

Unprecedented Promise - Matthew 2:1-11
Notes, Family Worship, Bible Reading

Notes from the Sermon

Gold, frankincense, and myrrh, now those are odd gifts to give to an infant. Of course, the gold might be nice for the parents, you could set up a college fund. And even though the frankincense's primary use was Temple worship, it was incense and could change the aroma of a room after a dirty diaper change. But myrrh, primarily a burial spice. Definitely in the regift category, right! The magi (AKA, wise men, and we have no idea how many of them showed up) came a long distance following this miraculous star to find the King of the Jews. The word Magi refers to people who served as magician/astrologer/priests in Persia and Babylon. We know very little about them other than this text which tells us that Jesus had a star they saw from the east and traveled here to worship this King. They pass through Jerusalem to get a little more information. Apparently they knew of the prophetic promises of the coming King, so they stopped to inquire of Herod the Great as to where this ruler would be born. Herod had ruled for Rome in Israel for around 30 years. While he did accomplish some very good things for the Jews, including a rebuild/renovation of the Temple, Herod was an awful and violent human being. A couple wives and a few sons were in the grave by his hands as he was known to wipe out anyone he saw as a threat and who did not submit in absolute allegiance. But he ruled, and the magi stopped to say "hello". Herod went right to the Jewish priests and scribes (think Bible scholars) to find out what Scripture said, and they immediately went to Micah 5:2 which predicted Bethlehem as the birthplace of the Messianic King. Upon hearing this these people left and headed the six miles to Bethlehem, continuing to follow this star, which rested over the place where Joseph, Mary, and the child Jesus resided. Upon entering they fell on their faces blowing kisses in worship (this is what the Greek word "worship" in this story means), opened their treasures and gave these gifts. Then, after getting some rest and having a dream where God warned them of the wicked intentions of Herod, they departed by another route back to their home as Gentile worshipers of the infant King. Meanwhile the current ruler is fuming, about to commit genocide and the religious leaders who should have been first to the birthplace in Bethlehem go back to their religious duties and rituals.

The gifts they gave were an act of honor and sacrifice, but the gifts themselves served a couple key purposes. First, Joseph and Mary are about to have to scoop their child up and flee for their lives to the land of Egypt, and God has miraculously provided for their needs. But on a deeper level the gifts represent some very specific things about Jesus' mission and identity. Gold is a gift fit for a king, something given to royalty. Frankincense was a fragrance burned and offered in the temple, used by priests to represent the prayers of the people. And, as mentioned, myrrh was a fragrance ointment often used in burials, and represents the suffering of the prophets speaking for God and reveals the ultimate purpose Jesus will fill in his death as predicted by the prophets.

In the Old Testament God gives the people three different types of leaders, all of them important, and yet different for God's covenant people. Each has a role to play as God's representatives. Of course, kings ruled. But Israel really didn't need a human king, they already had a True King in their God. The other nations had men who ruled ruthlessly without justice. Israel was to recognize that they were already a Kingdom and had a King. Yet, they cried out for a human ruler, and God gave them kings to rule. Yet, these kings had one job, and that was to rule in such a way that they were living reminders that the human king was not really the King. A few pointed to God as the True Ruler, leading people to worship of Jehovah and justice in relationships. Most though thumped their own chest and declared that they were the only true ruler, and they ended up wicked, unjust tyrants. Priests were to serve as the go between or mediator between God and the people. They brought God close to the people and the people close to God standing between. A person had to be born a priest in Israel, coming from specific families in the Tribe of Levi. They went to God on behalf of the people by offering sacrifices to atone or cover the sin that separated them from God's holiness. They went to the people on behalf of God by studying and interpreting the Torah, the Law of God in the first five books of the Bible. And the prophets spoke for God, giving His very Word to the people. The most common words out of the prophet's mouths and pens was "Thus saith the Lord..."

Of course, the nation failed to live in covenant relationship with God and these roles did not fulfill their ultimate purpose in the Old Testament. While some kings were righteous, most were evil and the people followed their idolatrous leadership. Priests continued to carry out the rituals of Israel's worship but failed to honor God with their own lives and turned the religious activity into mere ritual with no meaning. And there were two issues with prophets. First, false prophets were more than happy to bring a message from the Lord that did little more than affirm kings and the people in their sin. And when God sent true prophets, rather than listening they abused and murdered them. But all of these roles point us to Jesus, our true and better King who ushered in the Kingdom of God ruling in perfect righteousness and justice. Jesus is the true and better priest who offered something much better than bulls and lambs, he offered Himself as our sacrifice to atone for sin, and has become the mediator of a better covenant. And Jesus is the true and better prophet who not only speaks the Word of God, He is the Word of God, the ultimate revelation of the True and Living God in history and for us!

We don't know if the magi understood this when giving these gifts, but Matthew gets it when he writes this fact into the narrative of Jesus' birth. May we respond as the magi did in worship, surrender of our very lives, and obedience to God!

Bible Reading for the Week

Daily Bible Readings

Sun	Mon	Tues	Weds	Thurs	Fri	Sat
Song of Solomon 3	Song of Solomon 4	Song of Solomon 5	Song of Solomon 6	Song of Solomon 7	Psalms 121	Psalms 122

Reading from this past week: Matthew 2:1-11

Reading in preparation for this coming Sunday: Psalm 1, 117

Family Worship

Song - *God Rest Ye Merry Gentleman/We Three Kings*

<https://youtu.be/V7ljsErV-zg>

Gospel Project

Story: Faithful in Hard Times

Story Point: Peter encouraged believers who faced persecution.

Big Picture Question: How does the Holy Spirit help Christians?

Answer: The Holy Spirit comforts us, shows us our sin, and guides us as we live for God's glory.

Scripture: 1 Peter 1-2

New City Catechism

Question #52: What hope does everlasting life have for us?

Answer: That we will live with and enjoy God forever in the new heaven and the new earth, where we will be forever freed from all sin in a renewed, restored creation.

Verse: Revelation 21:1-4

Scripture

Matthew 2:1-11

- Who are the Magi and why did they follow the star?
- How did these men respond to Jesus when they found Him? How is their response different than Herod, the religious leaders, or the people of Jerusalem?
- Who are the prophets, priests, and kings? What were their roles for Israel and how is Jesus the fulfillment of each one?
- What needs to happen in our lives for us to rejoice with exceedingly great joy?

Prayer

*Pray that we would enter the New Year with worship, faith in Jesus, and obedience.

*Give thanks for Jesus who is our true and better Prophet, Priest, and King.