

Gifts for Jesus

Matthew 2:1-12

Online Sermon: http://www.mckeesfamily.com/?page_id=3567

What gift can one give to Jesus on His birthday? You think shopping for spouse, children, other relatives and friends of our North American, rich culture is difficult; what do you give to Jesus who is the Creator and Sustainer of all life (Colossians 1:15-16)? While He needs nothing from us (Acts 17:25), His heart's desire is that we might be born again (John 3:1-21) and worship Him as living sacrifices (Romans 12:1), full of love and unspeakable joy (1 Peter 1:8-9) that comes from an obedient heart (John 14:21). What keeps Christians from worshipping Him in both Spirit and truth (John 4:24) at Christmas is the mistaken belief that Jesus can be fooled into accepting our "dirty rags" or "masks" of accumulated knowledge and "ritual" acts of service as being acceptable gifts for Him on His birthday! This sermon is going to contrast the motives of King Herod, the priests and teachers of the law with that of the Magi and in doing so conclude that what Jesus truly wants on His birthday is the symbolic gifts of gold, frankincense and myrrh!

True Worship Means Being a Living Sacrifice



After Jesus was born in Bethlehem in Judea, during the time of King Herod, Magi from the east came to Jerusalem ² and asked, "Where is the One who has been born king of the Jews? We saw His star when it rose and have come to worship Him."

Even though millions of Christmas cards show three kings presenting gifts to Jesus whom is lying in a manger this far from the truth.¹ While the Magi could have been kings (Psalms 72:10, Isaiah 49:7),² they were most likely "wise men,"³ a priestly caste⁴ of astrologers⁵ who served in the royal courts of

¹ James Montgomery Boice, *The Gospel of Matthew* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Books, 2001), 30.

² Robert H. Mounce, *Matthew*, Understanding the Bible Commentary Series (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Books, 2011), 13.

³ Leon Morris, *The Gospel according to Matthew*, The Pillar New Testament Commentary (Grand Rapids, MI; Leicester, England: W.B. Eerdmans; Inter-Varsity Press, 1992), 35–36.

⁴ Michael J. Wilkins, *Matthew*, The NIV Application Commentary (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan Publishing House, 2004), 93.

⁵ Robert H. Mounce, *Matthew*, Understanding the Bible Commentary Series (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Books, 2011), 13.

Persia.⁶ Based on the long journey from region of Babylon⁷ to Bethlehem being about 900 miles⁸ and the fact that Herod ordered the children two years and younger to be executed, when the Magi arrived Jesus was in a house and was about two years of age.⁹ The origin of the star and the worship motives of these Magi are not known with certainty. While the star could have been a natural phenomenon such as light from Jupiter coming close to Saturn in the Sign of the Fishes¹⁰ in 7 BC¹¹ or the light from a supernova or comet,¹² the fact that the star appears, reappears, directs and stands still over Bethlehem¹³ seems to indicate the star was a miraculous appearance of an angel or some sort of Shekinah glory.¹⁴ While many commentators believe the Magi did not worship Jesus as deity,¹⁵ the fact that they came from Persia that touted to have the “king of all kings,”¹⁶ had contact with Jewish prophesy,¹⁷ travelled many miles and obeyed the angel of the Lord to go another route home; seems to point to their visit being more than just paying homage to a foreign king.¹⁸

It is not the religious elite of Jerusalem but the Magi that pay homage to Jesus.¹⁹ How ironic it is that those who professed to know and love God would barely take the time to read the prophesy while the supposed “pagan” Magi with their limited knowledge were willing travel 900



miles to bow and worship their true king! If we living sacrifices are to worship Jesus in Spirit and truth this Christmas, then we need to be ready (1 Peter 3:15) to pay homage to Jesus by serving Him whenever and whatever He commands us to do! This might mean feeding or clothing the poor, visiting someone sick or in prison, giving money to a family or charity, inviting someone into our home, mourning with someone who lost a loved one or telling someone about Jesus! Surely having been bought at a price (1 Corinthians 6:19-20) and having every breath granted to us by our

⁶ D. A. Carson, “The Gospels and Acts,” in *NIV Zondervan Study Bible: Built on the Truth of Scripture and Centered on the Gospel Message*, ed. D. A. Carson (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2015), 1928.

⁷ Barclay Moon Newman and Philip C. Stine, *A Handbook on the Gospel of Matthew*, UBS Handbook Series (New York: United Bible Societies, 1992), 33.

⁸ Michael J. Wilkins, *Matthew*, 94.

⁹ James Montgomery Boice, *The Gospel of Matthew*, 30.

¹⁰ Robert H. Mounce, *Matthew*, 13.

¹¹ Michael J. Wilkins, *Matthew*, 95.

¹² Leon Morris, *The Gospel according to Matthew*, 36.

¹³ Michael J. Wilkins, *Matthew*, 96.

¹⁴ James Montgomery Boice, *The Gospel of Matthew*, 30.

¹⁵ Michael J. Wilkins, *Matthew*, 96.

¹⁶ Craig S. Keener, *Matthew*, vol. 1, The IVP New Testament Commentary Series (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1997), Mt 2:1.

¹⁷ Robert H. Mounce, *Matthew*, 13.

¹⁸ R. T. France, *Matthew: An Introduction and Commentary*, vol. 1, Tyndale New Testament Commentaries (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1985), 87–88.

¹⁹ Craig S. Keener, *Matthew*, Mt 2:1.

Lord (Acts 17:25) would be enough incentive to serve Him with all our heart, mind and soul (Matthew 22:37) and with thanksgiving in our hearts (Psalms 9:1) ... especially for His birthday!

True Worship Requires Allegiance to Jesus

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 Messiah 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 shepherd my people Israel."

The sudden arrival of foreign dignitaries asking to meet the one born "king of the Jews" soon got the attention of the ruling elite.²⁰ Herod whom was an Edomite and made king by Rome would not tolerate the emergence of a "genuine descendant of the royal line of David as a



claimant to the throne!"²¹ It is not that Herod believed or feared the sovereignty of Jesus but the possibility of the people seeing Him as universal king that was about to usher in an anticipated age of peace and prosperity.²² All of Jerusalem, specifically the religious and political leadership, were disturbed by Jesus' birth for they feared Herod's violent reaction to such news²³ and the possibility of losing power should a new king take over.²⁴ Herod assembled all the religious authorities whom knew the Scripture, the chief priests and teachers of the law,²⁵ and asked them where the

Messiah was to be born? These "experts came up with a speedy reply"²⁶ quoted from Micah 5:2 and an allusion to 2 Samuel 5:2:²⁷ the Messiah would be born in the same city as King David,²⁸ the small village of Bethlehem,²⁹ and He would exercise dominion³⁰ and shepherd His people Israel.

²⁰ Robert H. Mounce, *Matthew*, 14.

²¹ Leon Morris, *The Gospel according to Matthew*, 37.

²² Robert H. Mounce, *Matthew*, 14.

²³ D. A. Carson, "Matthew," 86.

²⁴ Michael J. Wilkins, *Matthew*, 97.

²⁵ Craig A. Evans, *The Bible Knowledge Background Commentary: Matthew-Luke*, ed. Craig A. Evans and Craig A. Bubeck, First Edition. (Colorado Springs, CO: David C Cook, 2003), 58.

²⁶ Leon Morris, *The Gospel according to Matthew*, 38.

²⁷ Michael J. Wilkins, *Matthew*, 98.

²⁸ Leon Morris, *The Gospel according to Matthew*, 39.

²⁹ D. A. Carson, "The Gospels and Acts," 1929.

³⁰ Craig A. Evans, *The Bible Knowledge Background Commentary: Matthew-Luke*, 58.

What keeps us from worshipping Jesus in Spirit and truth this Christmas is due to our allegiance being fragmented between love of both the broad and narrow paths ever before us (Matthew 7:13-14). Like Herod we fear that full obedience to God's commands by nature



means self-preoccupation (Galatians 2:20) and lust for the evil desires of one's heart (Galatians 1:14) must die! Too often we compartmentalize our lives. We give only a precious few moments on Sunday morning and an occasional prayer or devotion throughout the week to honor our Creator. To prepare our hearts to serve when Jesus comes calling one must go beyond the chief priests and teachers of the law and learn to meditate, obey (James 1:22-23) and cherish (Psalms 1:2) every word from the mouth of God (Matthew 4:4)!

Worshipping Jesus without giving our full allegiance to Him reveals the duplicity of our hearts. In having one foot in His and one in Satan's kingdom we break His command to not serve two masters (Matthew 6:24, Exodus 20:3). While Jesus can and sometimes uses evil people to do His bidding, those who refuse to worship Him in both Spirit and truth (John 4:24) this Christmas can at best expect to be excluded from service and at worst invite His wrath upon them (Hebrews 12:4-12)! Those who give their full allegiance to Jesus are often chosen to do miracles greater than He ever did on this earth (John 14:12)!

True Worship Means no Masks

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 search carefully for the child. As soon as you find Him, report to me, so that I too may go and worship Him."



"Herod's duplicity takes over as he secretly brings in the Magi and attempts to find out when the star had appeared to them."³¹ While the reader is left to wonder what Herod plans to do the timing of the appearance of the star,³² apparently his plans had already been decided to slaughter all children from the moment the star appeared to present in an attempt to kill Jesus (see verse

³¹ Michael J. Wilkins, *Matthew*, 98.

³² John Nolland, *The Gospel of Matthew: A Commentary on the Greek Text*, New International Greek Testament Commentary (Grand Rapids, MI; Carlisle: W.B. Eerdmans; Paternoster Press, 2005), 116.

16).³³ This evil plot should not come as a surprise for Herod was an “unscrupulous tyrant”³⁴ whom murdered his favorite wife, many of his sons³⁵ and would later order a large group of prominent citizens to be executed on the day he died to ensure the nation would have to mourn.³⁶ Knowing the Magi lived a long ways away from Palestine and therefore probably did not know of his ruthless reputation,³⁷ Herod ordered a secret meeting with the Magi to ensure that his “hypocritical humility” to “go and worship Jesus” would not be revealed.³⁸ Wanting no undue publicity that might alarm the Jewish people of the coming of the Messiah, Herod sent the Magi without armed escort to Bethlehem.³⁹ The chief priests and teachers of the law made no attempt to go with the Magi and verify if Jesus truly was the long-awaited Messiah!⁴⁰

If we genuinely want to worship Jesus in both Spirit and truth this Christmas, then we simply must take off our masks of pretending! While our masks are not nearly as heinous as



Herod’s, do we not pretend to be holy in front of other Christians but in presence of the world look and act just like them? Can we truly continue to live in “debauchery, lust, drunkenness, orgies, carousing and detestable idolatry” (1 Peter 4:3) and yet still claim to be walking in the footsteps of our Savior (1 John 2:6)? When we enter the church are we not merely sinners saved by grace, through faith (Ephesians 2:8-9) in desperate need to learn how to obey His holy word? To enter His gates with thanksgiving (Psalms 100:4) we must pray that God will replace the duplicity in our hearts with a single-minded devotion to love and cherish His presence. While this is impossible for us to do on our own ability (Luke 18:27), we are promised that when we draw nearer to God, He will not only draw nearer to

us (James 4:8) but will also enable us to be holy as He is holy (1 Peter 1:16)! Remember, the world will not listen to our witness concerning Christ until we show them the way, truth and life (John 14:6) through our words and deeds!

³³ Robert H. Mounce, *Matthew*, 14.

³⁴ Leon Morris, *The Gospel according to Matthew*, 35.

³⁵ Robert H. Mounce, *Matthew*, 12.

³⁶ *Ibid.*, 15.

³⁷ Michael J. Wilkins, *Matthew*, 99.

³⁸ D. A. Carson, “*Matthew*,” 88.

³⁹ Leon Morris, *The Gospel according to Matthew*, 40.

⁴⁰ Robert H. Mounce, *Matthew*, 15.

Going Home Another Route

⁹ After they had heard the king, they went on their way, and the star they had seen when it rose 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, frankincense and myrrh. ¹² And having been warned in a dream not to go back to Herod, they returned to their country by another route.

After the meeting with Herod the Magi went their way and the star, they saw in the east miraculously⁴¹ reappeared, went before them and stayed still⁴² over the home of Jesus. The movement of the star at minimum had some kind of “supernatural angelic guidance.”⁴³ Upon



seeing the star, we are told the Magi were more than just a little joyful,⁴⁴ they were “deliriously happy.”⁴⁵ They did not visit Jesus in a manger⁴⁶ but when He was a toddler about two years of age and in a home.⁴⁷ When they saw Jesus they bowed low and proceeded to give Him⁴⁸ gold, frankincense and myrrh that were gifts fitting of a superior, king⁴⁹ or deity.⁵⁰ While many commentators find symbolic meaning in these gifts: gold for royalty, incense for divinity and myrrh for Passion and burial; Matthew does not mention⁵¹ if the Magi worshipped Jesus as the Messiah

or not.⁵² Either way if God’s own people would not worship Jesus the Magi would with whatever knowledge and faith they had!⁵³ Having been warned by “supernatural revelation” of Herod’s murderous intentions,⁵⁴ after they left Jesus they returned home by another route.

⁴¹ Robert H. Mounce, *Matthew*, 15.

⁴² Leon Morris, *The Gospel according to Matthew*, 40.

⁴³ Michael J. Wilkins, *Matthew*, 99.

⁴⁴ Leon Morris, *The Gospel according to Matthew*, 41.

⁴⁵ Ibid.

⁴⁶ D. A. Carson, “*The Gospels and Acts*,” 1929.

⁴⁷ Michael J. Wilkins, *Matthew*, 99–100.

⁴⁸ Leon Morris, *The Gospel according to Matthew*, 41.

⁴⁹ D. A. Carson, “*Matthew*,” 89.

⁵⁰ Michael J. Wilkins, *Matthew*, 100.

⁵¹ Leon Morris, *The Gospel according to Matthew*, 41.

⁵² D. A. Carson, “*Matthew*,” 89.

⁵³ Craig S. Keener, *Matthew*, Mt 2:1.

⁵⁴ Ibid.

What do you give to the Creator and Sustainer of all life on His birthday? All your heart, mind, soul and strength ... your allegiance! This is the kind of allegiance that refuses to put on masks and pretend to walk in His footsteps but instead offers Him gold to signify His right to rule one's heart, frankincense to acknowledge His position as our High Priest, and myrrh to remember it was by His death on the cross that our wounds were healed (Isaiah 53:4-5)! To leave by another route in which we came today to church we need to prostrate ourselves before our Lord and king and cry that He might change the inside of the cup so that we might be more than hearers but doers of His word. Christmas is almost here, have you prepared your heart to serve wherever and in whenever your Savior asks or is "self" still the lord of your life? If only we would bow our knee to Jesus, we could give Him not only what wants but in doing so point this world to the best gift that they have ever received.