

**“It’s A Boy!” - *The Wisemen Speak***  
**Message for December 30, 2018**  
**North East United Methodist Church**  
**Rev. Dr. Drew M. Christian**

Next week the Christmas tree will come down, the ornaments will be packed up, the snowman and Santa Claus will be put away, and the Nativity, with Mary & Joseph, the Shepherds and Wisemen, and the Baby Jesus will be set back in its box until next year.



But Christmas doesn’t end when the season is over, the decorations put up...

Today we reflect on the Wisemen visiting the Christ child...this event in the Christian Church is called Epiphany...it is usually celebrated twelve days after Christmas, on January 6...

Epiphany relates to us how the Wisemen responded to the news “It’s A Boy!”...and through those who traveled from afar, we are reminded that, yes, the birth of Christ was just the beginning...and we are reminded that how we react to such a gift is an ongoing event.

**PRAYER**

This past week, we celebrated the birth of Jesus Christ, the very Son of God. We stood and looked into the manger, heard of the angels’ pronouncement to the shepherds guarding their sheep in the field, sang “Silent Night, Holy Night,” and experienced the beauty and wonder of Christmas. But the story doesn’t end there. Christmas is just beginning AND Jesus is not to be packed away until next year.

This is what the gifts...the gifts that the Wisemen brought to the Christ child...show us...

Matthew 2: 1-12 -

***Jesus was born in Bethlehem in Judea, during the reign of King Herod. About that time some wise men from eastern lands arrived in Jerusalem, asking, “Where is the newborn king of the Jews? We saw his star as it rose, and we have come to worship him.” King Herod was deeply disturbed when he heard this, as was everyone in Jerusalem. He called a meeting of the leading priests and teachers of religious law and asked, “Where is the Messiah supposed to be born?” “In Bethlehem in Judea,” they said, “for this is what the prophet wrote:***

*‘And you, O Bethlehem in the land of Judah,  
are not least among the ruling cities of Judah,  
for a ruler will come from you  
who will be the shepherd for my people Israel.’”*

*Then Herod called for a private meeting with the wise men, and he learned from them the time when the star first appeared. Then he told them, “Go to Bethlehem and search carefully for the child. And when you find him, come back and tell me so that I can go and worship him, too!” After this interview the wise men went their way. And the star they had seen in the east guided them to Bethlehem. It went ahead of them and stopped over the place where the child was. When they saw the star, they were filled with joy! They entered the house and saw the child with his mother, Mary, and they bowed down and worshiped him. Then they opened their treasure chests and gave him gifts of gold, frankincense, and myrrh. When it was time to leave, they returned to their own country by another route, for God had warned them in a dream not to return to Herod.*

Gold, Frankincense, and Myrrh. Three gifts of great significance. Three gifts that point us toward the rest of the story.

Gold. A gift for a King.



This was a gift representing Christ’s royalty. Isaiah had cried out hundreds of years before the birth of Christ, *“Look! A righteous king is coming.”*

The prophet Jeremiah told the people, Jeremiah 23: 5-6, *““For the time is coming,” says the LORD, “when I will raise up a righteous descendant from King David’s line. He will be a King who rules with wisdom. He will do what is just and right throughout the land. And this will be his name: ‘The LORD Is Our Righteousness.’ In that day Judah will be saved, and Israel will live in safety.”*

A gift of gold to point to the fact that the king the prophets spoke of had arrived...a gift that reminds us, that it will be revealed to all that Christ is King in the last days, when Christ returns, Revelation 19:16, *“On his robe at his thigh was written this title: King of all kings and Lord of all lords.”* And He will rule the nations.

The gift of gold also pointed to the next segment of the story...Mary & Joseph's flight into Egypt to escape the evil, King Herod. Gold that would help them survive for the years they were in exile.

*Mary, did you know...that your baby boy has walked where angels trod...And when you kiss your little baby...You've kissed the face of God...*

Frankincense. A gift for a Priest.



This was a gift representing Christ's priesthood.

Frankincense is an aromatic resin obtained from Boswellia trees and was used throughout the Old Testament, being burned as incense in religious rituals and worship. Throughout the history of Israel, a high priest would offer sacrifices for the people. Hebrews 9:7 tells us, *"But only the high priest ever entered the Most Holy Place, and only once a year. And he always offered blood for his own sins and for the sins the people had committed in ignorance."*

Only the high priest was allowed to enter the Holies of Holies, the inner room of the Temple where the Ark of the Covenant was kept...The day of Atonement was the only day of the year that the priest entered the holy of holies to make sin offerings for himself, his family, and the *"assembly of Israel."* As the smoke of the burning offering ascended up from the altar (its chief ingredient was frankincense), the people believed their prayers would go up to God with it, and it would be a sweet savor to Him.



After making these offerings, the nation's sins were symbolically laid on a goat, the scapegoat, which was released into the wilderness to die.



At Christ's death the curtain that the High Priest had to enter through to the Holies of Holies was ripped in two.

Hebrews 10: 19-22 tells us, *“And so, dear brothers and sisters, we can boldly enter heaven's Most Holy Place because of the blood of Jesus. By his death, Jesus opened a new and life-giving way through the curtain into the Most Holy Place. And since we have a great High Priest who rules over God's house, let us go right into the presence of God with sincere hearts fully trusting him. For our guilty consciences have been sprinkled with Christ's blood to make us clean, and our bodies have been washed with pure water.”*



No longer must sacrifices be made on our behalf for Christ has made the ultimate sacrifice.

Romans 3: 23-26 tells us, *“For everyone has sinned; we all fall short of God's glorious standard. Yet God, with undeserved kindness, declares that we are righteous. He did this through Christ Jesus when he freed us from the penalty for our sins. For God presented Jesus as the sacrifice for sin. People are made right with God when they believe that Jesus sacrificed his life, shedding his blood. This sacrifice shows that God was being fair when he held back and did not punish those who sinned in times past, for he was looking ahead and including them in what he would do in this present time. God did this to demonstrate his righteousness, for he himself is fair and just, and he declares sinners to be right in his sight when they believe in Jesus.”*

The gift of frankincense pointed to the next segment of the story...Jesus would become our priest...the child would grow to become a man...teaching us, allowing God's power to work through Him to perform miracles, leading us to God, and becoming the ultimate sacrifice so that our friendship with God could be restored and forever secure.

*Mary, did you know...that your baby boy...would save our sons and daughters...that this child you delivered...would soon deliver you...*

Myrrh. A gift which would point to the sacrifice Christ would make...a gift that would point toward Christ's humanity...fully God, but also fully human...a gift that would point to Good Friday and the death Jesus would face...



The gum resin from the Commifera Myrrha tree is powdered down and used to create ointments and perfumes...In Biblical times, Myrrh was used to anoint the body for burial...Following Jesus' death, John 19: 38-42 tell us, *"Afterward Joseph of Arimathea, who had been a secret disciple of Jesus (because he feared the Jewish leaders), asked Pilate for permission to take down Jesus' body. When Pilate gave permission, Joseph came and took the body away. With him came Nicodemus, the man who had come to Jesus at night. He brought seventy-five pounds of perfumed ointment made from myrrh and aloes. Following Jewish burial custom, they wrapped Jesus' body with the spices in long sheets of linen cloth. The place of crucifixion was near a garden, where there was a new tomb, never used before. And so, because it was the day of preparation for the Jewish Passover and since the tomb was close at hand, they laid Jesus there."*

*Mary, did you know...that your baby boy...is heaven's perfect lamb...This sleeping child you're holding is the great I AM...*

Three very special gifts...that share with us the rest of the story...that the child, born in a manger, would grow up and become our King, our Priest, and through His sacrifice, our Savior.



Why did the Wisemen bring gifts? We know the significance of each of the gifts now, but what was their motivation.

The Bible tells us, in Matthew 2:1-2, *"Jesus was born in Bethlehem in Judea, during the reign of King Herod. About that time some wise men from eastern lands arrived in Jerusalem,*

asking, “Where is the newborn king of the Jews? We saw his star as it rose, and we have come to worship him.”

The Wisemen have come to worship the Christ...To do him homage; the Greek word translated “worship” here actually means to crouch and fawn like a dog at his master’s feet, to prostrate oneself to another.

That is why we come each Sunday morning...to worship Him...to come before Him and worship Jesus, who gave His life that we might be in eternal fellowship with God...to worship the God who sent His one and only Son...

Therefore, in our act of worship...what gift do we bring...Like the Wisemen of old, what gift do we bring the Christ-child, the Christ-man, our Savior...How do we crouch and fall at His feet...how do we offer ourselves to the one who gave us everything?

There are many gifts that we can offer our Lord, our God, our Savior...

First, we offer Him our worship through song and dance.



The psalmist cries out, “Praise the LORD! Sing to the LORD a new song. Sing his praises in the assembly of the faithful. O Israel, rejoice in your Maker. O people of Jerusalem, exult in your King. Praise his name with dancing, accompanied by tambourine and harp.” Again, the psalmist cries, “Praise the LORD! Praise God in his sanctuary; praise him in his mighty heaven! Praise him for his mighty works; praise his unequalled greatness! Praise him with a blast of the ram’s horn; praise him with the lyre and harp! Praise him with the tambourine and dancing; praise him with strings and flutes! Praise him with a clash of cymbals; praise him with loud clanging cymbals. Let everything that breathes sing praises to the LORD! Praise the LORD!”

The Bible tells us, “And David danced before the LORD with all his might, wearing a priestly garment. “

There are a great many styles of music and dance used in the church today to give God praise, to worship Him, to honor Him. Hymns, contemporary, Southern Gospel, rap, and rock music soar to heaven every week in churches throughout our country. Some churches people dance in the aisles before the Lord. What type of music or dance does God deems worthy to be a gift...God



tells us in, Isaiah 29:13, *“And so the Lord says, ‘These people say they are mine. They honor me with their lips, but their hearts are far from me. And their worship of me is nothing but man-made rules learned by rote.’”*

It’s not the style...it’s the heart. Are our hearts truly focused on Him?

If our hearts are focused on whether we like what we are seeing and hearing, then our hearts are no longer focused on Him...they are focused on us...One author writes, *“Worship offers a form of self-denial: In worship I remove myself from the center of things. Perhaps no greater challenge exists for most of us than to make a worship experience about God rather than about us. We seem to have a propensity to think of worship as meeting our needs. But that’s not worship – it’s idolatry. As two women left a worship service, one complained, ‘I didn’t really care for that.’ Her friend had a spunky reply: ‘Good, because we weren’t worshipping you.’ The only thing that matters about our worship is that God cares for it.”*

God cares for our worship...God receives our gifts...when our hearts are truly focused on Him.

What other gifts do we bring to the Christ child? We bring our testimony.

Paul’s directions to Timothy ring true for all of us. 2 Timothy 4: 1-5 – *“I solemnly urge you in the presence of God and Christ Jesus, who will someday judge the living and the dead when he appears to set up his Kingdom: Preach the word of God. Be prepared, whether the time is favorable or not. Patiently correct, rebuke, and encourage your people with good teaching. For a time is coming when people will no longer listen to sound and wholesome teaching. They will follow their own desires and will look for teachers who will tell them whatever their itching ears want to hear. They will reject the truth and chase after myths. But you should keep a clear mind in every situation. Don’t be afraid of suffering for the Lord. Work at telling others the Good News, and fully carry out the ministry God has given you.”*

The verbal form of the Greek word for Evangelism, meaning *“to bring”* or *“to announce Good News”* occurs fifty-five times in the New Testament, and is woven throughout the Bible, seen in the life of Isaiah, Jeremiah, Jonah, Peter, Paul, John and so many others who risked their lives and even gave up their lives in order to share what God had done for them and for all people.

The psalmist cries out, Psalm 105: 1-2, *“Give thanks to the LORD and proclaim his greatness. Let the whole world know what he has done. Sing to him; yes, sing his praises. Tell everyone about his wonderful deeds.”*

Another gift we bring is our offerings.



As someone once said, *“Everyone wants to give God credit...but few want to give Him cash.”* God knows the power money has over our lives...Jesus spoke of money more than any other subject...when we give we are trusting God to take care of us, we are obeying His Word which calls on us to support His Church and to give to those who are poor and less fortunate...and our trust and obedience are an act of worship, and a meaningful one because of the sacrifice involved. We are giving up things that we could have for others and for God’s church...

Our money is not the only thing we offer...We offer our service and our time. These offerings are not in place of a monetary offering but in addition to...We offer our gifts, time, energy to the work of the church. We take *“next steps”* in our walk with God, committing ourselves to learn more about Him, to grow in our relationship, to put our faith into action throughout the week. All of this is worship.

Colossians 3:23 – **“Whatever you do, work at it with all your heart, as working for the Lord, not for human masters...”**

Another gift is prayer.



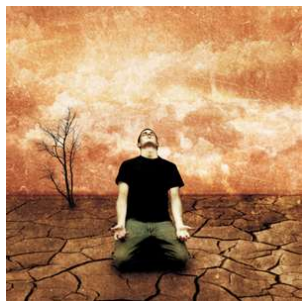
John Bevere writes, *“There is a call – no, a cry – coming from the heart of God and with each passing day its intensity increases: ‘Why are you satisfied without my presence; why do you remain distant when you could have intimacy with Me?’”*

Within the book of James 4:8, we find the a great invitation, *“Come close to God, and God will come close to you.”*



As A.W. Tozer writes, “*God wills that we should push on into His presence and live our whole life there.*” When we pray, it is an act of worship...drawing ourselves close to God, adoring Him, giving God thanks, and trusting Him with the issues we face.

Lastly, we give God our life.



John 15:8 – Jesus said, “***When you produce much fruit, you are my true disciples. This brings great glory to my Father.***” What fruit is your life producing? How is your life glorifying God?

The Wisemen brought gifts to the Christ child that first Christmas night...the night the greatest story ever told began...Ever since that night, those who believe, those who understand who that baby in the manger is...who understand that he grew up and was nailed to a cross...that understand Jesus died for them...Those who believe still bring gifts...gifts of music, dance...gifts of testimony and offering...gifts of prayer...the gift of one’s very life...

The One who gave us everything is worthy of so much more than we can possibly give...Let us continue what the Wisemen started...like them, let us react to the news “It’s A Boy” by traveling to the manger, bowing before the Christ, and giving Him all we can...and let us give it with all our hearts.