

The Gifts & Worship of the Magi

Matthew 2:1-12

Trinity Lutheran – Kearney, Missouri

January 6, 2018 – The Epiphany of Our Lord



In the name of the Father, and † of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit. Amen. During this season of Epiphany, it's almost too easy to focus on either the Magi themselves or the gifts they bring rather than on the One to whom their gifts were brought. And the reason why this is so I suspect is because not only are the Magi and their gifts unique, exotic and mysterious, but also because that is precisely where we sinners in our fallenness naturally seem to direct our attention. What I mean by that is that when you zero in on the Magi, the gifts they bring, the sacrifices they make to bring those gifts, or the manner in which they worship the newborn Infant Savior, then all of that seems to elevate *your* offering, *your* stewardship, *your* sacrifice, and of course, the way *you* yourself worship Jesus.

But the gold, the frankincense and the myrrh aren't really at the heart and center of the Magi's visit to the infant Jesus – in spite of what the songs and poetry tell us – because *your* offering, *your* self-sacrifice and the way *you* worship should never be at the heart and center of the Gospel message. What should always be central to the Gospel is only what Our Lord does and who He is. That our Lord and God chooses to assume human flesh, bear our sin and be our Savior, *those* are the things alone which ought to elicit from us an offering and a sacrifice – a glorious heartfelt worship which matches and exceeds anything the Magi may have brought to Jesus on that star-filled night so many long years ago. And it's not just *how* a person responds to Jesus' gift of Himself, because ultimately *your* response, *your* offering and *your* worship really mean nothing and will actually get you nowhere. To be sure, these things I just mentioned are nothing other than the life and love of Jesus which are lived

out and through each of us in a way that simply receives what He chooses to give.

You see, that's the lesson of the Magi – that the focus ought be taken off of them and directed toward Jesus alone. The Magi and their gifts should remind each of us that our offerings and worship are not a response – that is, a payback – for anything we have received, but simply a reflection of what God is doing in and for us. The account of the Magi should call each of us away from our own paltry contributions and our frenzied attempts at worship, back to the Gift of the Christ Child who is at work in us – not in what *we* do, but in *who He is* and *what He gives and bestows* by His Gospel through preaching and the Sacraments. For instance, consider how Herod desired to worship Jesus – not by receiving *from* Him, not by exalting the gift He brings, not in the Liturgy of the Gospel, but in a way which he only thinks is good and right. Herod's selfish worship began first when he heard the preaching of the Magi concerning the birth of the Christ Child. However, instead of that preaching drawing him to Christ to receive His gifts, Herod's heart was hardened so that his "faith" rested not in the promise of the Gospel, but in what he saw as a threat to his own position and power. And that hearing led not only to Herod's destruction but also to the needless, heartless massacre of many innocent children.

In contrast, the Magi weren't concerned at all with their worship or their gifts, but only with God's grace and kindness. And that grace and kindness of God appeared to them not as an idea, a sensational feeling, or a grand hope. Rather, it was manifested and arrived in human flesh, in the Person of the vulnerable poverty-wrapped Child as He lay in the arms of

the Blessed Virgin. The grace and kindness of God, you see, isn't an attitude, but a Person. And it's not just any Person, but the very Son of God come down from heaven to take on become the sin that you and I are – to be the Savior you and I could never hope to be.

So, the worship of the Magi wasn't only that they heard that inscripturated Word, but that they took it to heart and received it as the living, incarnate Word it truly is. The Magi believed that the promise of God is both resident in the infant Christ, and is also given through His flesh. And so they set out to find Him, not because they were curious, not because they needed to be convinced, and not even because they were willing to give up all they had for the sake of this Child. No, the Magi set out to make the long journey to Bethlehem – following the star as it rose before them in the East – so that they might worship the epiphany of God which had been revealed to them, His appearance and arrival – His manifestation and enfleshment in the Baby, Jesus, true God and true man in one Person, the Babe of Bethlehem.

And just exactly what was their worship? We actually know very little about their worship. Down through the ages it has taken on an almost cult-like story account with the three kings and the camels and the gifts that they brought with them from the East. From the stories we've heard it may have appeared to us as though their worship was simply that they had come to give gifts to the Christ Child – but I'd like to suggest that the Magi desired nothing more than to take in everything the Baby Jesus offers – everything the Baby Jesus is. Their faith was what led them to follow the star and not to be dissuaded. Their faith was what led them to receive this Child as He came for them – and for us all – in the flesh and blood of man. Oh, that *our* faith might lead us always in that same direction! Oh, that *we* would not be bedazzled and drawn away by so many other

intriguing, but quickly fading forms of worship! Oh, that *we* would also have the kind faith that is satisfied and gratified not with what so easily pleases us and our fallen sensibilities, but simply with what Our Lord is pleased to give and plant within us without measure!

By the preaching of this same Gospel which the Magi gladly sought and heard, and by the leading of the same star and light of the Holy Spirit, you and I, we have been given this true, right-worshipping faith – a faith which heeds the shepherding of Our Lord Jesus and leads us away from our own sinful lusts and desires, our own self-pleasuring, and our own self-gratifying ways of worship. This is a Holy Spirit given faith which calls us to the Christ Child, that gathers us with the Magi, with saints and angels around wherever Christ chooses and promises to be, that enlightens us so that we trust the promise more than the threat, that cradles us within His body, the Church, and unites us with Him in such a tight, close union that with His flesh and blood He makes a home, where lives and dwells within us.

And with that Holy Spirit given faith comes the Life of Christ in you, a life that gifts you not with money or deeds, but with your whole life and being as a holy, lively and reasonable sacrifice to God. The sacrifice of God in Christ is now being reflected and lived through you as your God-pleasing worship – as the only proper response to the knowledge that in Christ everything in your life is a yes and amen to the gifts God desires to give you. That's the lesson of the Magi and the proper focus of today's Feast. May it always be so, for Jesus' sake. Amen.

And now that peace of God, which passes all understanding, will keep your hearts and minds in that one true faith in Christ Jesus unto life everlasting. Amen.