

Fil-Am Community Church

Pastor David Bennett

December 30th, 2012

Key Verse: Matthew 2:1-12

“Precious Gifts for the real King of the Jews”

Good morning Fil-Am, it is so good to see you here this morning, I hope you all had a wonderful Christmas. Let's lean forward as we approach the New Year and get right into our message this morning.

Let's get into the **Word of God**, but more importantly let's get the Word of God **into you**.

This morning we are going to spend a little time discussion The gifts that were presented to the baby Jesus but before we get to that we are going to spend a little time looking at King Herod and the wise men first before we get to their encounter with Jesus.

I had to modify my sermon a little this morning because pastor Donel touched a lot of it last week in his sermon, mentioning the wise men and their journey to find this Baby King.

He also sparked an interest for me to dig a little deeper into the mind of King Herod that I think is fitting to mention before we get to the actual gifts presented to the baby King.

Let us first lay the ground work by looking at the Butcher of Bethlehem, King Herod.

We want to talk this morning about a man who hated Christmas even more than the Grinch and Scrooge combined. In fact, he tried to kill Christmas.

It's a strange and bizarre story that doesn't sound right amid the Christmas carols, bright lights, and messages about peace and Joy.

This is the Christmas season. Most of us have Christmas trees, and our hearts are full -- and everyone's happy, right? No, there's one man who isn't

happy about Christmas. In fact, he's pretty angry about the whole thing.

Only he's not a make-believe character. He's for real. He hates Christmas . . . and he's never even heard the word. He's the man history calls Herod the Great. His story is told in Matthew 2.

King Herod was born into a politically well-connected family; Herod was destined for a life of hardball and power brokering.

At 25 years old, he was named the governor of Galilee, a high position for such a young man.

The Romans were hoping that Herod could control the Jews who lived in that area.

In 40 B.C. the Roman Senate named him “**King of the Jews.**” It was a title the Jews hated because he was anything but religious.

Herod was the embodiment of the **ultimate villain.** He exhibited 4 classic characteristics:

1. Preoccupation with Power.

Herod was addicted to power. Power has been described as the ultimate human obsession. If it were an alcoholic beverage, Herod was passed out on the floor drunk with it.

The Bible links power, more often than not, to something we call sin. If power is defined as the ability to control resources in order to secure one's own destiny, then Herod was the epitome of power.

His life, and his use of power, can be summed up in three words

HE WAS...

- **CRAFTY**
- **CAPABLE**
- **CRUEL**

Herod was extremely **capable** in what he was asked to do. Soon after becoming King, he wiped out several bands of guerrillas who were terrorizing the countryside, reminds me of the God father where Al Pacino wipes out all his competition in one swoop as he takes over from his father, Marlon Brando.

In addition to being capable, Herod was also very **crafty**. He arranged all his relationships as conduits for power -- it was one thing he could never get enough of.

His craftiness had no barriers. Because he had a morbid distrust of anyone who might aspire to take his throne, he was also known as a **cruel** man.

He held tightly to the reins of power and brutally removed anyone who got in his way. Over the years he killed many people:

- ✓ His brother-in-law,
- ✓ his mother-in-law,
- ✓ two of his sons,
- ✓ and even his wife

Herod the Great was a cruel killer that was his nature. He murdered out of spite and he killed to stay in power.

Human life meant nothing to him. The great historian Josephus called him "barbaric."

The intensity of Herod's cruelty grew in direct proportion to the amount of power he possessed. At least we can say that he lived a consistent life.

2. Preoccupation with Possessions.

Herod wanted it all. He wanted everything a Roman Caesar had. With the knack of a Donald Trump, Herod built...

- ✓ 7 palaces and
- ✓ 7 theaters one of which seated 9,500 people.

- ✓ He even built stadiums for sporting events the largest could seat 300,000 fans! He even constructed a new temple for the Jews.

3. Preoccupation with Prestige.

Herod loved to make an impression on others. He built entire cities with state of the art architecture and amenities and named them after his superiors. He was also a smooth talker and had a special ability to win over his opponents. Several of his 10 marriages were prestige-oriented and politically motivated. He once married the daughter of his leading rival in order to gain prestige and power.

4. Preoccupation with Paranoia.

Ever since an enemy poisoned Herod's father, who was a king himself, Herod was beset with paranoia. He went to great lengths to make sure a secret ingredient never ended up in his soup.

Remember he killed or had killed:

- ✓ His brother-in-law,
- ✓ his mother-in-law,
- ✓ two of his sons,
- ✓ and even his wife

When he became king, he commissioned tens of thousands of slaves to build over 10 emergency fortresses, all heavily armed and well provisioned. In addition, he established an elaborate network of spies. Anyone with a plot to dethrone Herod was sniffed out and eliminated before he could eat breakfast. Those who opposed him would be invited to a midnight swim in the Jordan River with a cement boots on.

He ruled for more than 40 years, until he clashed with another King, the one who was also called, **The King of the Jews.**

Now, with that as background, let's fast-forward to the final months of Herod's life. Herod the Great, King of the Jews, is slowly dying of a disease. His body racked with convulsions, his breath foul, his skin covered with open sores, he's rapidly losing his mind.

But he is still the King. And then, one day word comes to him in Jerusalem that some visitors have arrived from the East.

These were strange men . . . with a strange question. Pastor Donel touched on them last week, so I won't go over it all again, but know that they were important enough to have an audience with the King upon their arrival.

They then asked him a question that shook him to his core in Matthew 2:2: *"Where is the one who has been born King of the Jews?"*

We saw his star in the east and have come to worship him. They were looking for someone who was born King of the Jews. Herod was probably thinking, "Wait a second?" Herod was the King of the Jews.

But he wasn't born a King. He had to fight and kill to gain that title. What were these men talking about? Why didn't his spies tell him about this threat to his throne?

Matthew 2:3 says that, *"When Herod heard this he was disturbed and all Jerusalem with him."*

The word "disturbed" means to **shake violently**. And no wonder. He had finally subdued his enemies. He had killed all his foes and was ready to die triumphantly. Now these strangers come with their strange question. No time to rest now.

One more person to kill a young boy who claims to be King. No wonder the Bible says that all of Jerusalem was shaken -- no one knew what this wacko would do next.

Now, even though Herod is old, remember the three words that define him

He was **capable, crafty, and cruel.**

He knew that somewhere in the ancient oracles was a prediction of the exact place where the Messiah, or special one of God, was to be born. So he called together all the ministers and religious leaders to find out if the Bible had anything to say about a coming King, they responded in;

Matthew 2:5-6, *“In Bethlehem in Judea, for this is what the prophet has written: ‘And 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 be the shepherd of my people Israel.’”*

Herod winces when he hears the word, ruler. Suddenly things are getting serious. Maybe these strangers are on to something. What if the boy they are looking for is the One the Bible predicted would come?

He must take Him out now.

So Herod called the stargazers secretly and found out from them the exact time the star had appeared. He sent them to Bethlehem and said “Go and make a careful search for the child. As soon as you find him, report to me, so that I too may go and worship him.”

Off they went. As Pastor Donel mentioned last week they traveled a great distance on foot between 800 and a 1,000 miles to find the Baby Jesus. Some scholars said this journey took as long as two years to complete,

I cannot give you an exact time but will tell you that they traveled for a long time to find the long awaited for King.

I’ve always wondered why they weren’t disappointed when they finally found Jesus. After All....

- ✓ He did not look like a king.
- ✓ His home did not look like a castle.
- ✓ He had no scepter in his hand.
- ✓ He commanded no armies,
- ✓ He gave no speeches,
- ✓ He passed no laws.
- ✓ He could not walk or talk.
- ✓ No royal decree came from his lips.
- ✓ There was nothing to make you think he was a King.
- ✓ To the outward eye, he was nothing but a peasant child born in dire poverty.

But to the Magi, **he was a King.**

They gave themselves in worship first.

Before they gave what they had in their hands, **they first gave their hearts** to Jesus.

They bowed down and worshipped and then they opened their treasures.

Friend, God wants your **life before He wants your gifts**. Have you ever surrendered yourself and submitted yourself to the absolute Lordship of Jesus Christ? If not, do it today!

He possessed more royalty in his crib than Herod had in his fine palace. Somehow these wise seekers saw beyond the present and into the future -- and in deep faith, they **worshipped him**.

That word literally means “to kiss toward and to **intensely adore**.” They somehow knew that this child would one day rule the world and they were not ashamed to fall on their faces before Him.

When at last they had found the Christ, they bowed down and worshipped him. They presented him with gifts.

Listen, it is not enough to discover who Christ is or even what he had done, I know we have said it countless times but it is not enough to memorize scripture verses, it is not enough to have head knowledge of who Jesus was.

We fall short if we only discover certain truths about him without also giving ourselves to him in faith and **Worship!**

Think of the inherent contrast. Although we read that the Magi met King Herod, they make no effort to worship him.

But when they finally find young King Jesus, these educated and extremely intelligent men fell on their faces before Him.

To this baby they gave the honor due a king. What Herod craved, the baby received.

Let's spend a little time and look at the gifts they brought to worship the Baby King this morning...

5. **Gold pointed to his majesty . . . for he is king.**

Gold is one of the rarest and most expensive metals. It represented the wealth and power of a king.

A Gift Worthy of His Lordship – Gold

- ✓ The gold represents money have you turned over ownership of everything you have to Jesus?
- ✓ Gold has obvious worth. It is a gift fit for royalty.

God deserves the very best that we can bring in our hand; but more than that...

- ✓ God deserves the very best we can bring in our heart.
- ✓ Such a great king deserves our loyal obedience and submission.

6. **Frankincense pointed to his deity . . . for he is God.**

A Gift Worthy of His Holiness – Frankincense

- ✓ Frankincense was used in the temple worship of the Lord.
- ✓ It represents the infant's deity
- ✓ He is truly God born in a human body.
- ✓ Frankincense was a symbol for prayer.

Frankincense is mentioned 17 times in the Bible. It was used as one of four sweet scents compounded together to make the ceremonial incense of the Jews. It was used in both sacrifices and prayer. Its aroma was always present in the Temple grounds.

As such, frankincense is a picture of praise and worship of Christ as the Holy One of God come down in flesh among us.

Psalm 95:6 *“O come, let us worship and bow down: let us kneel before the LORD our maker.”*

Isaiah 9:6 *“For unto us a child is born, unto us a son is given: and the government shall be upon his shoulder: and his name shall be called Wonderful, Counselor, **THE MIGHTY GOD**, The everlasting Father, The Prince of Peace.”*

Are you bringing your **hopes and dreams to God** in prayer on a regular basis?

7. Myrrh pointed to his humanity . . . for he was destined to suffer and die.

A Gift Worthy of **His Sacrifice**: Myrrh

Myrrh is an aromatic gum resin obtained from several trees and shrubs found in both northern Africa and throughout the entire East.

Myrrh was used in Egypt in the embalming process of mummification.

There are 22 references to myrrh in the Bible.

Myrrh was used to anoint every part of the tabernacle in the wilderness. It was myrrh that was poured out on the feet of Jesus just a week before his death.

- ✓ Myrrh a kind of perfume made from the leaves of a rose.
- ✓ It was used in beauty treatments, but when mixed with vinegar it became an anesthetic.
- ✓ After a person died, myrrh was used to anoint the body and prepare it for burial.
- ✓ John 19:39 tells us that after Jesus died, his body was wrapped in linen along with 75 pounds of myrrh and other spices.
- ✓ The gift of myrrh then, pictures his suffering and death.
- ✓ Myrrh stands for suffering and sadness.
- ✓ Have you given all your pain and heartache to Jesus this Christmas?

How prophetic to have myrrh as one of the gifts presented to him at his birth.

This child was born to die.

Matthew 1:21 *“And she shall bring forth a son, and you shall call his name JESUS: for He shall save his people from their sins”*.

Luke 2:11 *“For unto you is born this day in the city of David a Savior, which is Christ the Lord”*.

These gifts served as a validation of their worship. It reminds me that we can't worship God without making a sacrifice.

The mysterious men from the east knew something Herod would never know. That the little boy in a tiny house would someday rule the world. They **were not ashamed** to give him gifts fit for a King.

Just before the wise men step off center stage and drift into the twilight of history, we are told one last fact about them in verse 12: *“Having been warned in a dream not to go back to Herod, they returned to their own country by another route.”*

Now back to the **Butcher** of Bethlehem,

Realizing that he has been tricked, Herod freaks out. Remember that he is a bloodthirsty killer by nature. All the worst instincts of a lifetime of cruelty now come to the surface.

Keep this in mind because it's the only way you can understand what is about to happen. When Herod realized that he had been outwitted by the wise men, he was furious and did something worthy of Hitler or Stalin or Saddam Hussein.

He ordered the cold-blooded murder of all males less than two years of age. Herod the Great had become the Butcher of Bethlehem.

Rarely in history was a battle between Kings so dismally stacked?

Herod the capable, crafty, and cruel dictator filled with power, possessions, prestige, and paranoia, armed with firepower, resources and armies, and the little Jesus, held safely in the arms of his loving mother.

To say that the two Kings, Herod and Jesus, merely “crossed paths” is way too mild.

King Herod represented the popular perspective on power: Get it, keep it, and use it.

King Jesus had a more simple, yet radical philosophy: Use power to serve others.

No wonder the two kings clashed. They both possessed immense power, but how they chose to use it revealed the hearts of two radically different men. One was a tyrant, the other a servant.

One was consumed with **self-interest**: The other focused on pleasing God and **serving others**.

One manipulated, slandered, deceived, and coerced; the other healed, touched, taught, and loved.

Herod, with all his wealth and power, came to ruin. In the final year of his life, his body was infected with disease; his pain was so bad that he often **screamed throughout the night**.

Jesus, after a life of poverty and lowly position, descended yet further, to a rough, put together wooden cross. **His cries**, like Herod’s, also pierced the night.

By completely **yielding His** power, He also died. But there was a critical difference!

Herod could not save himself from death; Jesus could have, but **He chose not to.**

In life, Jesus willingly suffered, from the abuse by religious leaders, the ignorance, hard-heartedness, and rejection of many people, the constant threats to His life, the betrayals of friends, the beatings, and His death on our behalf.

All for a single purpose: to demonstrate God's outrageous love.

While Herod wielded the power of hate and self-protection, forming armies, building fortresses and killing at will,

Jesus wielded the power of liberating love.

Which King Are You Following this morning?

Because you see, Herod the King and Jesus the King still clash today.

In fact, they compete with each other for control of our lives.

There is one thing you can do to help root out the influence of Herod in your life: It is simply to....

Give your Life to Jesus.

Romans 12:1, *"I urge you brothers, in view of God's mercy, to offer your bodies as living sacrifices, holy and pleasing to God which is your spiritual worship."*

When you give your entire life over to Jesus Christ, this ultimate demonstration of worship is very pleasing to God and we drive a stake into the heart of Herod's influence in our life.

- ✓ Power loses its grip because we've humbly deferred to the King of Kings.

- ✓ Possessions are not ours, they belong to God. We are merely managers of what He's given.
- ✓ Prestige has no pull, because we are living to please God.
- ✓ Paranoia flies out the window because when God is for us, who can be against us?

Herod refused to make the 5-mile trip from Jerusalem to Bethlehem to worship the real King of the Jews.

He was content to keep his distance. He didn't want to go and have his own kingship challenged. He was so close and yet so far away.

I suspect that some of you are close to understanding the true meaning of Christmas as well. Friends, I encourage you to take the trip.

As you do, you'll come face-to-face with a powerful demonstration of God's outrageous love, a love that can liberate you. And, as you search for Jesus, you'll find in Him all that you are looking for.

You have to serve somebody. Who will it be?

You see, once you transfer ownership of your life from the influence of Herod the Scrooge to the Christ of Christmas, you will experience freedom from sin and selfishness.

With the Ultimate Ruler leading the direction of your life, you can be transformed from a Grinch who focuses only on getting, to a Giver who puts God and others first.

What can we give to the One who saved us?

A little over 2,000 years ago Jesus was born fully God incarnate in the form of Jesus Christ!

Here is a question for you this morning....

Have you searched for Him?

If so have you found Him yet?

If so, what are you giving Him this Christmas that is worthy of His

- ✓ Lordship
- ✓ Holiness
- ✓ Sacrifice?

I'd like everyone to stand right now. If you are ready to make that change this morning by putting your faith and trust in Jesus Christ,

I'm going to ask you to do what the Wise Men did seek Jesus and when you find him **bow down** and **worship** him..

Would you bow to Him today?

You don't have to get down on the floor to do this, but I would like you to just bow at the waist if you are willing to surrender your life to Christ, come to the front if you have anything you would like to give to the real King of the Jews this morning.

Let us pray...

Heavenly Father, when I think of the gifts the wise men brought:

Gold – let me bring to Jesus what I hold precious

Frankincense – let me bring Christ my true worship

Myrrh – let me die to self and live for You, day by day

Lord in your mercy Hear our prayer... Amen