

40-02-01-The Gifts of the Magi

Advent, Magi, gifts, surrender, Christmastide

Mat 2:11

What gift can we bring for the birth of the King?

INTRODUCTION: (read **Text:** *On 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 and of incense and of myrrh.*)
 –[**house** not a **stable**; the Bible shows it took about two years from *Christ’s birth till the Magi came*] However long it took, **the gifts of the Magi (title)** were Christ’s *1st birthday presents*. During our busy *holiday activities*, **these gifts remind us** of *Whose birthday we’re celebrating* at Christmas.
 –**Everything in Scripture is for our instruction**. So, **why are the Magi mentioned? What is being taught through them?** The **answers** to these two questions **may help us** with a more *personal question*: **HOM.idea.**

I. Who were the Magi?

- A. Were they *wise men* or *kings*? [**Tertullian** (225 AD) called them *kings*.]
1. The OT spoke of *kings*– **Ps 72:10-11**, ..kings of Tarshish and of distant shores will bring tribute to him; the kings of Sheba and Seba will present him gifts. All kings will bow down to him, and all nations will serve him.
 2. Because of the 3 gifts, a “3 *Wise Men*” legend started sometime before 600 AD, [**naming the wise men** *Melchior, Balthasar and Gaspar*].
- B. Literally, these were *Magi* (a term of **ancient and obscure** origin)
1. Its **general definition** [**HolmanBD**]: “Eastern wise men, priests, and astrologers expert in interpreting dreams and other ‘magic arts.’”
 2. There were 3 possible *backgrounds* for these Magi: *that of...*
 - a. **Medes**: a **sacred tribe of priestly wise men** who gave **counsel to Persian kings** through the use of *sorcery* and *astrology* .
 - b. or **Magicians**: a **name given to those practicing magic** (like Simon Magus and Elymas the Sorcerer in the *Book of Acts*).
 - c. or **Magians**: **Persian priests who**, like the Jews, had *only one God* and *no idol-worship*. (These Magi **anticipated a Messiah**, probably because of **the prophecies of Daniel**, who had been (**Dan 5:11**) “chief of the magicians, enchanters, astrologers and diviners”).

TRANS: Knowing very little about Jesus, these Magi “*bowed down and worshiped him,*” **bringing Him gifts**. But they set a pattern of **what to bring to the newborn King** by first bringing themselves. *So...*

II. Who do these Magi represent?

- A. They represent **God's will** for the world's *wise men*. *His will is**...
1. *for philosophers [lovers of wisdom] to submit to true Wisdom*– **1Cor 1:30**, “Christ Jesus...has become for us **wisdom** from God.”
 2. **for scientists [students of natural law] to kneel to the Law-Giver* (acknowledging the *God of Science*, the *Creator* of natural law)
 3. *for religionists [seekers of God] to worship the God Who became Man*. (*Occultists & New-Agers* often extol ancient religions, but their *man-centered beliefs* don't match the *God-centered* faith of the Magi.) [from **The Three Visions of Balthasar**: We vowed to leave our magic arts/ And serve this King the Star announced,/ To bow to Him with humble hearts./ And you who hear my mystic song,/ If you are wise, as I am gray,/ Will also seek to find that King,/ And worship Him, and wait His day.]
- B. The Magi also represent **us**, the followers of Christ:
1. *They were kings and priests; and so are we*– **Rev 5:9b-10** (NKJV), For You were slain, and have redeemed us to God by Your blood out of every tribe and tongue and people and nation, and have made us **kings** and **priests** to our God; and we shall reign on the earth.
 2. *They came to Christ; and so have we* (**v.2:11a**):
 - a. *coming to the house*– *Why do we come to the house of God? What do we hope to find here? We seek to be in God's presence!*
 - b. *they bowed down*– A big obstacle in coming to God is often *pride of knowledge*, which keeps our *finite* minds from *bowing down to the revealed will* of the *Infinite Mind* [**Hippolytus**: “We must not act in accordance with our own mind or our own will... We must look at things rather as God has chosen to make them known through Scripture.”]
 - c. *they... worshiped him*– The heart of the matter is a “heart” matter: *Each person must decide Who or what they'll worship. (We and the Magi chose to adore Jesus Christ, “the newborn King.”)*

TRANS: We've examined who the Magi were and who they represent.

But, “*Then they opened their treasures and presented him with gifts...*”

III. What were their gifts?– *they... presented him with gifts...**

- A. *of gold* [It was a **Persian custom** to approach kings with a gift, and the only fit gift was *gold*, king of metals]– Their *gold* symbolized their surrender to this newborn King's authority [A **defeated officer** who knew of Admiral Nelson's fame for courtesy, extended him his hand, but was told, “Your sword first, and then your hand.”] (If we would surrender fully to Christ the

newborn King, we must *lay down our swords at His feet!*)

- B. **of incense* (*frankincense*) [**a priestly perfume** burned in censers at worship]– a fit gift for Jesus, born to be a Priest [**Lat., pontifex**, *bridge-builder*]
1. It stood for the need of a Mediator between *sinners* and *God*.
 2. As a *priesthood of believers*, we must take up censers, burning with the *perfume of grace* and attracting others to Christ!
- C. **of myrrh* [a **spice** used for *embalming*]– a fit gift for One who was to die– **John19:39** says that Nicodemus brought *myrrh* to use in wrapping Christ's body. [**The word “myrrh”** is used only twice in the NT, like *parenthesis marks* wrapped around Christ's birth and His death.]
1. Jesus was born to be the sacrificed Lamb of God. (*Myrrh* cast the shadow of the Cross on the manger cradle of the newborn King.)
 2. *Myrrh* represented dying to self– **John15:13** “Greater love has no one than this, than to lay down one's life for his friends.” (Jesus calls us by His Cross to *follow* Him by taking up our own crosses.)

CONCLUSION:

–**What can we bring for the birth of the King**, the *Mediator* between God and man, the *Savior* of the world? The Magi *opened their treasures and presented gifts to Him*. Let's open the treasure store of our own hearts: –*Let's give Him our swords, surrendering our allegiance* to His reign alone, no longer fighting against His will with *our own defiant will*. –*Let's open our hands, taking up priestly censers* burning with the sweet-smelling *aroma of grace*, as we seek to bring others to Christ. –*Let's yield our hearts for His self-denying love to be lived out in us*. –closing: Christina Rossetti's Christmas poem,

In the Bleak Midwinter

In the bleak midwinter, / Frosty wind
made moan, / Earth stood hard as iron, /
Water like a stone; / Snow had fallen,
snow on snow, / Snow on snow, / In the
bleak midwinter, / Long ago.

Angels and archangels / May have
gathered there, / Cherubim and
seraphim / Thronged the air; / But his
mother only, In her maiden bliss, /
Worshipped the beloved / With a kiss.

Our God, heaven cannot hold him, /
Nor earth sustain; / Heaven and earth
shall flee away, / When he comes to
reign; / In the bleak midwinter / A
stable sufficed / The Lord God
almighty, / Jesus Christ.

What can I give him, / Poor as I am? / If
I were a shepherd, / I would bring a
lamb; / If I were a wise man, / I would
do my part; / Yet what can I give him– /
Give my heart.