, represents great value, and would have been much help to Joseph and Mary as they would soon have to flee for their lives and live as exiles and refugees in Egypt. Frankincense was fragrant when burned and used as incense during worship. As such it reminds us of the deity of Jesus. Myrrh is a bitter substance used to help prepare the dead for burial, and as such reminds us of the humanity, and of Christ's coming sacrifice for our sins. None of this is explained in Scripture, but people through the years have noted that there may be a message in the choice of gifts. After all, surely these wise men considered their offering carefully.

- **Application:** Note the divinity and humanity of Jesus. the wise men worshipped a little baby as God. He does not do things the way we would anticipate, and His plans involve the whole world. He does not begrudge humble endeavors, and this event underscores the importance of missions in the plan of God.

- **Conclusion**

As mentioned before, I am bad at giving gifts, but the wise men from the East, whoever they were, were very thoughtful in the gifts that they gave. This episode of the early life of Jesus gives us much to consider in the meaning of the gifts, the great gift that is Christ Himself, a gift that is for all people including those that were once far from God. Finally, we have the example that our Savior is not above humble endeavors, so neither are we. Such are some of the lessons we learn from this episode of the wise men bringing their gifts for Christ.