

WORSHIPPING THE SAVIOR LIKE THE WISE MEN Matthew 2:1-12

The Christmas season is almost over. In a couple of days, our thoughts will then turn to the changing of the year. 2024 to 2025. When we write a check – which we rarely do nowadays – to filling out forms or what-have-you which involves putting the date in, we have to train our minds and fingers to adjust. We'll be in this mode at least in the first few days or weeks maybe. It's a ritual we do every year.

But before we make any changes in the next few days, there is something that shouldn't change. And that is to continue to focus our thoughts on our God who never changes despite the changes that are going on around us. So, this morning I'd like us to talk about worship. I'd like to talk about how we can worship God in a way that is pleasing to him. And I'd like to use the example of the wise men in helping us to learn how to worship God.

We're in the last part of our series "Welcome the Savior." This morning, I've entitled my message, "Worshipping the Savior Like the Wise Men". It's based on Matthew 2:1-12.

Now, what is worship? The original Old English word was *worth-ship*. It suggests the act of attributing value and worth to something or someone. To worship is to say, I believe that this thing or that person is absolutely worthy. You can worship money and say that's the absolute worth in life. But when you say of God, you say of Jesus, you're worth it all, you're absolutely worthy – that is worship of a Divine Being.

Sadly, it's a missing ingredient in a lot of people's lives. A missing ingredient that can add much to their lives. Nowadays, we're all so busy that we don't take

the time to really worship God. What I'd like to do is help you with that. Because when you worship it actually changes you. It does something great to you.

You can think of your life like this **big map**. There's point A which represents the busyness and the messiness and the routine of your life. There is this destination, point B called "Worship." It's this place that we want to get to where we know there's a sense of peace. We know there's a sense of confidence. We know there's a sense of hope.

So how do you get from where you are to this place of worship?

We're going to let some guys show us how – some of the first worshippers of the Savior. They knew how to find Jesus. They knew how to find worship. They came all the way from the east, these guys, to find Jesus and to worship him. They were called the wise men. We're going to let them show us how to worship.

Now, let's look at what happened with the wise men. Please turn to Matthew 2:1-12. In Matthew 2, verse 1 and following, the Bible says, "*After Jesus was born in Bethlehem in Judea, during the time of King Herod, Magi from the east came to Jerusalem and asked, 'Where is the one who has been born king of the Jews? We saw his star when it rose and have come to worship him.'* When King Herod heard this he was disturbed, and all Jerusalem with him. When he had called together all the people's chief priests and teachers of the law, he asked them where the Messiah was to be born. 'In Bethlehem in Judea,' they replied, 'for this is what the prophet has written: "But 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 shepherd my people Israel." Then Herod called the Magi secretly and found out from them the exact time the star had appeared. He sent them to Bethlehem and said, 'Go and search carefully for the child. As soon as you find him, report to me, so that I too may go and worship him.' After they had heard the king, they went on their way, and the star they had seen when it rose went ahead of them until it stopped over the

place where the child was. When they saw the star, they were overjoyed. 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, frankincense and myrrh. And having been warned in a dream not to go back to Herod, they returned to their country by another route.”

So let's let these wise men sort of guide us on this journey of worship. Let me share with you now the **four parts of worship that we learn from the wise men.**

1. START WITH A SINCERE DESIRE.

You have to start with a sincere desire. It may sound too simple to say but if you don't want to worship you're not going to worship but that's the way it is. You have to want it. Worship is not going to burst in the front door of your life. You've got to go to his front door. Just like these men who went to meet with him. The Bible says in Matthew 2:1, **“Magi from the east came to Jerusalem.”** Who were these guys? They're also known as wise men for the east. So, who were they?

First, Magi is the plural of magus. A magus is a member of a hereditary priestly class among the ancient Medes and Persians. They had expertise in science and agriculture and math and history and astronomy and religion. And because of this they were sort of the power behind the power. They were the king makers of that day. That's why they were interested in a king that was going to be born. If it helps you, they were like the Jedi knights of that day without the lightsabers. That's what they were like. They were the power behind the power. They had heard that there was a king to be born, but a special king. They came to worship him. Not just to see him but to worship him. And they came all the way from the east. This journey of months and months, a very expensive, costly journey to walk all the way from the east to see this new king indicates more than just some intellectual curiosity. These guys were hungry to see this. They wanted to see this.

BTW, there could be more than three wise men who went to see Jesus. It could be a big contingent. People thought there were only three because only three gifts were presented to Jesus. But as we can see later, each gift had a significant meaning.

Anyway, when you think worship, one of the parts of worship is this desire, this wanting it in our lives. Like when you're hungry, when your stomach starts churning and growling, your stomach is yearning for something. That's a physical want. A physical need. It's easy to figure out how you satisfy that. What do you do? You look for food. And you eat. Just like during our Christmas party last week. There were lots and lots of food. Food was there to satisfy our hunger. We yearned for it. I'm sure many of you were yearning for it even while I was preaching.

Physical wants are fulfilled in physical ways. And spiritual needs have to be fulfilled in spiritual ways. That's what worship does. That's how it meets that need in my life.

One of the mistakes we make is we have a spiritual need, and we try to fulfill it in a physical way. What are these spiritual needs that I'm talking about? How do you know that you're hungry inside?

It's when you feel *empty* inside. There's a longing for something inside. Folks, that's a spiritual hunger. It's when you feel this need for hope inside or a need for significance. At your job, at your relationships. Those are all spiritual hungers. Many times, we try to meet those needs with physical means. We feel empty inside, so we go out and shop till we drop. We feel empty inside, so we eat more. We feel empty inside, so we binge on movies. It puts off the need for a while, but it doesn't meet the need.

This, by the way, is where all our addictions come from. It's by trying to meet spiritual needs in physical ways. We keep trying and trying and trying but it never

works. Because what we really need is worship. What we really need is what only God can give into our lives. He is the one who can fulfill these needs of emptiness and the need for hope and the need for connection. He's the one who has the power to do that. Spiritual hunger is fulfilled by spiritual means.

Because you have to want worship and because there's this hunger that has to be fulfilled often, as you read through the Bible you'll see God talking about this need that we have in physical terms. He'll talk about, "You need the living water that only I can give to you". Or "You have to taste and see that the Lord is good". What he's saying here is "You've got this spiritual need, you need to come to me to meet that need."

Regarding the wise men, where did this desire come from? It came because they saw a message that knew they could trust. This message was in the Scriptures. Although they were Persians, they studied the Hebrew Scriptures as well. That's the Old Testament. They knew that the Messiah was coming as prophesied.

Now, a star guided them to Jesus. How did they know that the star was God's message? I don't know. No one knows. There are lots of theories how they knew from that star that Jesus was being born. But they knew. That's why they're wise. Because of that they went to see this king that was being born.

God has a message for you as well. It's in his word, the Bible. When you read the Scripture, God says I'm able to meet the needs in your life. So, recognize that a spiritual need can only be met in a spiritual way. That's where you start. Start with the sincere desire that recognizes worship is connecting with the one who made you. When you do that needs are met in your life at deeper levels than you can imagine.

That's the first thing these wise men teach us. There's a second thing they teach us about worship. You

2. DEVELOP AN EXPECTANT SPIRIT.

In other words, you expect Jesus to show up. You expect God to show up. This is the faith factor. There's something about your expectation that causes God to work in powerful ways. When you expect to meet God in worship you tend to meet God in worship. These guys came and they expected to meet Jesus.

In Matthew 2:2 they say, *"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."*

There's no *hesitation, no second-guessing, no doubt*. They *expected* Jesus to be there. There's a great lesson in that. There's something about you spending just a few minutes on the way into a worship service expecting Jesus to show up in your life.

Most of us, we show up, and we're just rushing in. Me too. I understand that. You go into the parking lot and find a spot. If you're late, you park a bit too far. You've got to walk too far. It irritates you. Then, you get in and sit, and because you were tired last night, you just try to rest for an hour. You wouldn't want to sleep because I'll notice you.

I remember years and years ago, I was attending this church in Jersey City, and the pastor asked everyone to stand and he prayed and it was quite a long prayer, and I was tired that morning actually because I slept really late and I don't remember now why, and I didn't realize I fell asleep while standing, and when I woke up, I was the only one standing. It was just a few seconds but people thought I was really spiritual.

Anyway, coming to church has become a customary habit, something you do every week and so there's no more of an expectation to meet Jesus. But, folks, if we show up because we expect to meet him, there's something about that that changes everything. "Jesus is here. He cares about me. He loves me. He has something to say to me."

It's pretty interesting when you look at the Christmas story we just looked at, at the different people and the different attitudes. In this story you've got some wise men. You've got Herod the king who's going to see Jesus as a rival and try to destroy him. And you've got the religious leaders who tell them where to find Jesus.

If you look at them, they all had different attitudes. The wise men, they were expectant. They expected Jesus to show up. Herod – he was resistant. He didn't want Jesus to show up. But the religious leaders.... They were indifferent. They were just thinking, "We know it. We've got it memorized." They knew exactly the answer. He's in Bethlehem. That's where he's supposed to be. But do you notice? They didn't show up in Bethlehem. They didn't follow the wise men. They knew the answer but they didn't do anything about the answer.

I've got to tell you something. God can work a lot better with expectant and resistant people even than he can with indifferent. That's the worst. Jesus one time said, I'd rather have you be hot or cold. Don't be lukewarm or I'm going to spit you out of my mouth if you're lukewarm. Pretty clear language.

These religious leaders they became familiar with the truth. So they knew the truth but it didn't really impact their lives. You can become familiar with worship and it starts making an impact on your life. The first time you come to a worship service in a place it's like heaven opens up. You're there and like a few months later you're like counting the tiles on the ceiling. Trying to keep from going to sleep. You're trying to stay focused. You and I have to do something so that we stay focused. We stay expectant.

There's a lot of things you can do but these wise men teach us one of the main things you can do. When these wise men came they asked a question. That question helped them to find Jesus. "Where is the one?" One of the things you

can do to keep your attitude of expectancy going is ask God questions. Then you come to worship and wait for him to answer in your life.

The truth of the matter is there's some questions in your life that are only going to be answered in worship. Questions like, What's God really like? Questions like, Why is there evil in this world and Why is this evil happening to me? Questions like, How am I going to I find hope in this circumstance?

I can give you a logical answer to a lot of those questions but it's not going to be enough for you. You need more than that. You need something that goes to the depths of your soul. And that happens in worship. That's where you recognize that even though I may not be able to comprehend or understand or grasp it all, God is great enough to do that. There's something that happens in worship that answers those deepest questions of life. When you need an answer that goes to the depth of your soul you need worship.

As we continue on this journey with the wise men, the third thing they teach us that in order to worship you have to

3. DECIDE TO HUMBLE YOURSELF.

You decide to humble yourself. It's quite a moment in history when these great men, these wise men from the east, show up in Bethlehem and they bow before a baby. What a moment!

In Matthew 2:11, *"On coming to the house, they saw the child with his mother Mary, and they bowed down and worshiped him."*

They recognized they were in the presence of someone greater so they couldn't help it. They bowed down. They didn't just say there's this new king to lead a country. They knew there was something greater going on here.

You and I when we worship it's when we recognize that we're in the presence of someone greater. So much greater you can't even comprehend how much greater. You see, we don't just spend time in his presence when we're here in a

worship service at church. We are constantly in the presence of the greatness of God. Worship doesn't just occur inside the four walls of a room. It goes beyond it. That is a very humbling thought.

Do you know the song, "I Love You, Lord"? Our Gen Z youth, do you know that song? I'd like to tell you the story of that song, but first, how about we sing it and worship?

I LOVE YOU LORD

Ok, the story. The song was written by Laurie Klein, a young mother, living in a small camper while her husband attended college in 1974. Isolated in the Oregon wilderness, she had no community, no nearby friends, and no local church body to call home. Making things worse, she did not drive, so she could not go visit friends or family who lived farther away than walking distance. Her loneliness drove her to invest more fully in her daily time of devotion to God. The song rose out of her daily quiet time in the morning before her toddler woke up. The words tumbled out of her mouth as she was quietly playing guitar. Recognizing that they had some merit, she quickly wrote them down. The song found its way to churches and became one of the most widely recorded in all of contemporary Christian worship, having been covered at least 70 times by the year 2000. Beyond that, it was one of the most sung by believers the world over, appearing in more than 25 hymnals.

Folks, when you humble yourself you're connecting with God's greatness. You're recognizing who you are and you're connecting with the greatness of God. And when you connect with the greatness of God that affects you in ways you don't expect.

I don't know if you've ever touched a live wire. I remember when I was 6, I stuck my little finger in an outlet at home. It gave me a jolt. I think I survived. You know you've connected with power when you do that. It's very obvious.

When you humble yourself and connect with God's greatness, you know you're connecting with power. And it affects you in ways you can't even explain sometimes. That's the greatness of what happens in worship. Instead of losing consciousness, you become alive.

When those wise men showed up that day they saw the star and they went in and they realized Jesus was there. We humble ourselves in the greatness of God because Jesus is here.

It's not like he's sitting up in heaven watching all the worship services going on today on a big screen TV. Like somebody would watch NFL, watch all the games at once. No. He's here. He's God. He's able to be present everywhere at once. He's here with us. And in being here worshiping him we humble ourselves before him as part of what goes on in worship.

These wise men teach us a fourth thing about worship. The fourth things they do is the most famous thing we know about these wise men.

4. PLAN TO GIVE GIFTS.

You plan to give gifts. The most famous thing about these wise men is they gave three gifts. These three gifts are famous because they were part of the worship in their lives.

Worship is not just taking in. Worship is also giving out. It's also taking action. In worship, we receive from God but we also give back to God and others.

So in Matthew 2:11, the Bible says, *"Then they opened their treasures and presented Him with gifts of gold and of frankincense and of myrrh."*

A lot of us we never practice this part of worship. For one thing what do you give God? At Christmas you think about, "What do you give the person who has everything. What do you give the person who *made* everything? How do you figure that one out?" We have what I like to call the little drummer boy

®syndrome. I have no gift to bring that's fit to give my king. What could I give that would make any difference to God?

What you could give him is yourself. He made you to be in relationship with him. So when you give him your choice, when you give him your love, when you give him your devotion, that's the greatest gift of all. You give that back to him.

It's pretty interesting. This first Christmas when you look at the gifts that they gave they actually foreshadow who Jesus is going to be. What Jesus can do in my life and your life. They also tell us about the kind of gifts that we need to give.

They gave Him gold

They gave him gold. That foreshadows the fact that Jesus is a king. Because gold is a gift that was given to kings. So they recognized him as a king when they gave that gift. Jesus is the king of kings the Bible says. This was the gift that was given to kings. Gold, lots of gold. And they gave it to Jesus.

What does that mean for you and me? When we think about what we're to give back to him. It means you give him your best. You give him the valuables. You give him the best in your life. You give him the gold in your life. These wise men, the way they gave, teaches us how to give. You give him the best of yourself, the best of your time, the best of your resources, the best of your abilities because he gave for us. He gave all those things to us so we give them back to him. That's part of worship.

They gave Him frankincense

They also gave frankincense. As they gave frankincense they were recognizing Jesus as a priest. In the temple worship of that day, they used frankincense as a perfume that went up before God in the sacrifices that were made. Jesus is our priest. A priest is a bridge builder, someone who goes between God and man. Jesus is the one who goes between God and us. He stands in-between to bring us

together because of what he did for us on the cross and at his resurrection. He wants to bring us close to God. That's what Jesus does.

So what does this mean I give him? You give him your best. But you also give him your worst. You give him your sin and your guilt. That may sound like a very strange gift. But Jesus died on the cross to give you the gift of forgiveness. Some of you need to pray that for the first time right now. You can pray with your eyes open: I need your forgiveness. *Jesus, I need your forgiveness.*

Some of you prayed that prayer a long time ago but somehow you've wandered from it lately and you're letting these thoughts of the old sins, the old ways, come back again and again. They're haunting you right now. Recognize his forgiveness.

What better gift can you give Jesus at Christmas than recognizing the gifts he gave to you? The gift of his forgiveness. You give him your best. You give him your worst.

They gave Him myrrh

Then these wise men gave him myrrh. In that myrrh they recognized him as Savior. Myrrh was a spice that was used in the embalming of bodies. So here even in Jesus being a baby we see this foreshadowing of his death. The fact that one day he's going to give his life for you and me so that we can be forgiven. So that we can be saved from our sins.

What does that mean in our gift to him? It means you give him your all. Give him your best, give him your worst, then give him your all. He gave his all for you. He gave his life for you so that you can have life again. So you give your all back to him. Jesus is your Savior. You give your all back to him in serving other people and in loving him. He'll strengthen you to give your all.

We can see the meaning in these gifts today. But I doubt if these wise men could see these things. All they knew was these were things of great value. They brought to Jesus something that cost them something.

That's part of worship. You give to God a decision, a heart, a direction that cost you something. You give him part of yourself. Part of your choice. Part of your decision.

So when we think about how we worship, how we follow these wise men a real simple question with this one: What gift would you like to give Jesus this Christmas? What gift would you like to give Jesus?

It may be the gift of recognizing his forgiveness. It might be the gift of trusting him with a relationship or a decision. It might be the gift of recognizing a new habit in your life that will help you draw close to him in the years to come. What gift? As I say that, what comes to your mind?

The gift of a change in your life. The gift of a hope where you haven't had hope. As you think that's the gift I'd like to give, you're worshiping. That's part of worship – giving gifts back to him. We plan to give gifts.

Folks, real worship is worshipping Jesus the way the wise men worshipped him. **Start with a sincere desire. Develop an expectant spirit. Decide to humble yourself. Plan to give gifts.**