

“CHRISTmas is Calling: The Wise Men”

Matthew 2:1-12 (NIV)

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Wise men called to follow “yonder star.” They wanted to be guided to that “perfect light.”

How did these wise men get together? Tradition seems to say that they were from different countries in the East. Did they all begin following the star and then somehow bump into one another. Since they were following a star maybe they all stopped and had a Specialty drink at STAR-bucks. You know one of those venti Jehovah Java’s.

**<sup>10</sup> When they saw the star, they were overjoyed.**

Now Rev. Cathy talked last week talked about the Shepherds and their joy. Here we find the Wise Men did not just have joy; they were OVERJOYED. And I don’t think it was because of the Venti Jehovah Java. I don’t how to actually describe overjoyed---but I like it. Woo-Hoo!!! The Shepherds had joy, the Wise Men had Joy---and well, we should have Joy. Amen? Xxxxxx We are celebrating the Savior of the world.

Now let me pause and say that we know that there were more than one Magi or wise man.... but we really do not know if there were 3 or more. And sorry to ruin the song for you, but they were probably not kings. In the Middle Ages they said there were 3 Wise Men, because of the 3 gifts. It was around 500 A.D. when names were actually ascribed to each of the men. Now these names are not Biblical, but the tradition surrounding them makes the story even more interesting. Their traditional names, Gaspar (Caspar), Balthazar, and Melchior.

Very strange gifts. (image)



No, it was gifts of Gold, Frankincense, not Frankenstein, and myrrh.

**<sup>11</sup> 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.**

It would seem like they were strange gifts for a baby.... however, they were not strange gifts for a king. A King would receive Gold as a symbol of being valuable, incense as a perfume, and myrrh as anointing oil.

Some tradition holds that these wise men were from India, Arabia and Persia.... again, begging the question of how they all got together and make the journey together. Scripture does tell us they were from the East, meaning these were Gentiles searching for the King of the Jews.

Some give ages to the men. They represent all ages. Balthazar was said to be around 20, Melchior middle aged around 40....and believe me I don't like the phrasing here, but the old man was Caspar at age 60. I know right.... Some even identify which of these brought which gift (Caspar, gold; Balthazar, myrrh; and Melchior, frankincense). Also, if you look at certain art pieces you will notice that often one of the wise men has a dark skin tone.... usually the one they would say was Balthazar.

Gold the gift for a king. Why some have even said the gold helped finance Joseph, Mary, and the baby's journey to Egypt. Gold was the king of metals. This child was the King. King of Kings, and Lord of Lords. Not to reign by force, but by love. He was to rule over peoples' hearts not from a throne, but from a cradle that led to a cross.

Incense---the gift for a priest. Incense was used in worship in the temple and for sacrifices. It was a sweet perfume. Frankincense---the gift of holiness. It was used in worship and part of the perfume used in the holy place. It was mixed with the flour which was used in the meal offering. This gift for the Christ child reminds us that this child was going to function as a priest. A priest opens the way for people to have access to God. The Latin word for priest is Pontifex, which means bridge builder. A priest is one who builds a bridge between humanity and God----and so it was with Christ.

Myrrh---a bitter gift. A strange gift. A gift representing grief and sorrow. Myrrh is like anointing oil. Surely this Christ Child was the Anointed One. Myrrh is a gift of one who is to die. It was used to embalm. Myrrh---The gift of suffering, it is obtained by piercing the skin of bark of a small tree in which it is found. The plant "bleeds" giving out a white gum which turns red when it forms outside the plant. Myrrh was mixed with the wine vinegar which was used as a drug to kill pain in the suffering of a person. Jesus refused to drink this mixture when He was on the cross.

Now the wise men make it to King Herod and asked where is He that is born king of the Jews? King Herod, doesn't know, but since it is Christmas, he says, "I don't know.... Holiday Inn?" (sorry ☺)

Actually, the idea of gift giving at Christmas comes from the fact that the Wise Men gave the Christ King gifts of love. We give gifts as a sign of love.

I don't know anyone who doesn't like to receive a gift. How many times have we said, "Oh, you shouldn't have." ---and yet we still always take the gift? In many ways Christmas is about gifts. Gifts come in all sizes. From gigantic gift boxes, to small gifts containing expensive jewelry.

Gifts cause us to do strange things. A couple had been debating the purchase of a new vehicle for weeks. The husband wanted a new truck. The wife wanted a fast-little sports car so she could zip through traffic and around town. He would probably have settled on any truck, but everything she seemed to like was way out of their price range. "Look!" she said. "I want something that goes from 0 to 200 in 4 seconds or less. And Christmas is coming up. You could surprise me. Remember 0-200 in 4 seconds or less.

For Christmas, he surprised her and bought her a---brand new bathroom scale.

Next, week, I'll be having the funeral for that dearly departed husband.

Hope, peace, joy, and love are found in this gift of the Christ Child. Oh yes gifts of gold, frankincense and myrrh, but the real gift was the gift of love. God looked down and saw some un-happy people. He couldn't force them to love Him. He couldn't really command them to love Him. He certainly couldn't bribe them to love Him. But He could come to where they were.

And so---in love God sent His son to be with us---to give us hope, to bring us peace. A gift was given not out of obligation, but out of love. A gift not wrapped in paper, but passion. A gift not placed under a tree but made from the wood of a tree in the shape of a manger...that would eventually transform back into a tree....in the shape of a cross.

I have received gifts before---sometimes they have been homemade---and to be honest, I'm sometimes not really sure what it is. But I say, "Oh, my---this is special---thank you so much." Sometimes I receive what I call gag gifts or funny gifts that make me laugh. Sometimes when I open a gift it's something I need---socks, t-shirts. I'm grateful, because I need those things. Sometimes I open a gift and I get surprised---it's nothing that I was expecting. I love those gifts. It's like wow---I never would have thought I would have received this as a gift. And sometimes when I've opened a gift I say, "This is what I always wanted."

Perhaps you have received gifts that completely overwhelm you. Tears well up---and you wonder why did I receive this gift? Sometimes you may have received a gift and said, "Why did you give me this gift? It's too expensive. It's too much. You shouldn't have. Why did you give me this gift? And sometimes you are simply left speechless.

When you look at this gift, this gift of love, you realize it is something---Someone---you need. You look at this gift of love and you realize you're surprised---I never thought this would be the gift to us, that God would send His only son. And personally, when I look at the gift of Jesus I say---this is not only what I always needed, but also what I always wanted. Hope---peace---joy, and love.

I also look at this gift and say---why? Why did I receive this gift? It is overwhelming. It's too much. There would be great cost for this baby. God shouldn't have. I don't deserve this gift. God sent the gift of love---in the form of a baby.

Receive the gift He's given you. Undeserved---yes! Surprising---yes! What you needed---yes! What you wanted---yes! Overwhelming---yes!

2013 Disney came out with the film "Frozen." including 2 Academy Awards. Now Frozen 2 is out at theaters. There is a lot about love in the original movie. Indeed, love changes things.

In one scene Anna is frozen in order to save Elsa.



And Elsa said, "You sacrificed yourself for me?"

And Anna's simple answer: "I love you."

"God, You gave your Gift for me? Yes, I sacrificed My son for you." And Jesus said, "I love you"

### **Philippians 2:7-8 The Message (MSG)**

**When the time came, he (Jesus) set aside the privileges of deity and.... became *human*! Having become human, he stayed human. It was an incredibly humbling process. He didn't claim special privileges. Instead, he lived a selfless, obedient life and then died a selfless, obedient death—and the worst kind of death at that—a crucifixion.**

That was the greatest gift of love.

In the movie Frozen, I love the character Olaf. Classic line.



(image) Olaf said, "Only the act of true love will thaw a frozen heart."

Christmas is a time for receiving gifts, but also a time for giving. How has God called you to give gifts of love? How this week might God be calling you to help thaw the frozen world by sharing a gift of love with the common, ordinary, needful society that is craving to be loved.

Realize it doesn't matter who you are or what you have done...Jesus came for you...what a gift of love.

In that movie Frozen it seemed like all was lost in a cold, dark world. Oh, but look what love did. It warmed the world. It thawed the frozen. The Gift: Jesus. The Giver: God. It seemed like all was lost in a cold, dark world. But Jesus came born in a manger, received gifts of love from the Wise Men, and then showed how much He himself loved the world and gave the gift of His life for us. He thawed a frozen world. For God so loved....

This year receive, show, and share tangible gifts of love. But also, receive the greatest Gift of love. Jesus.