



**Sermon Series:** Looking Forward to Christmas

**To be used with** Session 5: Looking Forward in Worship

**Sermon Title Possibilities:** “The Heart of Worship!”

**Scripture:** Matthew 2:1-11;16-18

**Connection To Unit Theme:** If you ask the average person why they look forward to Christmas, they will likely tell you something pertaining to presents, parties, or anything pertaining to the commercialized aspects of the holiday seasons. Rarely do we hear responses revolving around worship and gratefulness for the miracle of Jesus. However, while there’s nothing wrong with enjoying the “other” aspects of this time of the year, worship should be our primary focus. Additionally, we ought to be clear on what worship actually is. Worship is reverence and appreciation for God solely for who He is, while praise is celebration and acknowledgment of what God has done. Therefore, when we worship, we aren’t just thinking about what He’s done for us, or what He can potentially do in the future, but we are simply giving Him glory just because He’s God.

**Introduction:** My Pastor and mentor, the late and great, Dr. R.L. White, Jr., once taught me the difference between the heart of preaching, versus the art of preaching. The art of preaching pertains to how we frame the sermon, the style that we use, whether or not we whoop, what gestures and illustrations we use. However, the heart of preaching pertains to how we live the sermon. How we apply the principles that we preach to our daily lives and our treatment of God’s people. And as important as the ART is, we cannot escape the importance of our hearts, especially when it comes to our worship. As our text in Matthew 2 reveals, God is ultimately concerned about the heart behind our worship. Why are we worshipping Him? What are our intentions? Are we doing it because we truly want to, or are we satisfying some feeling of obligation? Just as Dr. White taught me how people preach for different reasons and with different motivations, the same applies to those who engage in worship. God wants to make sure that we are worshipping for the right reasons and with the right spirit.

### **1. Matthew 2:1-6 - “An Attitude of Worship!”**

Anyone who is married will tell you that marriage extends far beyond the wedding day itself, but the work continues for the remainder of the marriage. There are those who think that once they’ve said their vows, that that’s all they need to do, but marriage is a continual choice. It’s a daily commitment to love, respect, value, and choose each other. Not only that, but it’s a commitment to grow with one another and challenge each other to do better. In short, marriage isn’t only important on the wedding day or the anniversary, but every day that we are married, we ought to value and prioritize our marriage.

In a likewise manner, we must have an attitude worship. Worship is not just what we do in church or around church folks, but worship is a lifestyle. Worship ought to be who we are and the primary motivation behind everything that we do for God. In Matthew 2, we see the story of Wise Men coming to worship Jesus after hearing of His birth. There are determined to get to

Him by any means necessary and to ensure that they worshipped Him properly and authentically. The fact that upon hearing of His arrival they immediately sought to get to Him demonstrates that they indeed had an attitude of worship, which is ultimately what the Lord desires to see from each and every one of us.

## **2. Matthew 2:7-8, 16-18 - “When Worship Causes Jealousy!”**

One thing that life as a believer will teach us is that everyone doesn't understand or worship. Some don't understand because they can't bring themselves to have faith, while others simply struggle with jealousy and narcissism, and don't want anyone to be regarded or acknowledged other than them. Therefore, when certain people see or hear anything about worship, they immediately oppose it because they can't imagine sharing the spotlight with anyone or anything else.

King Herod expresses that same type of jealousy in Matthew 2. Upon hearing of the arrival of Jesus and hearing that Wise Men and others were worshipping Him, this did not sit well with the King at all. His jealousy ultimately drove him to want to kill Jesus, which gave us an even deeper glimpse into the condition of the heart of King Herod. His bruised ego, coupled with his egotistical nature caused him to demonize anyone who was being praised over him, as well as anyone who could be considered a threat. A dangerous situation when someone feels that they deserve more consideration than God almighty, but unfortunately, as the story of King Herod proves, it happens. We need to check our hearts, because the mindset that produced King Herod is still very much alive, even if Herod himself isn't.

## **3. Matthew 2:9-11 – “I Choose to Worship!”**

Worship is, above all else, a choice. We decide who we worship, we decide when we worship, and we decide how we worship. Not only that, but when situations arise in our lives, we ultimately decide whether or not we worship our way through it or handle it a different way. Worship should always be a genuine desire, rather than a feeling of obligation. Of all the choices we make in our lives, our lifestyle of worship is of paramount importance. God wants us to take this seriously and hold it in higher regard than anything else in our lives. Everything we say and do ought to be predicated upon our worship for God.

In Matthew 2:9-11, The Wise Men make a choice to not only find Jesus, but worship Jesus. They are in no way swayed by the jealousy of King Herod, nor are they deterred by his obsessive narcissistic behavior. They are more determined to worship than concern themselves with anything else. This is ultimately what God wants to see from us. He wants us to choose Him every time, and never abandon our drive or commitment to worship. Even during this season that's heavily focused on consumerism, we ought never lose sight of our worship of God.

## **Conclusion**

When my wife and I were planning our wedding, we had a meeting with our photographer to discuss what we wanted things to look like on our special day. Our photographer made a very profound statement that I'll never forget, “How important is photography to you and your wedding day? That will determine how much effort and priority we put into it.” While he was speaking in the context of pictures for a wedding, the sentiment applies across the board. This is particularly true when it comes to worship. We all need to ask ourselves how important worshipping God to us, because that will ultimately determine how much effort and priority we put into it. As we discover through this text, the Wise Men cared a lot about worship, which

shows up in the effort that they put in. However, there are others whose lack of care and priority shows up in their refusal to worship consistently and efficiently. God is challenging us to examine our hearts, examine our attitudes, and examine our priorities. It is imperative that stay focused on adequately worshipping God and give Him the first place priority that He deserves. This shouldn't only occur during Christmas time, but every day of our lives should be geared towards worshipping Him.

**Author Bio**

Joseph T. Howard, Sr., M.Div. is an ordained Minister of the Gospel residing and primarily serving in Atlanta, GA. He is a graduate of New Orleans Baptist Theological Seminary. Joseph is married to the love of his life and a powerful minister in her own right, Bianca Robinson Howard, and together they have two children: Rose Victoria & Joseph, Jr.