

Gold: A Gift for a King *Matthew 2:1-12*

INTRODUCTION

Christmas and presents. Those two words fit together nicely, don't they? So natural is the combination that we often use them together in a simple descriptive phrase: *Christmas presents*.

One of my earliest childhood memories involves the Christmas presents my brother and I received. I was three years old that year. My brother Tim was one. My Dad had been recalled to the Army during the Cuban missile crisis and our family was living in a rented house on a bay in Massachusetts. As you might expect, we had very little money that year, certainly nothing extra that could be blown on extravagant Christmas presents.

The sum total of our gifts under that tree was a coloring book and box of eight crayons to share, and a game. My mom cried about that for years afterward. The game we got involved taking suction cup darts and shooting them across the room at three crows hanging on a spindle. If you hit one, it would spin around and around. We lay on our floor with Dad for hours, shooting at those birds and laughing each time we managed to hit one.

As grown-up Christians we try to downplay the "presents" part of Christmas, don't we? Instead we talk about the "real meaning" of Christmas. We have even created other descriptive phrases to remind ourselves that it is NOT about presents under the tree, phrases like "Jesus is the reason for the season." Dr. Seuss gave us a memorable rhyming phrase in his classic story about the Grinch:

What if Christmas, he thought, doesn't come from a store. What if
Christmas...perhaps...means a little bit more!" (Dr. Seuss, *How the Grinch Stole Christmas*)

And while you will never hear me advocate for more gift-wrapped presents under a tree I do want you to pause for just a moment with me this season to remember that Christmas has always been inseparable from presents. You simply cannot tell the story of Jesus without thinking about the giving of gifts:

For unto us a child is born, unto us a son is **given** ... (Isaiah 9:6)

Our theme for this Advent and Christmas season is "Unwrapping Christmas." Isaiah 9:6 is our theme verse. I encourage you to memorize it if you don't know it already. That's only part of the whole – and that part is the point of emphasis for our theme. The entire verse reads:

For unto us a child is born,
unto us a son is given,
and the government will be on his shoulders.
And he will be called

Wonderful Counselor, Mighty God,
Everlasting Father, Prince of Peace. (Isaiah 9:6)

My five year old granddaughter Allie has memorized that whole verse and will be reciting it in her pre-Kindergarten Christmas program next week. So if a five-year-old can memorize it ... well, so can we.

On these three Thursday evenings we are going to read the same Gospel passage: the visit of the Magi. You will hear it again on the first Sunday in January as we celebrate Epiphany. On Thursdays, we are going to look individually at the three gifts given to the Christ-child by those visitors from the East.

On Sundays our focus will be on what God has given to us. That will culminate at our Christmas Eve services where the text will be our theme verse:

Unto us a child is given. (Isaiah 9:6)

Much of the story of the Magi is told in the legends of the church. For example, the Scriptures don't record their names or exactly how many wise men there were. It is the legend that tells us there were three and that their names were:

Gaspar (or Caspar), Melchior, and Balthasar

So much of the wise men story is not clear from the Scriptures. But their gifts for the Baby Jesus? Well, the text leaves no doubt about those:

They opened their treasures and presented him with gifts of gold, frankincense and myrrh. (Matthew 2:11b)

Tonight we begin with the gift of gold. I'm calling it:

A gift for a king

It is a time honored tradition that whenever you visit the ruler of a country you take along an extravagant gift. In 1880, Queen Victoria gave President Rutherford B. Hayes an ornate desk carved out of timber salvaged from the British ship H.M.S Resolute. Years later, that desk is now a fixture in the Oval Office.

- Theodore Roosevelt was given a live zebra and a lion from Ethiopia.
- Richard Nixon received a panda from China.
- George W. Bush was given 300 pounds of raw lamb meat from Argentina.
- Australia gave President Obama crocodile insurance. No one has figured out what that one was all about.

In 1 Kings 10, the Bible tells us about the day the Queen of Sheba came to visit King Solomon:

She came to put his reputation to the test by asking tough questions... She came to Solomon and talked about all the things that she cared about, emptying her heart to him. Solomon answered everything she put to him—nothing stumped him... She then gave the king four and a half tons of gold, and also sack after sack of spices and expensive gems. (1 Kings 10, *The Message*)

On the day I wrote this sermon, the price of gold was \$1,764 an ounce. Solomon was given 4½ tons. That calculates out to more than a quarter of a billion dollars based on today's market price.

The pattern was clear. When you visit a king, you take gold.

- The mere presence of gold among the three gifts of the wise men was in itself a deeply political and theological statement.
- The wise men were not coming to see a baby. They were coming to see a king.
- They said as much when they stopped in Jerusalem to get directions from King Herod.

"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." (Matthew 2:2)

They believed that this child was a king. "He has been born king..." they said. Not "he will be a king someday." He is king now. Target gift cards would not suffice. They were bringing gold.

That creates a dilemma for me. I don't have any gold to bring to the Christ-child this Christmas. A gift of that magnitude would empty our bank accounts and leave us destitute. And yet the protocol is:

You don't come before the king with trinkets.

So what can we bring? What can we possibly bring that matches the value expected when you are in the presence of the king? What can you give to such a king?

Give Him ... you.

Listen to these words from Jesus, as recorded in Matthew 10:

Are not two sparrows sold for a penny? Yet not one of them will fall to the ground outside your Father's care. And even the very hairs of your head are all numbered. So don't be afraid; you are worth more than many sparrows. (Matthew 10:29-31)

#1: YOU ARE OF GREAT VALUE BECAUSE OF WHO YOU ARE

According to the Scriptures you and I have been created in God's image.

As I was preparing this sermon, I read an article on the website of the Institute for Creation Research. It is a long and fascinating article. I want to read to you just a couple of paragraphs:

Mankind has been fascinated with the form and function of the human body from the very beginning. For beauty and sheer simplicity of line, it is unmatched. As a machine, the human body is the pinnacle of God's work, formed on the sixth and last day of creation, after which God declared, it is "very good."

Chemically, the body is unequalled for complexity. Each one of its 30 trillion cells is a mini-chemical factory which performs about 10,000 chemical functions. And every cell has one trillion bits of data! Each one also replaces itself every seven years. Each one is independent, yet cooperates with many millions of other cells.

Even though there are over four billion people alive today, each body is exorbitantly expensive (and about 50 billion humans have been born since Adam). If its chemical elements were bought on the open market, a medium-sized human body would cost at least six million dollars.

Wow! You are not worthless. You are the six million dollar man!

#2: YOU ARE OF GREAT VALUE BECAUSE OF WHAT YOU COST

The Scriptures also tell us that we have been "bought with a price."

... you were bought at a price. Therefore honor God with your bodies. (1 Corinthians 6:20)

The theological word here is "redemption." We have been redeemed – purchased by the blood of Jesus on the cross. God sacrificed His only Son to redeem us. That is a steep price to pay, and He did it because you have great value.

APPLICATION

The greatest gift you can give to Jesus this Christmas is the gift of you. You are the gold, the treasure. By kneeling in His presence and confessing that He is your King of kings and Lord of lords is the equivalent of this first gift of the Magi.

Tonight and every night during this Advent season, I encourage you to pause to make this declaration:

Lord Jesus, You are my King, and I give you my life.

Amen.

Following my sermon each week we are going to sing "We Three Kings." There are five verses in that hymn. Each week we will sing the first verse and the last verse, but out of those middle three we will only sing about the gift of the Magi that has been our focus for this evening. Tonight that is in verse 2.