

Matthew 2:1-12 *After Jesus was born in Bethlehem in Judea, during the time of King Herod, Magi from the east came to Jerusalem ²and asked, "Where is the one who has been born king of the Jews? We saw his star when it rose and have come to worship him."³When King Herod heard this he was disturbed, and all Jerusalem with him. ⁴When he had called together all the people's chief priests and teachers of the law, he asked them where the Messiah was to be born. ⁵"In Bethlehem in Judea," they replied, "for this is what the prophet has written: ⁶"But you, Bethlehem, in the land of Judah, are by no means least among the rulers of Judah; for out of you will come a ruler who will shepherd my people Israel."⁷Then Herod called the Magi secretly and found out from them the exact time the star had appeared. ⁸He sent them to Bethlehem and said, "Go and search carefully for the child. As soon as you find him, report to me, so that I too may go and worship him."⁹After they had heard the king, they went on their way, and the star they had seen when it rose went ahead of them until it stopped over the place where the child was. ¹⁰When they saw the star, they were overjoyed. ¹¹On 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. ¹²And having been warned in a dream not to go back to Herod, they returned to their country by another route.*

Dear friends in Christ our Savior,

What would you do for a Klondike Bar? That has been a long running jingle. When that first came out the commercials showed them asking people if they would cluck like a chicken or hop like a frog or sing 'I'm a little teapot' just to get a Klondike Ice Cream bar. Some of you may remember those commercials from the 80's and 90's. It's pretty funny to see what lengths people will go to humiliate themselves just to eat a Klondike Bar. But the point has been well made: when you have something worthwhile, you are willing to go to great lengths to get it.

This is worship. Worship is humbling yourself to exalt someone or something else. Worship is lowering yourself to give praise and honor to another. The question I lay before you with this text this morning is: What are you willing to do to worship your Savior? To what lengths in your life are you willing to go exalt Jesus as your Savior and to honor him not only as the Lord of your life but as the Lord of all? Worship is more than just what we do when we gather in this building with our fellow believers. Worship includes all that we do in view of the mercy God has shown to us in Jesus on a daily and regular basis to offer ourselves as living sacrifices to him. To adequately answer this question of what lengths we are willing to go to worship our Savior, we first need to come to a full understanding of the true treasure we have in Jesus. We see in these wise men a true devotion and worship of their Savior. As we today celebrate the truth of Jesus' salvation not being just for the Jews but for all people, we are encouraged: **Give God Your Best.**

As familiar as most people are with this account, there are a lot of things we don't know. How many wise men were there? The tradition is there were three—most likely because of the three gifts mentioned. Some say as many as 12. Matthew doesn't tell us. What were their names? Over the years, tradition has suggested different names. Matthew doesn't tell us. When exactly did they arrive in Jerusalem? Where exactly did they come from? What exactly was this star? How did the wise men connect the star with the birth of the Messiah? Matthew doesn't tell us any of this! So rather than spending our time speculating on what we don't know, we do better to focus on what we do know. Matthew left out these other details because they aren't the important part of this account. The details Matthew gives us focus our attention squarely on who this child is and the response of the wise men to him. Matthew resolutely holds the spotlight on Jesus.

Everything the wise men did tell us that they recognized exactly who this little child was and that they valued him highly. When they arrived in Jerusalem after their long trip, they asked, "*Where is the one who has been born king of the Jews?*" These prominent Gentile men would not have undertaken a long arduous trip at great cost and risk to themselves nor given such expensive gifts to worship a foreign earthly king. No, they recognized Jesus to be the spiritual king God had sent to rescue them from their sins. Since we don't know exactly where they were from, we can't say exactly how they came to know about Jesus. Tradition has them coming from Babylon. If this is true, we can see how they would have known. The Magi were a class of priests, astronomers and astrologers. They were influential advisors to the king. Daniel was made the presiding officer over the caste of Magi some 500 years earlier. Surely, he would have passed along his faith in the coming Messiah. In addition, there were thousands of Jews who remained in Babylon after their countrymen were allowed to return to Jerusalem after the exile. These also would have passed their faith down. These magi were looking for the Messiah whom God had promised. They came to seek the Christ. They came in faith to worship the one who had been born to free his people from their sins. God led these men to see who this baby truly was. God led them to their Savior, the child who would reconcile them to God in heaven. Even though they were not Jews and were on the outside looking in for so long, the star beckoned them to come and worship their King. They sought their Savior with treasure-filled hearts looking for the one whom God had promised would take away their sins.

As they recognized the treasure they had in this child who fulfilled the prophecies of the OT and had come to take away their sins, they gave their best to worship him. Look at the journey they made. What devotion they displayed to worship their Lord. They didn't just hop on a plane and after a 2 hour flight were in Jerusalem looking for Jesus. Their journey would have taken weeks if not months. They would have traveled through desert and wilderness areas with wild animals and robbers to threaten them along the way. They would have had to bring a large caravan to support such a trip.

Why take such long and dangerous trip such as this? They wanted to give God their best. They recognized the treasure they had in the Savior whom God had sent and they were willing to go to great lengths with great sacrifices to worship him.

The gifts they brought also showed their devotion and the lengths they were willing to go to worship their king. Here again, they gave the best of what they had. While we can see symbolism in the gifts they brought, we can't assume that they brought these gifts with that symbolism in mind. Some have tried to say the gold acknowledged Jesus' royalty, the incense respected his deity and the myrrh anointed him for his death and burial. This symbolism isn't justified by the text. We're simply told they brought gifts and the gifts they brought were valuable. They gave God their best. They did not bring the cheapest gifts or give to their king whatever was left over after the trip. They brought Christ valuable gifts that honored and worshipped him as their Savior and King. They weren't coerced or forced into bringing gifts. Freely, of their own accord, they brought valuable gifts which honored their king. Because they recognized Jesus as their Savior and king and trusted in the salvation which he came to bring, they gave him their best.

It leads us to ask an evaluating question of ourselves: Do we give God our best? Whether it's in the effort we spend to gather for Worship and Bible Study or in the way that we use our talents and gifts or the offerings we give in response to his love, do we give God our best? What are we willing to sacrifice to make sure that we are at worship or so that we can serve with the gifts he has given to us or so that we can bring him our best in our offerings to worship our King? Do the efforts we display in responding to Jesus display that he is our Savior and the Lord of all? I think these are important questions to ask. It's easy to become complacent in our worship of Jesus. We can all too easily take for granted what he has done for us and become at best lukewarm in our response. As we lose sight of the reality of what Jesus has done for us we can become non-responsive in our spiritual lives. The Jews were waiting for the Messiah but missed him completely because they had become complacent. How many people have grown up in a Christian Church but left to return to the darkness? Do we carry on in the church the way we always have without reason or thinking about it? Do we chafe at change, grumble when we are asked and encouraged to get out of our comfort zone to spread the light, to give of our gifts or talents or time and complain that we don't feel as comfortable as we want?

When worship and Bible Study attendance is down, when our giving is behind, when we have to beg and plead for people to be involved in carrying out the ministry God has given to us, this is a sign of a deeper problem. When other industries face these challenges, they look to the institution and try to solve the problem by asking: what are you offering, how exciting is it or is it worthwhile. But not so in this case. When the church faces these problems, we have to look deep down inside of each one of us. This is a heart problem. We aren't giving God our best because we don't fully see him as he is. The wise men were willing to sacrifice much time and effort to worship their Lord face to face. We have a hard time giving up lawn cutting time, beach time, a soccer game or whatever it might be to gather in God's house for 1 hour to worship him. For many, attending Bible Study isn't even a thought. We fill our schedule with so many other activities we don't have the time or energy to serve in any meaningful way. The wise men sacrificed greatly in bringing expensive gifts in honor and worship of their king. We have a hard time giving up our latte each morning or that extra vacation or tickets to the game to bring forth our generous offerings. This is not an institution problem. It's a problem of the heart. It's the reality that we are sinners who are selfish with what we have. It's the problem that we don't always see the depths of our sin to fully realize the salvation Jesus came to bring. We don't always give God our best because we fail to treasure what he has done for us.

God gave us his best because we don't always give him our best. That's humbling. It's embarrassing and shame producing to realize how far short we have fallen in honoring and worshipping our God as he deserves. It's scary because it makes us come face to face with exactly what we deserve for this sin—God's wrath and punishment. But friends, its only when we truly grasp this that we marvel again at this little child the wise men worship. We see in that child God giving us his best! He gave his only Son who gave up the riches of heaven to live on this earth and walk in our shoes. He gave up the bliss of perfection to suffer the abandonment of hell that you and I deserve. He came to die so that you and I can live! That's amazing. This is why the wise men were so overjoyed. This is the joy that fills our heart every single time we gather in God's house and consider what great things God has done for us. This is what leads us to want to give God our best in all things.

Yes, God gave us his best because we don't always give him our best. But God also gave us his best SO THAT we can give him our best. God releases you from the guilt and consequences of your sin. You are free to go and serve him in all things. Go give him your best. Give him the best of your offerings to display your trust in him and to honor him. Give him the best of your time to carry out his work. Give him the best of your talents to glorify him for giving them to you. This time of year is full of resolutions as people bind themselves to goals they wish to achieve in the new year. As you ponder today the treasure you have in Jesus and the salvation he brings to you, be renewed in your resolve and step forward into this new year committed to giving God your best. Devote yourself to seeking him in Scripture. Dedicate yourself to honoring him with your generous, sacrificial, first fruit gifts. Pledge your time to use the talents he has given you to serve him in a meaningful way in carrying out his mission to be his witnesses to our world. Commit to him all of who you are and all of what you have to worship him. Jesus is your king who rescued you from your sin, who reigns eternal on heaven's throne, and who will come again to bring you to your eternal home. To what lengths are you willing to go to worship him? What are you willing to sacrifice to bring honor and praise to him? He gave you his best so you can live with him eternally. Go now, and give your best to him. Amen.