

What gift do we bring?

The Gift of the Maji!

Matthew 2:1-18

Three buildings in town were overrun by squirrels—the town hall, the hardware store, and the church. The town hall brought in some cats. But after they tore up all the files, the mayor got rid of the predators, and soon the squirrels were back. The hardware store humanely trapped the squirrels and set them free outside of town. But three days later, the squirrels climbed back in. Only the church came up with an effective solution. They baptized the squirrels and made them members. Now they see them only on Christmas and Easter.

So, how many wise men were there? We often think 3, largely because there were 3 gifts, but Scripture doesn't tell us how many wise men there were. Today we are going to take a look at the gifts given to Jesus by the wise men and the circumstances surrounding this story.

I. Visit of the Wise Men & Herod's Plot Mt. 2:1-12

Matthew 2:1-2, "After Jesus was born in Bethlehem in Judea, during the time of King Herod, Magi from the east came to Jerusalem and 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.'"

The Magi or wise men came from the east. It could have been from Persia as most believe or from Babylon. In either case both cultures were influenced and would know Jewish prophecy. Both countries had taken Jewish captives in the 6<sup>th</sup> & 7<sup>th</sup> centuries BC.

We don't know exactly what they knew, but they knew enough to recognize the signs that the Christ was born. That means that Jesus came with a mission, He came with a work to do.

When the wise men were looking for Him they asked the question, "Where is the one who has been born king of the Jews?" This question implies the lineage of David. In Matthew 1 Matthew laid out the lineage of Jesus going back to David.

Samuel told David in 2 Samuel 7 how God would establish his throne forever.

2 Samuel 7:11b-13, "The Lord declares to you that the Lord himself will establish a house for you: 12 When your days are over and you rest with your ancestors, I will raise up your offspring to succeed you, your own flesh and blood, and I will establish his kingdom. 13 He is the one who will build a house for my Name, and I will establish the throne of his kingdom forever."

God continues to fulfill His prophecy regarding Jesus' role on earth.

How will you answer that question? "Where is the one who has been born king of the Jews?" Where is Jesus in your life? Wise men still seek Him!

We are told that the wise men found Him by following a star. What in the world does that mean? Which star? How did it lead them to the very home where Jesus was residing?

The bottom line is we simply don't know. Commentator and Bible Scholar William Hendricksen writes in his commentary on Matthew this: "Suffice it to say that the wisdom and kindness of God is

evident from the fact that He "spoke" to these students of the stars in the language which they could understand, namely, that of the "star."

What we do know is the purpose of the wise men's trip. Matthew tells us they have come to worship Him, baby Jesus.

The wise men, in another country, see the sign in the star, load up their camels with the gifts and supplies they would need on their journey and walk across Iraq and into Israel just to come and worship a baby born to be king, to be Messiah.

How much would you do to worship Jesus?

Someone from our church invited a person to come to church here recently, but when that person heard that our service was at 9:30 they declared it to be too early to go to church. I guess they didn't see the star.

What would you do to worship Jesus? How far would you go? What obstacles would you overcome just to worship Jesus?

Matthew 2:3-8, "When King Herod heard this he was disturbed, and all Jerusalem with him. 4 When 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.”

7 Then Herod called the Magi secretly and found out from them the exact time the star had appeared. 8 He 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.”

Herod was disturbed because he didn't want anyone taking the throne he had worked so hard to get. Jerusalem was disturbed because they knew how Herod would react to any threat to his throne. They knew him to be a hard and merciless king.

King Herod was not a Jew, but he knew how to use the Jewish faith to his benefit and used it as a tool for his own good. The Jewish historian, Josephus, called Herod capable, crafty and cruel.

Herod was also a builder. He built the amphitheater, a palace and he added to the temple with such an ambitious project that it became known as Herod's temple. It was upon the top of this temple that Satan appeared and tempted Jesus.

When Herod was trying to locate this newborn king, he consulted the religious leaders asking them where the Messiah was to be born. The Messiah! He asked where the Messiah was to be born, not some random king, but the Christ, the Savior, the Messiah!

His advisors answer Bethlehem by quoting from Micah 5:2 & 4.

Herod was going after the Messiah all in his vain attempt to hold the kingship. He even solicits the help of the wisemen to locate the baby.

Matthew 2:9-12, “After 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. 10 When they saw the star, they were overjoyed. 11 On coming to the house, they saw the child with his mother Mary, and they bowed down and worshipped him. Then they opened their treasures and presented him with gifts

of gold, frankincense and myrrh. 12 And having been warned in a dream not to go back to Herod, they returned to their country by another route.”

The star takes them directly to the very house where Jesus was living! I still don't know how, but it did. Then they did what they had come for, they worshipped Jesus!

Then they did the part we all know about, they gave Him gold, frankincense and myrrh.

There has been a lot written about these gifts but in general this is what we know.

Gold is the symbol of royalty. Frankincense or literally 'pure incense' is something used during a meal offering in service to Jehovah. It can be referred to as 'God's incense.'

Myrrh is a perfume. Perfume was for man to make life more pleasant.

Early church leader Origen made this observation: "The wise men brought gold as to a king, myrrh, as to one who was mortal and incense, as to a God."

No matter how we parse the gifts the wisemen brought, it is clear that they were gifts to the newborn king of the Jews, the Messiah!

When it came time to leave, we are told that the wisemen left for home going a different way since they were warned in a dream about Herod's intent. And they obeyed the message in that dream.

Joseph had a dream as recorded in Matthew 1:20 when the angel told him not to be afraid to take Mary as his wife and that the baby was conceived by the Holy Spirit. Do you know what he did?

Joseph took Mary to be his wife! He obeyed the angel.

## II. The Flight to Egypt Mt. 2:13-15

Now here we read:

Matthew 2:13-15, "When they had gone, an angel of the Lord appeared to Joseph in a dream. "Get up," he said, "take the child and his mother and escape to Egypt. Stay there until I tell you, for Herod is going to search for the child to kill him."

14 So he got up, took the child and his mother during the night and left for Egypt, 15 where he stayed until

the death of Herod. And so was fulfilled what the Lord had said through the prophet: "Out of Egypt I called my son."

Joseph has another dream and what does he do? He didn't wait until morning, he didn't wait to think about travel plans, he didn't wake up Mary to ask her opinion. He got up and left; he obeyed!

You will also notice in this passage another prophecy fulfilled. "Out of Egypt I called my son." This comes from Hosea 11:1. Do we understand the significance of this quote coming from Hosea?

The life of Hosea is a picture of Christ and the church. Hosea was married to a harlot, Gomer. Now, he should have taken the first clue when he found out her name. But God had directed Hosea to marry Gomer and Hosea was a faithful husband, loving Gomer. Hosea was the example of Christ in this relationship.

Gomer, always falling back on her old sin, being unfaithful in the relationship represents the church and our unfaithfulness in our relationship with Christ.

So, the lesson here is don't be a Gomer. Stay faithful. Be like Joseph, when told to go in the middle of the

night he obeyed. Will you be this obedient to God's call on your life?

### III. Herod's Revenge Mt. 2:16-18

Matthew 2:16-18, "When Herod realized that he had been outwitted by the Magi, he was furious, and he gave orders to kill all the boys in Bethlehem and its vicinity who were two years old and under, in accordance with the time he had learned from the Magi. 17 Then what was said through the prophet Jeremiah was fulfilled:

18 "A voice is heard in Ramah, weeping and great mourning, Rachel weeping for her children and refusing to be comforted, because they are no more."

Can you believe this guy? Herod is king and he's afraid of being dethroned by a baby. Not only is he the king, but he's an old king. He doesn't know it yet, but he will die within the year, and he's worried about an infant...do the math.

Here is the lesson we learn from Herod; See how foolish sin makes a man?