

### What Will I Give to Jesus?

Isn't the Christmas Season a great time to experience the **joy of giving** gifts? Didn't you find **satisfaction** in giving gifts that demonstrated your love and appreciation for your family, your friends and others? Didn't it **warm your hearts** to give those gifts with no thought of any reward or recognition. But no matter what you gave or how much it warmed your heart, it can't really be compared to God's gift. **God gave** His dearest and His best – His own Son to be our Savior. On Christmas Eve/Day we were privileged to unwrap that Gift that goes well beyond our human words.

Yesterday, January 6<sup>th</sup>, was Epiphany, often called the **Christmas of the Gentiles**. It's the time we announce the appearing of God's Son as **God's gift to all nations**. The story of the Magi from the East gives us a **second chance** at Christmas. We can talk about "gifts" again, but this time it will be **our gifts** to God, gifts that **we give** to God with no thought of any reward or recognition. The Wise Men show us how we can do that. Because of God's Gift **they came to give gifts** to the One who was, "*a light to lighten the Gentiles*" and the "*glory of God's people Israel*."

What if you had been there, what would **you** have offered? While it might be hard to answer a hypothetical question like that, it is not out of place for us to ask today, **WHAT WILL I GIVE TO JESUS?**

The story of the Wise Men has fascinated Christians down through the centuries. Actually we **know very little** about them. Legends abound as to **where** they came from – Babylon, Persia or someplace else... about **how many** there were, the traditional three or as many as twelve. Some have even given them **names**, Gaspar, Melchior, and Balthasar. None of those legends can be proven.

It's best for us to stick to the simple passage before us, (1-2) "*After Jesus was born in Bethlehem of 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 in the east and are come to worship Him.'*"

So we know they came from someplace to the **east**, and when they ended up before Herod they asked him a question that indicated they had carefully **studied Scripture** which says, "*And a star will come out of Jacob, a scepter will rise out of Israel.*"

It also becomes clear that they were **men of science and learning**, quite possibly astronomers. But the most significant thing we learn from their words is the **purpose** for their coming, "*We saw His star...and are come to worship Him.*" So often when we think of these Magi or Wise Men, we focus on their gifts of **gold, frankincense and myrrh**. But let's not forget that their primary reason for coming was not to give gifts, but to **worship Him**.

The **star** that had led them to Jerusalem had disappeared and forced them to inquire in Jerusalem, "*Where is the one who has been born king of the Jews?*" It was a question that caused quite a bit of **stir** in the city, especially for King Herod. After they were given direction, based on the Old Testament prophecy of Micah to go to Bethlehem, the **star again appeared** and led them to a small house in Bethlehem where Mary and Joseph and the baby Jesus were now staying. This is likely six months to a year, or longer after the birth of Jesus.

In verse 11 we're told that "*coming into the house, they saw the child with His mother, Mary, and they bowed down and worshiped Him.*" Before they offered a single gift, they fell to their faces in sincere and honest adoration. In the ancient world, **that** was the position of worship. And there is no other explanation for their journey of incredible **length** and **difficulty**, other than their burning desire to **worship and adore** the newborn Savior. This was no excursion born out of **curiosity**. They hadn't gone to **impress** their friends, nor were they

seeking an **emotional high**. They were seeking their Savior, as they said, “*We saw His star...and are come to worship Him.*”

What could these Wise Men have to say to us today? One thing they would tell us is that **nothing is more important than worshipping Christ**. They would certainly tell us, “Give Him your worship and praise!” They would say, “Look at us! The only reason you know anything about us is because we **found the Savior**.” And it is true. We know nothing else about them, before or after that event. The only thing that counts is that **they found Jesus** and in Him found that which **truly satisfies**.

And nothing more counts in our lives than to **know Jesus**, know His **power and love**, know Him as our Savior from sin and death. When we come here to worship on a Sunday morning, we, too, are saying that, more than anything else, we need Jesus. We **find Him** in His **Word** and holy **Sacraments**. And like the Wise Men, coming to Him, we find that which truly satisfies – we find **relief** from the burdens of our sins, we find **joys** in our daily life, and new **hope** for the life to come.

Obviously, worship is something that takes some **effort** on our part. We can only imagine the **difficulty** that the Wise Men experienced and the **sacrifices** they made to make this lengthy journey. Would we have **questioned** them if they had said, “Our first responsibility is to our **families**, to our **jobs**, or to our **careers**?” Would we have **challenged** them if they had explained that the **length** of the journey and the **expenses** involved were just too great? We would easily have excused them.

But the fact is, their **worship** began long before they arrived in Bethlehem, even before they decided to leave home and follow the star. Worship for us is always much more than just sitting there and being a spectator. When here it involves taking part in **songs and hymns** of praise, if not singing joyfully, at least, focusing on the message and meaning. It means listening attentively to God **words**, and in whole-heartedly offering **prayers**. It involves **confessions** of faith and **actions** that reflect the love in our hearts.

So these Wise Men gave Jesus their **worship**. We are not told **how long** it went on. Was it for ten minutes or for an hour or, perhaps, much longer? Nor are we told exactly **how** they worshipped. A part of their worship undoubtedly involved **listening to Mary and Joseph** tell of the miraculous **birth** and of the **song** that the angels. Perhaps they also **sang** a **song** of gratitude and praise to God, maybe a Psalm or two. And it could well have been that their worship involved **talking** with Mary and Joseph **about the Child**, and what His birth **meant** for them and for all people. And **then** they presented Him gifts – gold, incense and myrrh. And remember, there was nothing last minute about these gifts. They had been **planned and purchased** long before this.

The **first gift** mentioned is **gold**. Whether a beautifully crafted object or a large, unformed chunk of it, gold was an appropriate gift to set before a **king**, a gift befitting His high office. If we ask ourselves, “**WHAT WILL I GIVE TO JESUS?**” we know one answer is **our gold**, that is, our material offerings. Love for our Savior moves us to bring **gifts of money** for a ministry that has blessed **our lives** and that renders so many spiritual blessings **to others**.

The **next gift** mentioned is **frankincense** or **incense**. It comes from the **resin** of certain trees. After it is dried and scrapped, the white dust is burned to release a fragrant aroma. It is very expensive. The Old Testament mentions incense quite often, especially in the context of **offering up prayers** to God. The Psalmist says, “*Let my prayers be set before you as incense.*”

The Wise Men saw in Jesus, a **high priest** who would be their **intercessor**, offering up prayers to God on their behalf, prayers that were sure to be pleasing to God. Listen to the comfort the Apostle Paul found in knowing the Savior would be our **intercessor**: (Romans 8) “*Who will bring any charge against those whom God has chosen? It is God who justifies. Who is he that condemns? Christ Jesus, who died – more than that, who was raised to life – is at the right hand of God and is also **interceding** for us.*”

When we ask ourselves, WHAT WILL I GIVE TO JESUS?, we know another answer is our **prayers**. Prayers in which we say: “**Thank** you, Lord, for all Your blessings to me.” “I’m sorry, Lord, please forgive my many sins.” “Lord, give me **guidance, direction and protection** in my daily walk.” “Lord, **lead** me safely to my heavenly home.” Those kind of prayers, coming from a believing child of God, do come as **sweet smelling incense** before the throne of God and pleasing to Him.

The **final gift** the Wise Men presented was **myrrh**. This gift was also harvested from the **resin** of a tree, which once dried, the shavings would be used in very rare and expensive perfume. But myrrh takes on its greatest significance when used in connection with the burial of the dead. This gummy substance would not only **hold** the cloth wrappings together, but its fragrant odor would also help **disguise the odor of death**.

Recall how Joseph of Arimathea and Nicodemus took the body of Jesus down from the Cross, lovingly wrapped it in finest linen, and generously spread a **mixture of myrrh** and aloes between the wrappings. And just six days before our Savior’s death, He had been a guest in the home of Mary and Martha and Lazarus. It was Mary who broke open a jar of nard, a **form of myrrh**. She poured all the perfume on Jesus’ feet and then wiped His feet with her hair. The whole house was **filled with the fragrance** of that fragrant perfume. Remember how Judas hypocritically called it a terrible waste? But Jesus defended her and pointed out that she had done this **in anticipation of His burial**. Her faith had moved her to worship in this way.

Again, when we ask, WHAT WILL I GIVE TO JESUS? we know that along with all the **other gifts**, we offer Him everything, **our very lives** as a sacrifice of praise and thanksgiving. Paul said it so well, (Romans 12) “*I urge you brothers, in view of God’s mercy, to offer your bodies as living sacrifices, holy and pleasing to God – this is your spiritual act of worship.*” Our whole life is a “*living sacrifice*”, from beginning to end.

The Wise Men gave their very best. Certainly Jesus is worthy of the **very best** we have to offer! So, once more we ask, WHAT WILL I GIVE TO JESUS? And we answer: “Lord, I give You my **worship and praise**, my grateful prayers, my **gold**, my **incense** and **myrrh**. More than that, I give You **my life** as a living sacrifice of thanksgiving to You.” May that **always** be your answer!