

Title: Gifting Like the Magi  
Date: 12/29/24  
Subject: Gifts believers should give to God  
Scripture: Matthew 2:1-12; 1 Peter 2:5, 9; Hebrews 13:15; Romans 12:1; Psalm 51:16, 17

19% of gifts given this Christmas will be returned. If you want to give gifts that won't be returned, give God the gifts he wants, that are on his list. Please turn to Matthew 2 to read about some men who showed up bearing gifts for the Christ child.

Read Matthew 2:1-12

Someone with a unique, quirky, offbeat sense of humor speculated what would have happened if the wise men had been wise women. First, they would have asked for directions which leads to the second, they would have been on time so that 3) they could help Mary with the delivery. 4) they would have cleaned the stable. 5) they would have made a casserole. 6) they would have brought practical gifts.

The wisemen are shrouded in mystery. The Bible doesn't provide much information. They came from the east. They wanted to know where the king of the Jews was born. They'd seen his star in the east and had come to worship him. They got there some time after the birth. They weren't late. They got there at God's appointed time. They found the child in a house with his mother Mary.

Where did they come from? Modern day Iraq, Saudi Arabia, Iran, farther east? How far did they travel? Speculation says as much as 1000 miles or maybe over 2000 miles and double that when you take into account their round trip. Who were they? They go by many titles - Magi, wisemen, kings. And their names – were they really Casper or Gaspar, Melchior, and Balthasar as the tradition holds?

How many wisemen? Were there only three? Doesn't seem likely that three foreign travelers would disturb wicked King Herod and all of Jerusalem. Some traditions hold there were 12. Others estimate 100 plus.

Because they studied the stars, they're often called astrologers which in that day was more a combination of astrology and astronomy. They were part of the educated class. The English word Magi comes from the Greek “magos” which comes from the Persian “magupati.” It was a title given to priests who were known for their ability to interpret the meaning of what they saw in the night sky. They were students of all things spiritual, the worldview of their culture and those of surrounding people groups.

What about the gifts? They were lavish and appropriate for the short term and the long term. Gold – symbol of wealth and royalty, points to Jesus as being the king. Frankincense - a fragrant resin was mixed with incense to be used in worship. (Learn about the properties of frankincense oil for relieving pain). Points to Jesus being God. Myrrh - another resin often used in perfumes and for embalming. Points to Jesus' sacrificial death.

There was more cost involved. There were the expenses associated with their travel. There was considerable time commitment. Their reputation probably took a hit as other wisemen doubted their conclusions and mocked them – both before the trip and then afterwards.

What gifts could we, should we, will we bring to the Savior? I conducted a word search of the Bible verses that have the words give, giving, offering and sacrifice. Sacrifice means giving something that costs the giver and is something of value.

I. our position. While we're not Magi in the sense of being astronomer astrologers or kings, I want you to view yourselves as a bunch of wise guys and wise women who are priests. We find this term in several Scriptures.

Read 1 Peter 2:9

This is how the Lord views us. Pretty impressive pedigree he's bestowed on us. "A royal priesthood" connects back to the V. 5.

Read 1 Peter 2:5

"a holy priesthood." We've been made to be a kingdom and priests to serve God and the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ (Revelation 1:6, 5:10). Every person who's placed their trust in Jesus Christ belongs to the priesthood of believers. All of us are to be active in priestly duties - spiritual service to God to offer spiritual sacrifices acceptable to him and declare the praises of him who called us out of darkness into his wonderful light. Spiritual acts include physical tangible things.

One source identifies the duties of priests: "(1) reflect the holiness of God and that of their high priest, (2) offers spiritual sacrifices, (3) intercede for man before God and (4) represent God before man" (NIV study Bible note on 1 Peter 2:5).

The verses in 1 Peter 2 tells that we are to offer spiritual sacrifices. One of these is to declare the praises of him." Link this to another verse - Hebrews 13:15. Go back to through James to Hebrews.

Read Hebrews 13:15

II. "a sacrifice of praise"

We touched on this area in our recent series – a mash up of Thanksgiving and Christmas. We focused on having an attitude of thanks, giving thanks to God for God, heaven, Christ's sacrificial work, his word, the family of God and Jesus the gift that keeps on giving.

We confess the name of the Lord God. We're his followers because the Son of God entered humanity which we just celebrated. He lived a perfect life which enabled him to be the perfect sacrifice to deliver us from our sins and give us eternal life. We give thanks that there is such a God who loves and cares for people. We give praise to him because he's called us out of spiritual darkness into the light of life. We've seen Jesus as the light of the world. We give thanks for his character, for his works.

While Old Testament Jews offered thank offerings of sacrificing animals (Leviticus 7:12-15; 22:29- 30), the Lord makes it clear he's after something much deeper than people sacrificing an animal and then walking away, almost as if nothing happened. He rebuked the people for their sacrifices and burnt offerings.

The Psalmists are joined by Old Testament prophets who declared that the Lord detests their meaningless offerings and sacrifices. They needed to have a heart change so they'd live in ways that pleased God (Isaiah 1:11-17; Amos 5:21-24; Micah 6:6-8; Malachi 1:10).

We're to have lips that speak his praise. To whom should it be expressed? To God of course, but I think it's more about speaking praise of God to other people, letting them know what God has done for us. Confessing his name before others. Declaring that we're followers of Christ, he's changed us, given us hope.

It's a sacrifice because we like to take credit for accomplishments and like to receive praise.

“May these words of my mouth and this meditation of my heart be pleasing in your sight, LORD, my Rock and my Redeemer” (Psalm 19:14).

III. Sacrifice of ourselves Romans 12:1

READ Romans 12:1

God was displeased with dead animal sacrifices. He's even more detested by human sacrifices as was practiced by various cultures around the world. One of the reasons he told the Israelites to wipe out the Canaanites was because of their child and human sacrifices. It's obviously obvious that he's not calling upon people to make those kinds of sacrifices.

Instead, the sacrifice the Lord is pleased with are living sacrifices. It's the dedication of our bodies. God says that our bodies are important and we're to surrender them to him as living sacrifices that are holy and pleasing to him. It's a sacrifice because we want to be in control, be the boss, sit on the throne of our lives.

Other scriptures agree. “Do you not know that your body is a temple of the Holy Spirit, who is in you, whom you have received from God? You are not your own; You were bought at a price. Therefore, honor God with your body” (1 Corinthians 6:19, 20).

Sometimes the body as the temple of God refers to the entirety of Christians. Here it refers to each person's individual body is a sacred place where the Lord God lives even as Jesus promised that those who love him the Father and he would live in them.

Another scripture tells us “In the same way, count yourselves dead to sin but alive to God in Christ Jesus. Therefore, do not let sin reign in your mortal body so that you obey its evil desires. Do not offer the parts of your body to sin, as instruments of wickedness, but rather offer yourselves to God as those who have been brought from death to life; And offer the parts of your body to him as instruments of righteousness. For sin shall not be your master, because you are not under law but under grace... Just as you used to offer the parts of your body and slavery to impurity and to ever increasing wickedness, so now offer them in slavery to righteousness leading to holiness” (Romans 6:11-14, 19).

I heard Alistair Begg this week speak about how the world can be so enticing, and the more we listen to its voice, the more we're willing to compromise because it doesn't sound quite so bad.

Don't make excuses for sin. Don't think that it's okay to sin because the body, the physical, is evil so it doesn't matter what we do to it or with it. Offer our bodies to God. It's about making the right choice. The Lord desires that we live pure lives.

Our bodies represent the entirety of our being. It's who we are. It's ourselves. It's our person. In another spot, Paul writes about the “sacrifice and service coming from your faith” (Philippians 2:17).

Even Jesus faced the temptation in regards to his body and being. When he was in the garden of Gethsemane, he prayed again and again if there was some other way than him giving his life...but nevertheless he said whatever is your will Father let it be done (Luke 22:42).

Throughout his life, He'd given himself and his body to follow the Father's will. In the final analysis, it came down to the actual sacrifice of his human body.

Some Christians have been called upon to give the ultimate sacrifice of their lives because they are a Christian. Most Christ followers won't be called upon to give the ultimate sacrifice. We're called upon to live holy lives, ones that are set apart from sin and set apart to God and his purposes.

The Old Testament prophet Micah put it this way: "With what shall I come before the Lord and bow down before the exalted God? Shall I come before him with burnt offerings, with calves a year old? Will the Lord be pleased with thousands of rams, with ten thousand rivers of olive oil? Shall I offer my firstborn for my transgression, the fruit of my body for the sin of my soul? He has shown you, O mortal, what is good. And what does the Lord require of you? To act justly and to love mercy and to walk humbly with your God" (Micah 6:6-8).

Doing all for the glory and praise of God (1 Corinthians 10:31) requires devotion, discipline, determination. A living sacrifice is to stay on the altar. It's the idea of obedience.

When King Saul scored a major victory over an enemy he kept back some of the best sheep and cattle to sacrifice to the Lord instead of totally destroying them as had been instructed. The Lord was grieved he'd made Saul king because he had turned away and not carried out his instructions (1 Samuel 15:10). When the prophet Samuel confronts Saul, the king claims he carried out the instructions, then blames the soldiers for his disobedience. God spoke through Samuel: "Does the Lord delight in burnt offerings and sacrifices as much as in the obeying the voice of the Lord? To obey is better than sacrifice, and to heed is better than the fat of rams. For rebellion is like the sin of divination, and arrogance like the evil of idolatry" (1 Samuel 15:22, 23).

Saul told Samuel that he had sinned...but proved to not be sincere as shown by what happened afterwards. He continued to try to justify himself and shift the blame. He wandered farther away from God.

Contrast this with David and as we do so we find a third gift to give to the Lord.

#### IV. A broken and contrite spirit

David was known as a man after God's own heart. He trusted in the Lord when he fought and killed the lion, bear and Goliath. He loved God's word. Many of his songs became part of scripture. He was committed to following the Lord. And yet, because he wasn't perfect, he temporarily decided that something else was more important than following the Lord. He sinned. He committed adultery and then staged a murder to cover it up.

Unlike Saul, David mentioned when he said he sinned, He wasn't trying to avoid punishment. He wasn't trying to plea bargain down to say it wasn't that serious and hope God would overlook the transgression.

He wasn't trying to blame somebody else. He took full accountability for what he'd done. He was 100% guilty and confessed "I have sinned against the Lord" (2 Samuel 12:13).

Psalm 51 is a record of David's confession. V. 1 - he pleads for mercy from God according to God's unfailing love and great compassion. He desires that God would blot out his transgressions, wash away his iniquity and cleanse him from sin. V. 10 - He desires that God create a pure heart in him and renew a steadfast spirit within him. V. 16 - He acknowledges that the Lord doesn't delight in sacrifice or burnt offerings but the sacrifices of God are a broken spirit, a broken and contrite heart.

Broken and contrite spirit and heart. This was the sacrifice David offered to God. This is the sacrifice we're to offer to God. It's a sacrifice because our pride and ego make it hard to admit we're wrong, have done something wrong.

David comes back to the idea of bringing the sacrifice of praise (vv. 13-15). He says he will open his lips and mouth to declare God's praise so that transgressors and sinners will hear about what happened to him. His tongue will sing of God's righteousness, that God is right in what he does and holding people accountable for their sin, and more importantly, for giving them the opportunity to turn to him to confess their sins.

Adrian Rodgers spoke of David's experience: "God's goodness led to David's repentance. If you love him, get rid of sin that breaks his heart."

"Blessed is the one whose transgressions are forgiven, whose sins are covered. Blessed is the one whose sin the Lord does not count against them and in whose spirit is no deceit" (Psalm 32:1, 2)

"The Gift of the Magi," a short story by O. Henry, tells of Jim and Della, a young husband and wife. They want to buy Christmas gifts for each other but have very little money. O. Henry writes, they "were very proud of two things which they owned. One thing was Jim's gold watch. It had once belonged to his father. And, long ago, it had belonged to his father's father. The other thing was Della's hair. If a queen had lived in the rooms near theirs, Della would have washed and dried her hair where the queen could see it. Della knew her hair was more beautiful than any queen's jewels and gifts. If a king had lived in the same house, with all his riches, Jim would have looked at his watch every time they met. Jim knew that no king had anything so valuable." The story has a plot twist and surprise ending that shows sacrifice. Some might say they weren't so wise, but O. Henry concludes his story: "Of all who give gifts, these two were the most wise. Of all who give and receive gifts, such as they are the most wise. Everywhere they are the wise ones. They are the magi."

May we be like the Magi and give to God good gifts.

"Long walk part of the gift."