



Dec 21: God's Sacrifice for Us.

Matthew 2:1–12 (ESV)

The Visit of the Wise Men

2 Now after Jesus was born in Bethlehem of Judea in the days of Herod the king, behold, wise men from the east came to Jerusalem, 2 saying, “Where is he who has been born king of the Jews? For we saw his star when it rose and have come to worship him.” 3 When Herod the king heard this, he was troubled, and all Jerusalem with him; 4 and assembling all the chief priests and scribes of the people, he inquired of them where the Christ was to be born. 5 They told him, “In Bethlehem of Judea, for so it is written by the prophet: 6 ‘And you, O Bethlehem, in the land of Judah, are by no means least among the rulers of Judah; for from you shall come a ruler who will shepherd my people Israel.’ ” 7 Then Herod summoned the wise men secretly and ascertained from them what time the star had appeared. 8 And he sent them to Bethlehem, saying, “Go and search diligently for the child, and when you have found him, bring me word, that I too may come and worship him.” 9 After listening to the king, they went on their way. And behold, the star that they had seen when it rose went before them until it came to rest over the place where the child was. 10 When they saw the star, they rejoiced exceedingly with great joy. 11 And going into the house, they saw the child with Mary his mother, and they fell down and worshiped him. Then, opening their treasures, they offered him gifts, gold and frankincense and myrrh. 12 And being warned in a dream not to return to Herod, they departed to their own country by another way.

In shedding blood to cover the sin of two humans in the very first garden, God writes onto the

pages of time this idea of sacrifice. See Hebrews 9:22.

- Since God was the first to provide a sacrifice for sin. It's fitting that he calls the shots about the kind of sacrifices that are needed to be able to cover sin.

Sacrifices had to be the First

- In Exodus 34:19: **19** *All that open the womb are mine, all your male livestock, the firstborn of cow and sheep.*
- God asks that his people sacrifice to him the first of what they have.
- Why would God ask for the first of what we have? One reason: the first of what I have reveals where my heart is.
- Pay attention to the firsts in your life, and like a compass needle, they will point you to the things you treasure most.

Sacrifices had to be Flawless.

- Leviticus 1:10 (ESV) **10** *If his gift for a burnt offering is from the flock, from the sheep or goats, he shall bring a male without blemish,*
- Leviticus 5:18 (ESV) **18** *He shall bring to the priest a ram without blemish out of the flock, or its equivalent, for a guilt offering, and the priest shall make atonement for him for the mistake that he made unintentionally, and he shall be forgiven.*
- The goal of raising lambs for wool is the finest fleece that is flawless.
- When God asks for the flawless, he's asking for the best.
- This perfect, best of the flock kind of super-sheep...TAKES YEARS TO PRODUCE.
- All that work, so that it can be handed over to God, and sacrificed.

Sacrifices must be given Fully.

- A sacrifice given as intended, means that once given, it becomes irretrievable. It's lost to the giver forever.
- Listen for it in Deut 18:4. **4** *The firstfruits of your grain, of your wine and of your oil, and the first fleece of your sheep, you shall give....*
- In this text God is asking for the first shearing of the sheep. The first fleece.
- This first shearing is the *finest* fleece that you'll ever get from that sheep.
- The first shearing is also the *smallest*. And consequently, this first shearing holds the most value.
- God is asking for the finest, the rarest, the costliest.
- And on top of it all, he's asking for something that, once given, will *never be recovered*.
- The very word "sacrifice" means slaughter. It inherently means that the life will be lost. What is truly given fully, will never be recovered.

God asks for these kind of sacrifices. *The first, the flawless, given fully.*

- In this is the central theme of the entire Bible: *The perfect laying down its life on behalf of the imperfect. Sacrifice* is a spiritual reality begun by God himself.

Matthew writes for us in chapter 1 of his gospel: “*they shall call his name Immanuel, which means God with us.*” God will always be with us. Today, I want to show you another reason why that’s true.

- Matthew’s main purpose in writing his letter is to show his Jewish audience that Jesus is the King.
- Matthew writes about wise men who happen into Jerusalem.
- The wise men are led on this journey to a king. They are intentionally led to a ruler: “*we are here to worship the King of the Jews*”
- Herod, who IS the king, calls his chief priests and scribes together and asks them about it. They say, “*Oh yeah...there's a prophet who spoke about that. The prophet says the King will be born in Bethlehem and the prophet also says “ruler”, that a “ruler” will come from Bethlehem... and that this ruler will be a shepherd for the people of Israel.*”
- In that line from Micah, Matthew points out that not only is Jesus King, but he’s a certain kind of King. A shepherd King.
- Herod outwardly tells the company of wise men to go and try to find this child. So the wise men continue their search. A star guides them to where the child is.
- And when they arrive, they do something that was customary to do whenever you were in front of a King. The custom was to bring a gift.
- We’ve talked about sacrifices. Now let’s talk about gifts. The two go together.

Sacrifice is echoed in the giving of gifts.

- Gifts are the echo of the sacrificial system that God himself began.
- A gift is a small sacrifice. We sacrifice and give gifts in order to communicate “*You mean something to me.*” We give gifts to those we want to be right with.
- The wise men knew they needed to be right with the true King. And the way they worshipped was to give him gifts. Little sacrifices.
- So gold, frankincense, and myrrh. Giving those things was the way they said, “*We want to be right with you.*”
- When Matthew writes “*they offered gifts*” in verse 11, he uses language of sacrifice to a god.
- *The wise men opened their treasures...* The gifts they gave were prized possessions of first importance, I’m sure they were flawless, and were given fully...considered lost once given.
- The custom of the day for those bowing in front of royalty was to bring a gift, a sacrifice. So that’s what the wise men did to be right with the King. But, it was also custom of the day for the King to reciprocate in the gift giving.

Look what Jesus, the one true King of all time and space, gives...

Scripture calls Jesus the firstborn.

- Luke 2:7: she gave birth to her “firstborn”
- Romans 8:29: He is the firstborn among many brothers
- Colossians 1:15: called the firstborn of creation
- Colossians 1:18 & Revelation 1:5: he is the firstborn from among the dead
- Hebrews 1:6: he is God’s firstborn Son

Scripture tells us Jesus is flawless.

- 2 Corinthians 5:21: *For our sake he made him to be sin who knew no sin, so that in him we might become the righteousness of God.*
- 1 Peter 2:22: *22 He committed no sin, neither was deceit found in his mouth.*
- Hebrews 4:15: *15 For we do not have a high priest who is unable to sympathize with our weaknesses, but one who in every respect has been tempted as we are, yet without sin.*
- 1 John 3:5: *5 You know that he appeared in order to take away sins, and in him there is no sin.*

Scripture tells is Jesus gave fully.

- Philippians 2: *6 [Jesus] who, though he was in the form of God, did not count equality with God a thing to be grasped, 7 but emptied himself, by taking the form of a servant, being born in the likeness of men. 8 And being found in human form, he humbled himself by becoming obedient to the point of death, even death on a cross.*
- Hebrews 2:14-17: *14 Since therefore the children share in flesh and blood, he himself likewise partook of the same things, that through death he might destroy the one who has the power of death, that is, the devil...17 Therefore he had to be made like his brothers in every respect...*
- What do those texts point to? A: Jesus becoming human. That is the gift.
- Jesus gives up something that can never be regained. A status that can never be recovered. It is lost forever.
- He will never go back to the way he was as only God – He lost this status, gave it up fully, for us

The gift of the true King to the wise men, and to all who follow, is the greatest anyone could ever give: The gift of sacrifice.

"The magi, as you know, were wise men--wonderfully wise men--who brought gifts to the Babe in the manger. They invented the art of giving Christmas presents. Being wise, their gifts were no doubt wise ones, possibly bearing the privilege of exchange in case of duplication. And here I have lamely related to you the uneventful chronicle of two foolish children in a flat who most unwisely sacrificed for each other the greatest treasures of their house. But in a last word to the wise of these days, let it be said that of all who give gifts,

these two were the wisest. Of all who give and receive gifts, such as they are wisest. Everywhere they are wisest. They are the magi.” —O’Henry

You've heard it this way: “*wise men still seek him.*” But it doesn't go far enough. The seeking needs to lead somewhere. If it's true seeking, it will always lead to sacrifice.

- Jesus gives the gift of himself. He gave everything so we could give everything as well, and when we do, the world works as it should.
- What do you have to sacrifice today? What pocket watch? What long waterfall of flowing hair? What resources? Talent? Words? Power? Opinions? Influence? Time?
- Whatever it is, give the first, give the flawless, and give it fully. What you might lose will never outweigh what you will gain.

God, help us to see the great sacrifice of Jesus for us. He gave up heaven for us. He gave up status for us. He gave up his perfection for us. And he gave it all fully, in his great love for us. Help us see that sacrifice, and understand that to give is the best thing we could ever do. Let us give ourselves to the King. We ask this is the name of the baby in the manger, Immanuel, God with Us. Amen.