

“The Perfect Gift for a King”

Matthew 2:1-12

I love giving gifts for Christmas, don't you!

I love finding the perfect gift for someone and then watching them open it

Of course the danger is that what you think is the perfect gift

Might turn out to be less than perfect.

I remember one year my son's favorite tv show was “Scrubs”

So I bought him a set of scrubs to wear. He never wore them.

He wasn't really as excited about receiving that present

As I was to give that present.

Apparently watching “Scrubs” is different from wearing scrubs.

The flip side of the picture is that that children in our k plus program

Receive presents each year and we get to watch them open the presents

And they just love the presents they get- dolls, trucks, harmonicas.

And it brings joy to all of us to see them enjoy the presents.

You can tell they like the presents because of the excitement in their eyes,

And the fact that they immediately start playing with the present,

And they tell others about what they got.

So if we struggle so much to give gifts to each other how can we possibly give

The perfect gift to the king- our savior Jesus Christ.

Can you imagine the Magi traveling all the way from Persia or modern day Iran

To Bethlehem and hoping against hope that they brought the perfect gift.

The journey is long, probably 1000 to 1200 miles about the distance to NY.

It would have taken anywhere from 3 month to 12 months

To travel that distance by camel and foot.

And the gifts that they brought had to be purchased

Well before they knew anything about the child.

It's ironic that we know very little about these mysterious magi

Except that they were from the east

and yet we know exactly what they brought Jesus-

Gold and Frankincense and Myrrh.

In fact a whole song has been written about "We Three Kings"

Inspired primarily by the gifts they brought.

And the song implies that the gifts were:

-Gold for a King;

-Frankincense for Deity;

- And Myrrh to foreshadow his death on the cross.

Our children shared the meaning of these gifts in their pageant last week.

But in some sense these physical gifts were just the place holders

For the real gifts that the Magi offered to the King of all creation.

The real gift giving started as the Magi started their 1000 miles journey

over several months to visit this new "King of the Jews". They interrupted

their lives to prepare for this king. They went to a far away land,

Endured all the risks of the journey to follow a star.

The second part of the gift was that they knelt down and paid him “homage”

I don’t really know that word “homage”.

The most recent translation Common English Bible says “honor”

But I don’t think that “honor” is sufficient to explain what they did.

The Greek word “*Prosekunesan*” really means “worship”.

Now these Magi were not Jews,

they were not Christians (hadn’t been invented yet)

they certainly weren’t Presbyterians

so who knows what form this adoration took

but what they did as they entered the house, knelt down,

paid homage and presented their gifts to Jesus Christ,

sure sounds like worship to me.

I had the opportunity to visit the Church of the Nativity six years ago

With a group of Christians, Muslims and Jews.

The traditional birthplace of Jesus is underneath the Chapel

In a little cave like area with a star to mark the spot.

Not what I expected but my Muslim friend

As he got to the grotto immediately kneeled down

Kissed the spot that marked the birth of Christ

And worshipped God.

And I felt as if I were in the presence of a modern day Magi.

And after their encounter with Jesus the last we hear about the Magi

Is that *“they left for their own country by another way.”*

After their encounter with Jesus they didn't just continue

In their ignorance and naiveté but they changed.

They didn't go back to Herod, they didn't even take the same road

That they had taken to get there.

They were changed and their life path was changed.

They went back to their home country presumably

To tell people what they had seen and heard

Like the shepherd who returned to tell

All that they had seen and heard

But they returned changed

They returned by another way,

They returned according to God's way.

And that is the last gift-

to be changed by our encounter with God this Christmas.

If Christmas is over and we have prepared in this journey of Advent

And we have worshipped (we're here today on Christmas morning)

But we are in no way changed then we haven't really

Received the greatest gift of all-

the gift of God's life saving, life changing Son.

And after all: God is the great gift giver on Christmas.

And our best gift to God is to receive, enjoy and appreciate the perfect gift

That God has given us in His Son Jesus Christ.

And yet our gift giving and gift receiving pales in comparison to God's gift giving

So how did gift giving change over the years.

The whole gift giving tradition at Christmas that started with the Kings giving

gifts to the Christ child continued with the story of St. Nicholas,

a Bishop of Myra in the 4th century in Asia Minor who

gave gifts to children in need in Asia Minor;

It was perverted in the Middle Ages as the Kings decided Christmas

Should be a time when their subjects gave them gifts;

It was partially restored by Good King Wenceslas who decided that

He should be the one giving gifts of food and clothing to his subjects

Martin Luther brought the St Nicholas and King Wenceslas traditions

Of giving to Germany in the 1500's;

The Dutch made the gifts into a treasure hunt with clues and shoes

And the America's made gift giving an industry with Santa Claus

And "The Night Before Christmas" written in 1820's

By Clement Clarke Moore.

But the story doesn't end there; Clement Clarke Moore donated land to

Start General Theological Seminary in 1817 and taught Hebrew there.

One of the students at GTS, John Hopkins became the music

Director at GTS and wrote the song "We Three Kings"

So we end up where we started with the Three Magi

The gifts of gold, frankincense and myrrh that they offered to Christ

As they responded to the greatest gift of all- Jesus, God's Son.

The rest of us are really just children receiving God's precious gift of Christ

And the best gifts we can give to God are our response to God's gift.

Anticipation and preparation to receive the gift ,

Worship, adoration and praise of Christ.

and lives that are changed by the Holy Spirit.

The perfect gift to the King is " *to love the Lord our God with all our*

Heart and might and soul.*" **Happy Christmas. Amen*