

ESF, Lord's day service message
12/23/2018

Worship the King
Matthew 2:1-12

After Jesus was born in Bethlehem in Judea, during the time of King Herod, Magi from the east came to Jerusalem² and asked, "Where is the one who has been born king of the Jews? We saw his star in the east and have come to worship him."

³ When King Herod heard this he was disturbed, and all Jerusalem with him. ⁴ When he had called together all the people's chief priests and teachers of the law, he asked them where the Christ was to be born. ⁵ "In Bethlehem in Judea," they replied, "for this is what the prophet has written:

*⁶ "But you, Bethlehem, in the land of Judah,
are by no means least among the rulers of Judah;
for out of you will come a ruler
who will be the shepherd of my people Israel.' "*

⁷ Then Herod called the Magi secretly and found out from them the exact time the star had appeared. ⁸ He sent them to Bethlehem and said, "Go and make a careful search for the child. As soon as you find him, report to me, so that I too may go and worship him."

⁹ After they had heard the king, they went on their way, and the star they had seen in the east went ahead of them until it stopped over the place where the child was. ¹⁰ When they saw the star, they were overjoyed. ¹¹ 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 and of incense and of myrrh. ¹² And having been warned in a dream not to go back to Herod, they returned to their country by another route.

What is the real meaning of Christmas? In today's word the real meaning of Christmas is found in worship. Through the story of the

Magi, today's word teaches us what true worship is and how we can worship the Lord and always live with the joy of Christmas.

Offer your life as a living sacrifice

When Jesus was born in Bethlehem in Judea to become the Savior of the world, Magi came to Judea to find Him and worship Him. They were Gentiles. They came from a foreign land. At that time, even the Jews in Judea, for the most part did not know that the Savior had been born. Then, how did these foreigners know that the Savior had been born in Judea? They said that they saw a star which indicated that the Savior was born and the star led them to Judea.

How did they know the star was related to the Savior? In the Old Testament, there was a prophecy that related the Savior to a star: "*A star will come out of Jacob; a scepter will rise out of Israel*" (Numbers 24:17). In ancient times, there were many Jews who were living in foreign lands outside of Judea. They built Jewish communities and their own worship places which were called synagogues. Sometimes they allowed Gentiles to come to the synagogue and hear their Scriptures. The Magi might have heard about the Savior and the star of Jacob in the synagogues. Of course "a star of Jacob" was used in the Old Testament not literally but figuratively to indicate the Savior. However, the Magi were able to connect that prophecy to "a star" in the sky that appeared at the time of the Savior's birth.

It was not their wisdom that enabled them to connect the star to the Savior's birth. It was God's mysterious help that allowed them to do so. God touched their hearts to connect the Savior's birth to the star. If you have found Jesus as your Savior and the Savior of the world, it is not through your own knowledge, wisdom or effort, but it is God's word and God's grace given to you. If you want to witness of the Savior to any unbeliever, you need both the word and God's grace for that person. You must prepare with the word of the Savior and you must pray to seek God's grace for that person.

When the Magi found out that the Savior was born just as the Scripture prophesied and God confirmed the Savior's birth with a star, they wanted to follow the star to seek the Savior. They want to go to the land where the Savior was born.

We do not know specifically which region or country of "the east" they came from. But it surely means that they came from afar. Such a journey in those days involved weeks or even months of incredible dangers and difficulties. There were areas that were almost uncharted, where bands of robbers ambushed travelers. The journey was a very dangerous, costly and risky journey. They risked their own lives to take the journey. But they were willing to take the journey. Why?

Why did they take such a dangerous and perilous journey? In verse 2, we can find out the reason of their journey: "*Where is the one who has been born king of the Jews? We saw his star in the east and have come to worship him.*" God gave them the heart of worship. When they had the heart of worship, they were willing to take the journey.

They took the journey not to seek their own personal gain, such as enriching their lives by traveling to a foreign country, or by researching for an unusual star, or by finding a business opportunity. The sole purpose of their journey was to worship the king, who was born to be the savior of the world. To worship the king, they took such a dangerous, perilous, and risky journey.

Nobody forced them to do so. They were willing to do so. They offered themselves as living sacrifices to worship the Savior as Paul says in Romans 12:1- *offer your bodies as living sacrifices, holy and pleasing to God-this is your spiritual act of worship.*

While they offered themselves as living sacrifices in worshiping God, their hearts were filled with joy. God protected them from all dangers on the journey to find the Savior. God used the cruel king Herod to help

them. God used even the resources and power of a foreign government to help them. The Lord filled their hearts with joy along the journey.

We have some people who come to every Sunday worship service from afar- Arlington Heights, Lake Forest, Waukegan, Elgin, Rockford, etc. They live 10, 20, 30, even 80 miles away from the church. To come to church, they must spend lots of money on gas and sacrifice lots of time. A brother comes to our church from the south side of Chicago. He has to take two buses and a train. Why do they sacrifice? Does anybody force them to do so? No. God has given them the joy of worship that the world cannot give. They have a passionate and joyful desire to come and worship the Lord. Every week, when we worship the Lord with them, God fills all our hearts with joy too. The joy in their hearts touches our hearts.

Do you want to live by God's blessed guidance? Do you want to live by God's supernatural protection? Do you want to live with a joyful spirit?

Then follow God's desire of worship. If you pursue God's desire of worship, you can willingly and joyfully offer yourself to God as a living sacrifice. Come out of your comfort zone and take action to serve the Lord and serve the people as the Lord wants you to do. Some of you may work six days a week, from Monday through Saturday, with lots of physical or mental stresses. Sunday is the only day you can take care of your personal needs –catching up on sleep, finishing laundry, resting etc. So coming to church every Sunday may be a sacrifice. If you also have to spend time coming to prayer meetings, Bible studies, evangelism, or taking care of people, you sacrifice far more.

But those actions are living sacrifices that please God. God accepts such living sacrifices and blesses you as he blessed the Magi –showing spiritual secrets, guidance, protection, and joy. Be willing to sacrifice yourself to worship the Lord.

Worship only Christ together with other believers

The Magi's object of worship was Christ. They came from afar not to worship Mary, Joseph, or any honorable person in the land of Judea, but Christ. Christ was the only one who they wanted to worship. And they pleased God and God filled their hearts with joy. God satisfied the desire of their souls.

There's a song that was recently written by a young man who leads the worship at a church. He was an extremely talented singer. But the pastor noticed that he was more interested in the attention he received than in worshipping the Lord. One day the pastor took him aside and told him that he could not lead the singing at church until his songs could bring people's attention to the Lord. This young man was angry at first and yet the words of the pastor were true, and he knew it. Six months later he wrote a song and taught it to the church there. The words are these:

I'm coming back to the heart of worship and it's all about you, it's all about you Jesus. I'm sorry Lord for the thing I've made it! It's all about you, it's all about you Jesus!

What or who is at the heart of your worship? Is it yourself? Is it your pastor? Is it your praise? Is it showing off your talent? Whatever it is, if it is not Jesus turn your heart to him only. And your heart will be filled with joy and satisfaction.

Also, the Magi worshipped Christ *together*. The Bible does not tell how many Magi came to worship the King. But the word "Magi" is the plural form of "Magus." So, they were at least two or three or maybe more in number. It means that they took the dangerous and costly journey together. They prepared to worship the King together and came to worship Him together.

If each of them had tried to find the Savior individually, they would have been very lonely on the journey. Each of them would have been an

easy target for robbers. But by taking the journey together to worship the Lord, they could encourage each other. When somebody got tired and felt like quitting the journey others could encourage him to continue. Also, by praying together and sharing their faith together, they could avoid serious mistakes on the journey.

Everybody can worship the Lord alone. But worship also should be done together among believers, because God wants to receive collective worship from His people. When God delivered “*his people*” from slavery in Egypt, God said that they would worship him *together* after the deliverance (Ex. 7:16; 8:1, 20; 9:1, 13). In heaven *people from all nations* will worship the Lord *together* (Revelation 7:9-17).

The Magi may not have agreed on all issues they faced while they were seeking, traveling, and worshipping the Lord. But they constantly focused on one goal - seeking and worshipping the Lord. As a result they would be able to overcome differences among themselves, forgive each other and take the difficult journey together in unity.

While we serve the Lord together there are certainly times of disagreement or conflict. But when we focus on seeking and worshipping the Lord, we can be one even if we are different in many aspects because God gives us the spirit of forgiveness and the spirit of unity.

Are you living in conflict with people around you? Try to focus on worshipping the Lord together with them. Then God will give you the gift to overcome conflicts. God will give you the power of forgiveness. God will always give peace to you and to others around you.

Give the best of you to the Lord

When we seek the Lord, we often expect to receive something from the Lord rather than giving Him something. But the key to worship is not receiving but giving. That is what is in the worship of the Magi. They came to the newborn King not to receive anything from Him but to give

their precious gifts to the King. They didn't come with cheap stuff or leftovers but with gifts that were very costly-gold, incense, and myrrh. Also, their gifts were very meaningful in expressing their faith in Christ.

The gift of gold

Gold has always been one of the most valuable commodities on earth. In ancient times, gold indicated kingship. Kings received gold as tribute. Through the gift of gold, they honored the newborn Christ as the King of all kings (Dan. 10:17; Rev. 1:5; 17:14).

If you honor the Lord as the King of all kings, you will give Him your gold. Your gold may be the best portion of your day, the best talent among all of your talents. Your gold may be the center of your heart.

The gift of incense

Incense was used by the priests in worship. Through the gift of incense, they honored Jesus as the Priest (Heb. 4:14). It was also a symbol of prayer. The Lord had commanded them to use it and burn it in their acts of worship. Revelation 5:8 speaks of incense as prayers, *"....Each one had a harp and they were holding golden bowls full of incense, which are the prayers of the saints."*

God is really pleased with our sincere prayers in worship. When you pray you are not only asking something from the Lord but also giving the best portion of your spirit to the Lord.

The gift of myrrh

In Jesus' time, people used myrrh to embalm their dead. Through the gift of myrrh, the Magi honored Jesus as the sacrificial Lamb of God who would sacrifice His life to bring forgiveness of men's sins (John 1:29; Hebrews 10:10; Revelation 13:8). Whenever we come to worship the Lord, we have to confess our faith by acknowledging that He is the Lamb of God who died for the forgiveness of our sins.

If they had come to receive something from the newborn King they would have been very discouraged. There was nothing they could get from the newborn baby. The baby had nothing to give them. The baby's

parents were so poor that they could not even afford any of their travel expenses. But because they came to give, they did not get discouraged when the baby did not give anything to them. Instead, they rejoiced in their giving. While they were giving the gifts to the Lord, He gave them great joy.

To the giving heart, God brings joy.

Chad was a young, shy outcast. At the end of the school day when other children would walk home together, Chad was left to himself. For this reason his mother was deeply concerned when Chad told her he wanted to make a Christmas present for every child in his class. Nevertheless, she purchased all of the supplies for him to fulfill his desire. With paper, glue, and crayons, Chad spent three weeks making thirty-five Christmas Cards. On the morning of the class party, Chad was overflowing with excitement. He carefully collected all of his Christmas Cards and headed out for school, but his mother was not so enthusiastic. She knew her son might not receive a single Christmas Card and wondered if he could handle that level of hurt. To compensate for the pain, she baked his favorite cookies and had them ready when he walked through the door. The afternoon silence was broken by the sound of children walking down the street. As usual, the other kids were laughing as they walked together and Chad was all by himself. She noticed his hands were empty and tears started to fill her eyes. When the door opened, she choked back the emotions and said, "Mommy has some warm cookies and milk for you." He barely heard a word. His face was glowing and his chest was about to burst with pride as he said, "Not a one . . . not a one. I didn't forget a one, not a single one! (I gave Christmas gift to every one)"

The greatest joy in life is reserved for those who are more interested in giving than receiving.

If you want to live a joyful life always, try what the Magi did- be a giving person, try to give generously to the Lord first and then to others.