

Giving to The Gift

Series: *The Mystery of the Incarnation*

Mat 2:1-12

To The Village Church, 12/16/2007

Main Idea: God will use our gifts in the bringing about His Kingdom, if we worship the greatest gift, the Gift of Himself.

Meditation:

Stop Shopping. Start Giving.

--Reverend Billy of the Church of Stop Shopping, *What Would Jesus Buy?*

Post-Sermon Song Theme: The gift of the Incarnation

Benediction:

May the joy of the Magi be yours, as you see the greatest gift of God in Jesus Christ.

Charge:

Go forth, seeing His value and entering His drama.

Giving to The Gift

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I. Is Christmas About the Giving of Gifts?

A. Gift-giving: An annoyance

1. It is my privilege to be the pastor here. My name is Sam Andreades. Welcome to the Village Church. You might have noticed a beautiful sanctuary upstairs. And yet we are meeting down here in the basement. In honor of the Incarnation, in which God humbled Himself to become a man, came downstairs, if you will, we have decided to celebrate Christmas down here in the basement. It is TVC's way of saying, "this is the meaning of Christmas." So snuggle up, and let's look at a beloved story of Christmas.
2. The story of the Magi—pagan astrologers, who come from who knows where, showing up to acknowledge the Christ child.
 - I heard a Magi joke, where the other two say, "Gold!? I thought we agreed on a price limit!"
 - I think this joke funny because it turns on the matter of what Christmas gift-giving is about. What are we supposed to be concentrating on? And what do our gifts mean? Is it about obeying a price limit, or getting the right gift?
3. Gift-giving can be a real distraction.
 - *What Would Jesus Buy?* Funny movie. Gets at this struggle with shopping for Christmas.
 - The American market for religious products is expected to top **\$8.6 billion** in annual sales by **2008**.¹
 - We had a holiday party at our house. I told my guests, of different faiths and no faiths, "We have to sing carols. Lest we be crushed by the materialism of this holiday." Even atheists were happy to join in singing these overt Christmas carols because they felt the same thing.

B. What can be given to the Gift?

1. That question, what is the meaning of our gift-giving, can come with us into this passage. Because this passage is about the giving of gifts. **V11**—What do these gifts to Jesus Christ mean?
2. Let me ask it this way: What gift could the Magi really give to the Christ?
 - Christ is the real gift. As a Christian, we look at this holiday and, to us, it is about God giving *us* a gift, the gift of Himself as a Man. To be born among us.
 - So, to keep Christmas well this year, we have to ask, What can the magi really give to the Christ?
 - And what can we really give to the Gift Himself? Is there anything?
3. Many Christmas traditions don't reflect the meaning of the holiday too well.
 - Many are lifted from pagan practices...But this one, even if it is annoying, I like.
 - The reason I like it is because I think that we can give gifts to the Christ. Two gifts. And they are the two things that the Magi gave to Jesus at the beginning. And, the more I think about it, the more I think that this is the only appropriate and Christian way to celebrate Christmas—by giving the same two gifts the Magi gave:

¹ Michael Lindsay, *Faith in the Halls of Power*, 122.

4. Two gifts:
 - a. Seeing His Value (worship)
 - b. Entering His Drama (your life)

C. Magi did not get there night of

1. One thing to get straight about the magi, before we talk about their gift-giving: They didn't get there night of. Liked the *Nativity Story*—except for one thing.
2. Magi didn't get there the night of.
 - v11-entered the house.
 - V7—Notice Herod determines the exact time when the star appears. So, even though Herod never learns the location of Jesus Christ, he knows his age. Later in chapter (v16), realized he'd been tricked, slaughters all the babies 2 years old and under. Note how, v7, Herod determines the exact time the star appeared. Bethlehem is right next door to Jerusalem (hard to tell now), 6 mile walk south from Jerusalem. And it was a small town. Wouldn't take long for Herod to know that the magi weren't coming back.
 - V7, v3-Also explains why Herod had to talk to the Magi secretly and why the whole city of Jerusalem was disturbed by their visit. This would make sense if there was a Messianic expectation aroused by rumors of events of Simeon and Anna, fixtures of the Jerusalem temple, who had prophesied over a small baby that had come through some months before.
3. Why wreck the tradition? Why matter? Accurate Bible knowledge turns out to be pretty important.
 - Christopher Hitchens makes an issue of this in his book, *God is Not Great* (p111) to try to show the NT writers, Matthew and Luke, contradict each other. Only a contradiction if you believe that the magi got there night of.²
 - Otherwise the accounts compliment, not contradict. Matthew does not tell how J&M got to Bethlehem. Luke does not tell how they left and ended up back in Nazareth.
4. Besides, how would you like to entertain guests the night you've given birth? How do you think Mary would have felt? Mary, guess who's here? It's these three magi from the East.

What I did when relatives wanted to come right away: said "no."

So don't be annoyed with me.

² The relevant verse, Luk 2:39, uses *w`j* as a temporal conjunction with the aorist, meaning "Joseph and Mary returned to Galilee...after they had done everything according to the Law of the Lord." But this phrasing does not preclude other events happening in between to bring them to Galilee.

II. The Gift of Seeing His Value

So, the Magi arrive in Bethlehem, via Jerusalem, and give their gifts.

A. Their worship: Valuing the seeming valueless

1. What do these gifts mean? Important to note what they are doing as they give.
 - **V2**—The Magi tell us why they came—to worship.
 - **v11** tells us what they did when they came.. It was worship. They gave their gifts in worship. Gold, frankincense and myrrh³ were usual gifts of subject nations.⁴ They were expressing subjection, with these gifts, to the infant Jesus Christ.
2. To worship is to value highly. How utterly valueless the scene that met them must have seemed to the Magi.
 - They had just left Israel's golden city--see the movie, *Nativity Story* for a glimpse of just how dazzling the newly built Jerusalem temple looked that year, from miles away.
 - Failing to find the new-born king there, they find him alone in a poor rented house, in a dusty town, his mother as his only attendant.
 - Not in Manhattan, but in Jersey City.
3. And yet
 - they didn't shake their heads and feel gipped.
 - They didn't turn away in disappointment.
 - They didn't sigh and say, "All this way, for this?"
 - It must have looked quite strange—giving gold to a baby. Could only mean something if they saw beyond the current circumstances, if they saw that the baby was worth more than gold.
 - No price limit to the value of that little Jewish infant in the rented accommodations.
4. Valuing the seeming valueless, what all the best Christmas stories are about.
5. To give the proper gift of worship, you need to realize the value in a gift that doesn't shout out its value. It wasn't given in the great golden city—instead it was given in the tiny town six miles south.

³ They gave wonderful scents (Sol 3:6, Sol 4:14).

⁴ So interprets Calvin and Faussett, of these gifts, as per Psa 72:15, 1Ki 10:2, 10, 2Ch 9:24.
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B. For A Ruler Who is a Shepherd

1. **V6**-tells us the value: a Ruler who was a Shepherd. A “ruler who will shepherd” was exactly what Herod was not. And exactly what Jesus is.
 - A shepherd can be quite hard with his sheep, but he protects them, feeds them, heals them, makes them grow. He cares for each one.
 - The continuous well-being of his sheep is his constant preoccupation. All of his time, thought, skill, strength, and resources are directed to this end.
 - He would rule, but by losing Himself for those He was ruling.
2. God’s gift of the Christ doesn’t at first seem to be worth gold. But a Shepherd-Ruler is the very thing this tired world needs. He was the only one who could bring us relief:
 - personal relief from the great weight of our sins,
 - intellectual relief from the great confusion of our philosophies,
 - social relief from the great injustices of our collectives.
3. The prophecy they quote is from the **Micah** who, interestingly, prophesied especially in the vicinity of Jerusalem. Mic 5,
 - which follows with “...they will live securely...” (Mic 5:4)
 - “...and he will be their peace.” (Mic 5:5).
 - Christ will secure His people. He is a ruler who can be our peace.

C. Rev. Henry Venn⁵ and the most interesting thing in the world

1. There was a minister, the Rev. Henry Venn, who told his children that he would show them the most interesting sight in the world that evening.
 - Plastered him all that day w/questions, but no.
 - He led them to a miserable hovel that bespoke extreme poverty. Can anyone be happy here?
 - Told them: Inside, there was 19 year old young man, dying of a disease, with constant fever and 9 painful ulcers. Could he be happy, in disease and poverty?
 - Abraham Midwood: (w/sweet smile) Oh yes, sir. I would not change my state with that of the richest person on earth, who didn’t have what I have:
 - “There is nothing to bear while the presence of God cheers my soul.”
 - Talked about how he had Christ Who cares for him.
 - “Oh yes, I am truly happy.”
 - The reason I can tell the story this morning is because Venn’s children never forgot that evening. And grew up to tell the tale.

D. Your worship: Seeing His value

1. If you would keep Christmas well, if your gifts are to have the meaning that they should have to really celebrate this holiday, you have to first give the Magi’s gift of worship. You have to realize the value of Jesus Christ, as God’s gift to you: A Ruler Who shepherds you.

⁵ SDM, 28. Venn was an English evangelical minister of the 1700s.
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2. For some of you, Christmas may mean placing value on something heretofore you counted as insignificant. Maybe you have politely relegated God to triviality in your life.
3. For others, it may mean insisting on the value of Christ over all other things in your life.
 - He is worth more than your pursuits, your career, your relationships, your iPod. He is worth more than your home, your performances, your Christmas presents. The first gift you need to give this Christmas is your worship of Him.
 - See his value. Stop shopping. Start worshipping. Give Him your heart.

III. The Gift of Entering His Drama

The first gift we can give to the Gift Himself is to worship Him. The second gift is entering the drama of His kingdom.

A. The contest between the Magi and Herod

1. The passage sets up a contest. It is Herod Vs. The Magi and the Star. A contest over the gift of the Christ King.
 - What we know of Herod the Great from other sources is perfectly in keeping with his behavior in this passage. Throughout his reign, he systematically eliminated any potential contenders to his throne, including members of his own family. He had ten wives, held his position with manipulation, politically maneuvering and brutality.
 - At the beginning, the Magi are naïve about the current state of Israel's governance. By the end of the story, they are savvy. In part, no doubt, because of what they saw and heard in Jerusalem.
2. **V12**—tells us their second gift: they prevented the baby from being killed.
 - V12's use passive voice "were warned" focuses on the magi's role (instead of on God's role) in keeping the child from being murdered.
 - It was probably an additional expense and time-consuming to take a route that bypassed Jerusalem.
 - It was a gift, for good reason.
3. The magi prevented the death of the Christ.
 - If the baby had been murdered, there would be no shepherd ruler to lay down his life for the sheep. If He was killed before He grew up to voluntarily lay down His life, there would be no active obedience. There would be no sacrificial atonement. There would be no gift of the HS. There would be no salvation for the world.
 - These foreign Zoroastrians, or whatever they were, by recognizing the value of God's Gift, gave themselves to His preservation.
 - And it mattered.
4. What I find astounding is that God would give this most precious gift to the world and then allow it to hang by the most tenuous thread.
 - There is real drama here in this contest between Herod and the Magi.
 - Would you buy a diamond ring for your loved one and then allow it to dangle over a sewer grate?

B. God's delight in you being part of the drama

1. What does it mean? These gifts from the Magi mean God invites our participation, not only in the worship of Christ, but also in the work of Christ.
 - God delights in you being part of His drama. To take part in His gift to the world.

- Your decisions this year will matter in the building of His kingdom.
2. And such gifts as those decisions are precious to God:
 - A legend tells us how once a little boy in church had no money to place among the offerings on the altar, so he gave a rosy apple, the only gift he had to offer.
 - Presently, when the priest removed the alms from the altar, he found there an apple of pure gold.
 - I don't know if that happened, but it is how God looks at the gift of your life to His work. The simplest gift is, in the eyes of God, pure gold.
 3. As much of a player as you wish to be, by following Christ, He will use you.

C. The Gift of the Village Church

1. v1-tells us that what we might think was just a woman giving birth was much bigger than a happy story, or even than a Jewish Messiah. It is a story of cultural engagement. Through whatever means, God revealed the birth of the King to magi from afar.
2. When I wonder what is the point of the Village Church, it is to be part of the drama. We are not just a church. We are here to be part of the larger story.
 - V3—The coming of Jesus will always cause some disturbance. As Jerusalem was disturbed, we want to disturb our city.
 - David Bush: Giving himself to be an elder this year, entering the drama of the Kingdom. And what drama.
 - Illustration of TVC'er giving themselves to the bringing of the Kingdom: Gallery Curator (Sara Techia): "Mako's paintings allow skeptics like myself to do the one thing that secularists label as a sign of weakness: to hope."
3. Henry Venn's son, John, grew up and founded the **Church Mission Society**, which today supports over **700 people** working in **50 countries** to bring Christ and care to those in need.
4. God will use our gifts in the bringing about His Kingdom, if we worship the greatest gift, the Gift of Himself.