

## **Sermon Matthew 2:1-12**

*May the words of my mouth, and the meditations of our hearts, be acceptable in Thy sight, O Lord, our Rock and our Redeemer. Amen.*



**Time passes, Christmas festivities are fading. Pretty packages that were neatly arranged under the Christmas tree have turned into brown boxes. Clothing and other items now lay in a chaotic pattern. Gifts have been given and received. Many of them are now being enjoyed, while some are being exchanged at the store. Gift giving, which for many is the commercial focal point of Christmas, is over. The Christmas tree is being removed along with the decorations.**

**Today's Gospel focuses upon a group of people who arguably could be identified as the first gift givers—the wise men. Coming from distant lands in the East, these men sought the king of the Jews and found Him in a Bethlehem stable. Once they had found Him, they offered Him precious gifts.**

**The story of the wise men has much to say to us as we celebrate the birth of the Christ child and seek to live out our lives as disciples of Jesus Christ.**

**The story of the wise men highlights the expanse of God's grace. We say that God so loved the world that he sent His**

only begotten son. The wise men and others in the Christmas story demonstrate the validity of this statement.

The wise men were gentiles. Tradition holds that they were three in number. That's probably because of the number of gifts they brought. They've been given names, too: Melchior, Caspar and Balthazar. Legend has it that they were kings from three nations. Melchior was a king in Persia. Caspar was a king in India and Balthazar was a king in Arabia. However, it is interesting that Chinese Christians maintain that one of the magi came from China.

They were probably pagans-possibly Zoroastrians. They were astrologers-seeing messages in the stars, which was something that the Jews would look down on. Yet, they are the ones who were the first to proclaim Jesus as the king of the Jews.

The wise men have also been identified as royalty—"We Three Kings of Orient Are". As such, the good news of Jesus was proclaimed to royalty in addition to outsiders.

The shepherds were among the lowest classes of Jewish society. Shepherding was a low and menial job. It was dirty and hard work, and it paid miserable wages. The shepherds represent the poorest of the poor. They are the marginal and unseen of society. But they are the first to hear the heavenly message that the Messiah has been born.

**You see, no one person, or group of people, is outside the circle of God's grace. No one is excluded. Where would we say the circle of God's grace stops? Whom would we not include as children of God and members of God's family?**

**In Matthew's story of the wise men, he turns things upside down. The wise men are not only outsiders, but they are men with a question, "Where has the king of the Jews been born?" This question causes them to pack up their camels and travel to a distant land. Their question motivates them to seek Jesus. The wise men mark the beginning of Epiphany, they're placed in our traditional Christmas manger scene, which we call the Creche. The central figures are Mary and Joseph and the baby Jesus. Flanking them on one side, we see shepherds in their rustic clothing with sheep. And on the other side of the stable we see the three wise men in their opulent robes, bearing their gifts of gold, frankincense and myrrh. The manger scene speaks volumes about who this baby is, born in a dirty, smelly stable. Who comes to visit Him? Who adores Him on bended knee? Shepherds and kings.**

**However, on the other hand, those leaders of Israel who supposedly have all the answers-Herod and his religious advisors-do not seek to adore Jesus. In fact, they fear the birth of the king of the Jews. They reject Him and seek to kill Him because He is a threat to their positions of power..**

**Now, there may be times when we are afraid of our questions—especially our religious questions. We fear that they might harm our faith or cause us to doubt. But, we can learn from the journey of the wise men that our questions can motivate us to seek Jesus. We are challenged to seek answers, and in doing so, to grow in our understanding of God, while at the same time being strengthened in our faith.**

**The times that we should be fearful of are those times when we think we have all of the answers, or a corner on the truth. It is at these times that we lose our motivation to grow and to seek Jesus. Those who feel that they have all of the answers, will find that they didn't know all of the questions.**

**When the wise men arrived in Bethlehem and located Jesus and His parents, they stopped and worshiped Him. As part of their worship they gave Him gifts—expensive gifts—of gold, frankincense and myrrh.**

**In our celebrations of Christmas we have both given gifts and received them. We have experienced the joy of both giving and receiving. Our gift lists are probably quite long and they most likely even include our pets. I wonder, though, if we have ever thought of giving Jesus a gift, like the wise men did so long ago. I think Jesus probably has enough gold, frankincense and myrrh. If the truth be known He doesn't really need a**

**blender, a video game, or a fish tie. So if we were to give Jesus a gift, what would we give Him?**

**In the final chapter of his Gospel, Matthew concludes with the Great Commission. The risen Jesus sends his disciples outward. And I quote: “Go and make disciples of ALL NATIONS, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit. Teach them to obey everything I have commanded you.”**

**His gospel begins with foreigners who came seeking the Messiah. The movement was from the outsiders looking in. They came searching. But at the end of Matthew’s gospel, the movement has reversed. The church is propelled outwards. Christ’s mission impels us to reach out.**

**The message of Christ and His gospel of life is meant for all people of every time and every place. As Christ’s church, we are called outward. Simply put, the church exists for Christ’s sake. We have no other purpose than to go and proclaim Christ in word and deed. We speak on Christ’s behalf. We carry on with acts of mercy for His name’s sake.**

**Perhaps Christmas can be a time when we recommit ourselves to love God with all of our hearts, all of our souls, all of our minds and all of our strength, and to love our neighbors as ourselves: that is to live our lives as disciples of Jesus Christ. The message of Christ and His gospel of life is**

meant for all people of every time and every place. We have not traveled as many miles nor endured travel by camel as did the wise men. We didn't climb rocky hills in the dark as did the shepherds. We have traveled, though, and we have gathered to worship the Lord and to celebrate His birth, His life, His death, and His resurrection. Those were His gifts to us. We have come together to receive his Word, His body and blood in the Eucharist, and to offer our praises, hymns and prayers. When we leave today, we have the opportunity to love and serve God by offering ourselves to be one expression of God's presence in the world today.

And that will be the greatest gift we can give to Jesus.

Amen.



*Remember the words of our Lord who said, "It is better to give than to receive".*