

Well, today is the last day of the Christmas Season and we finally come to the Feast of the Epiphany: Kings, Gold, Frankincense and Myrrh.

This is certainly one of the coolest parts of the Christmas Story.

I think it's easy to see why this passage is so popular. We've got these mysterious figures - the Magi. And usually - in Scriptures -- magi are not good people.

They are sorcerers and astrologers.

But these people have recognized something about Jesus that even his own people cannot yet see.

These Magi follow the star, and they stumble into Jerusalem.

Then they stir up a little bit of trouble with King Herod.

Finally, they find the Christchild in Bethlehem, and then - they are warned in a dream by God, so they slip away into the desert.

It's a great story. With the Wise Men, we get the message that Jesus is to be the Christ for all people, and His light will shine out across the world, He did not come just for the Jewish people.

Many Christmas poems and songs reflect on what we might bring the Baby Jesus as our gifts.

This morning, I'd like us to reflect on these gifts these three Wise Men brought- gold, frankincense and myrrh and what they mean.

GOLD - This gift would finance the Holy Family's coming flight to Egypt. It also symbolizes Christ's immortality and purity.

Gold was the gift that would be presented to a king because it was the most precious metal of the day and it symbolized royalty.

The wise men recognized that this baby – born in a manger was no ordinary baby. He was King Jesus.

The wise men didn't cuddle Him nor did they play games with Him. Instead they bowed down in reverence to Him. They worshiped Him.

Even at this point – the Jews who had long been anticipating the arrival of the Messiah – still did not recognize him as the Messiah.

FRANKINCENSE is a resin used in incense for worship and also symbolizes prayer and sacrifice.

It has been used for medicinal and soothing properties.

Being an incense – it was burned, believing it to carry people's prayers to heaven. Christ – humbling himself to become a man -- offers us the greatest gift of all, the light that forever burns in the darkness.

These wise men recognized the sinless deity of Jesus that was deserving of their worship.

Matthew 2:11 says "And when they came into the house, they saw the young child with Mary, his mother and they fell down and worshiped Him. And when they had opened their treasures, they presented Him with gifts of gold, frankincense and myrrh."

You see, Jesus was not only born a King, - He was God in human flesh.

Now, whether the Wise Men fully understood all of this or not, I don't know. But I do know that the Holy Spirit must have compelled them to bring these gifts and the whole event was recorded in the Bible.

The third gift was **MYRRH**.

Myrrh is a fragrant gum, which the ancient Israelites believed strengthen children. It is very “bitter” and is considered a wound healer because of its strong antiseptic properties.

This gift was a symbol of Christ’s mortality.

Myrrh was used as a narcotic to dull pain.

It was mixed with wine and offered to Jesus as he hung on the cross – but instead of tasting the wine and myrrh to numb His pain, Jesus suffered and tasted death for every man.

The myrrh was also mixed with aloes to wrap Christ’s body for the tomb.

Can you imagine bringing a little baby something that was used to embalm the dead?

These gifts were not given by accident.

Of everything that could be listed as gifts to the King, we read that they brought gold, frankincense and myrrh to recognize His kingship, His priestly deity
and His sacrificial death.

The hallmark of the Feast of the Epiphany is the Star that led the Magi to the child Jesus in Bethlehem.

And so we think about this feast as the reminder that Jesus is the **light to all the nations** – that **all people** are welcome in his household.

And we also remember that being followers of Jesus means that when we order our hearts and our lives toward him, we can be a way that God’s light continues to shine in the world today.

Jesus came to release us all from our sins and to restore each one of us to the love of God.

We are called to repentance, to humility and to gratitude.

At Christmas, we often talk about the gift of Jesus – God’s only Son.

But many of us just kinda gloss over the reality that the **gift is really** Jesus’ life given freely on the cross so that we might all have eternal life.

Can you remember the best gift you ever got?

Do you have this kind of childhood memory?

Maybe it was the year you got an Easy Bake Oven, or a Red Rider BB Gun – or a Cabbage Patch Kid – maybe Walkie Talkies.

Maybe it was the year you got a new bike or a new car.

Maybe the best gift you ever got wasn’t anything that could be wrapped up or put a bow on, but was the gift of family or friends being together.

As kids, we spend a lot of time thinking about the best gifts to **get** and as adults we spend a lot of time thinking about the best gifts to **give** and yet what gets forgotten

during this entire season is that Christmas is about the Best gift that has ever been given to us - JESUS.

Did you ever stop and think about it - at Christmas – we give gifts to everyone but Jesus.

But let’s be honest – what do you give the God who has everything?

We won’t find anything at the mall or from Amazon.com.

It won’t be anything we can put in a box and wrap up with a bow.

Jesus does not give us a Christmas list.

But He was pretty clear about the gifts He wants from us.

We find part of that list in Matthew 25:35-36. - “For I was hungry and you fed me. I was thirsty and you gave me a drink, I was a stranger and you invited me into your home. I was naked and you gave me clothing, I was sick and you cared for me. I was in prison and you visited me .”

Now here’s the thing – these things never happened to Jesus.

There was never a time when people took care of him and helped meet his basic needs, so they asked him, Lord, when did we see you hungry and feed you or thirsty and give you something to drink.

When did we ever see you in need and help you in any way and Jesus replied,

Matthew 25:40, “ I tell you the truth, when you did it to one of the least of these my brothers and sisters, you were doing it to me!”

So we give to Jesus the gifts He wants when we give to anyone around us who is in need.

We give to Jesus when we feed the hungry.

We give to Jesus when we help clothe the naked, provide clean water for those who are thirsty and when we visit the sick and those in need.

Now for Jesus, this gift list was not a wish list – Jesus actually expects these actions from us, his followers

Today we say –

But Jesus, I am just one person, what can I do to help solve the problem of world hunger?

But Jesus, we are just one church, what can we do to bring about clean water to a poor nation?

But Jesus, the need for healing and hope and peace in our nation today is beyond our ability to address.

But Jesus

We are still saying that and it's time we stopped making excuses and started asking Jesus to show us the way.

Do you remember the story of the 5 loaves and 2 fish? Jesus said, bring them to me and when they did - he blessed the food and those 5 loaves and 2 fish fed the entire crowd - over 5000 people.

One day right here at our church - we were having a dinner and many more people showed up than we thought.

We knew we did not have enough food to feed everyone who had come -

But we prayed over the food and wouldn't you know - we fed everyone and even had a few leftovers. God is good. He is faithful to His Word.

When we offer to Jesus what we have - he can use our gifts to solve the problems we face.

SO what gift do you think you will give to Jesus?

So often we fumble in our pockets and our purses for a gift worthy of giving to our Savior. BUT I'm not talking about material gifts - I am talking about more important things.

- **Will you give Him your trust?**
 - Faith is a voluntary.
 - Jesus doesn't have your trust unless you give it to Him. He will never force it.
- **Will you give Jesus first place in your life?**
 - If anything or anyone other than Jesus holds first place in your life - it's an idol.
 - Choose to make Jesus first in your finances,
 - first in your interests,
 - first in your relationships,
 - first in your schedule -
 - and even first in your troubles.
 - Let your life be the best sermon you ever give.
- **Are you willing to give Jesus your Heart?**
 - Your heart is what you love, what you value, and what you care the most about.
 - Jesus says, "Where your treasure is, there your heart will be also (Luke 12:34).
 - One important way you give Jesus your heart this New Year is by giving your resources to His work.
 - Jesus doesn't need your money, but he wants what it represents - your heart.
- **Will you share your faith and bring other people to Jesus?**
 - **Will you give him your witness?**
 - God wants a family more than anything else in this world.
 - He wants children who choose to love Him and trust Him.
 - Take time and tell someone about what Jesus has done and is still doing in your life.
- **Will you give Him your worship?**
 - Are you willing to allow the Holy Spirit to fill you on Sunday mornings as you sing hymns and songs of praise to our Lord?

- Are you thinking about the words to the prayers that are being said - the liturgy that we share?
 - Are you willing to fall on your face before Him?
- Are you willing to carry that worship into and throughout the week by spending time with God each day?

- **Will you have compassion for all people?**

- God has placed you smack dab in the middle of hurting, hopeless, wounded people, and you probably don't even realize it.
- We ought to give the gift of our help to those who are hurting.
- We ought to give the gift of forgiveness to those who have hurt us
- Be moved by the pain that crosses your path

- **Will you give Him more than an hour on Sunday morning?**

- Coming to church is nice - but if you don't allow your heart to be open to changes God may want to make in you - then why do you come?
- Do you read the weekly devotions that Pastor Drew gives us each week in the bulletin?
- Do you read some other devotional each day to bring you into the presence of our Lord?
- Do you pray all throughout the day??
- Do you read the Bible - after all - it is God's basic instruction book to us for how to live our lives.
- Allow God's Holy Spirit to speak to you - to teach you - to change you
- Take what you learn on Sunday mornings and share it with others that maybe don't go to church.

- Jesus is worthy of our praise and our worship.
- He deserves all the devotion we can give Him
- He deserves all the love we can show Him

- Wise people know they owe everything they have and are to the Lord Jesus Christ. We should never be ashamed to worship Him and share Him with others.
- All we can do is to offer God the best of what we have at the moment.

The Bible tells us that the Wise Men didn't give Jesus their leftovers when they visited Him on that first Christmas but instead gave three very significant and valuable gifts:

“They bowed down and worshiped Him. They opened their gifts and gave Him treasures of gold, frankincense, and myrrh “ (Matthew 2:11)

How readily have we given God, - not second best, ---not what's simply 'good enough' ----- but the very best of what we have to offer?

For me, Epiphany is a time for a new beginning or recommitment to God.

- He is the star that guides my life
- He gives meaning and purpose to my life. I try to follow His direction and leading in the big and small things that happen each day.
- My epiphany may be a tiny spark or a fire that might make me stop in my tracks.

Many of you may be in need of a personal epiphany.

Maybe you've struggled in some way, you know you need to change, and you want to change.

But you're sick and tired and you wonder if things will every change.

Many times we write contracts and call them resolutions - but my guess is that your history with resolutions is much like mine. They aren't worth the paper they're written on or the mental effort to store them in your brain. And they EXPIRE in about two weeks anyway.

Life is filled with bumps and bruises, ups and downs, ins and outs. Sometimes it's easy to be discouraged and have doubts. But we know that through it all - God is with us.

Ya' know - when you think about it - our life journey is filled with the promises that God has for us. We must hold them close.

God's greatest gift of love ,that first Christmas, set the stage of the love that we should show each other. Ours should be a love that is sacrificial, giving, and available to all people, regardless of their color, background or social status. This love that we share will show Christ our love for him.

In this New Year how will you show Christ your love for Him?

Who will you reach out to? Give to? Share Christ with?

Many times, we feel we are unworthy of this incredible gift that God has given us - Jesus Christ, his Son.

We are unworthy - but God's gift is magnificent and extravagant.

There is nothing we can do to deserve it - we must simply accept it.

God teaches us, by sending His angels to appear to shepherds in the fields that first Christmas night, that God is ready to meet us and love us right where we are, as we are, with His grace and His love.

I wish for each of you a personal epiphany.

Maybe you need a new understanding of how God works in your life.

Maybe you wonder what He expects from you.

If you're asking questions, that's good because it means you're ready to take the journey.

You haven't given up -so don't - begin to challenge yourself.

Where do you want to change?

What is it that you have sought for years?

It may be something simple that you just feel has never happened for you.

It may be something complex and it may be something tangible or intangible.

It could be several things at once - maybe even interrelated.

You don't need a book - a DVD or a legal pad full of written resolutions.

It comes down to a choice.

Just love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind and with all your strength. And the second is this: You shall love your neighbor as yourself. There is no other commandment greater than these.

I'm ready for an epiphany - are YOU ?

LET'S PRAY:

Most gracious heavenly Father.

As the New Year dawns and every day that comes - may it be bright and glorious with the sweet presence of You - who came to us as a child in Bethlehem - who died for our sins on the tree, --- who was raised from the dead for the forgiveness of our sins, --- who ascended to heaven to make intercession for us ---- and who said, "I will be with you to the end of the way". Glory to God in the highest. Amen.