

## What Gifts Do We Bring?

**Ephesians 1:3-14 and Matthew 2:1-12 | Epiphany Sunday | January 5, 2025 | Pastor John Klawiter , preaching**

Grace and peace to you my friends in Christ,

With the arrival of Epiphany, the date of Christmas present giving has arrived. Although waiting until the 12 th day of Christmas isn't customary anymore, it does feel like a long time to wait, doesn't it?

What's the longest you've waited to get a Christmas gift?

I'm guessing it's not as long as the owner of a construction company in Illinois did for a gift with his name on it.

Tim King, and yes, on Epiphany Sunday, the guy's actual name is King—found a present recently while remodeling his parents bathroom. When the drywall was exposed, this treasurer was hiding in the wall, accidentally falling through the wall from the attic.

Before he finished the project, he looked and saw his present from 1978. When he was 6 years old.



So... what did he do?

He called his mom. He couldn't open it without her.

What was inside? It wasn't gold, frankincense, or myrrh... it was Matchbox Thunder Jets. Tim King, after 46 years, finally opened his present and the 6 year old in him

was thrilled.

Just think, the next time someone has trouble patiently waiting to open presents, you could remind them at least they're not waiting for 46 years.

The wise men aren't THAT late, but this story does bring up a few interesting observations about when they show up, what they give, and who the wise men are in the first place. Matthew's version of the birth of Jesus is different than the one we hear on Christmas Eve from Luke.

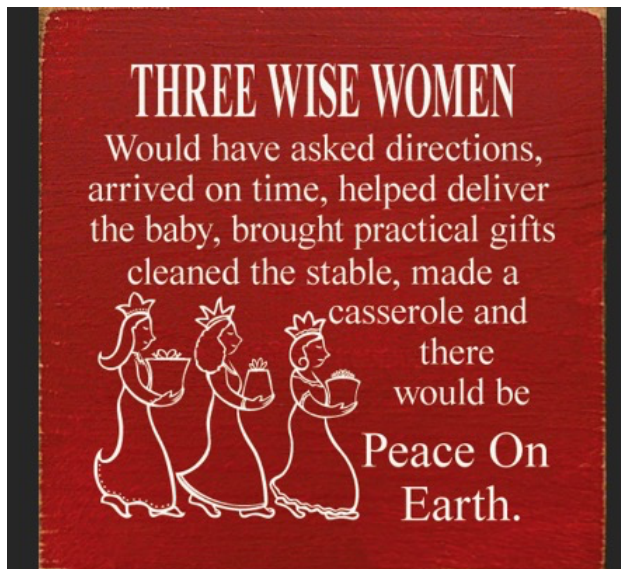
In fact, in his story, we don't hear about shepherds or the day that Jesus is born. What we do learn is that Jesus is born in Bethlehem in Judea in the time of King Herod.

The dates aren't perfect. We don't know exactly when Jesus is born or when Herod dies, but we do hear in Matthew's version that magi come to see the newborn king. Magi—like magicians or magic, these guys are certainly unique, they may be wise, but the honor of kingship wasn't placed upon them until the 6<sup>th</sup> century, representing kings from Persia, India, and Arabia.

The venerable Bede, in the 7<sup>th</sup> century, wrote that the three magi signify the three parts of the known world at that time—Europe, Asia, and Africa.

This caught on because each of them, Balthasar, Melchior, and Gaspar (also fictional names made up later) represented the whole world, the Gentile world. Joseph Kelly writes about this in the "Origins of Christmas".

"The popularity of the All-races interpretation shows that theology and symbolism triumphed over the biblical text."



Translation? None of the names, locations, or races are true or Biblical. But it sure makes a great story! It also helps fill in the gaps about why they show up in the first place. At many a Bible study is the point raised about how impractical the gifts seem. Others have wondered, if only three wise WOMEN would've shown up... they would've asked for directions, arrived on time, helped deliver the baby, brought practical gifts, cleaned the stable, made a casserole, and finally, last

but not least...there's be peace on earth.

I mean, it's probably not wrong.

## Sermon Transcript

But again, we don't have a ton to go with. It helps to remember where the magi go first. It's not to Bethlehem. They go straight to Jerusalem—where King Herod, the current King of the Jews lives.

They assume his lineage has the new child, the next king. They go to pay him homage and you don't show up at King Herod's door, the mighty, powerful, merciless tyrant known as Herod, without gifts.

Wouldn't gold and extravagant spices and perfumes from the Silk Road trade route like frankincense and myrrh actually make a lot of sense to give King Herod's baby?

But there is no baby at the King's house.

Herod, upon hearing this news that someone believes another "king" is out there, wants the magi to lead him to this challenger to his throne, but he doesn't let on that he's threatened.

The magi figure out that if Herod doesn't have a new child king, he's probably not actually excited that another child is out there with claims to be king. It's quite a revelation.

The birth of Jesus wasn't just a singular moment. It's a series of reveals to people without the power of a king, like Herod. It's not revealed in the temple or to the leaders of the court.

Jesus shows up to the outsiders. To the shepherds, called by the angel to this barn in Bethlehem, happens much earlier than the arrival of the magi.

Today's story, the manger is pushed back—it's outside of the place where Jesus is dwelling. The magi visit a house, not a barn. Eventually, the craziness of the census has calmed down and the child, potentially two years old at this point, is met by the travelers from afar.

They give gifts, which might be more practical than we give them credit for because it's not going to be cheap to escape. It's quite remarkable, really, that this gifts likely preserved the life of Jesus when, as a vulnerable child, he easily could have been killed.

The magi, struck by the holiness of this child, don't drop their own religious beliefs and become followers of Jesus. They don't renounce citizenship from whatever land they've come from.

## Sermon Transcript

Like the shepherds before them, they witness, they honor and worship, and then they leave to tell their people what they've seen.

These unique outsiders are the first to hear the good news. This should give us hope. No matter what is eating at us today—whatever shortcomings, fears, or misgivings are weighing us down.

They don't need to be puffed up about how important THEY are. They don't need to be flaunting how special they are to Mary and Joseph.

They aren't kings. We made them kings because we needed them to be special. Because it makes us feel like our king is more special.

Guess what, Jesus doesn't need that. Jesus wants us to know that whatever superlatives or excess we feel we need to add to show off, it's unnecessary.

Who we are is enough.

Jesus became human to tear down our facades. To bless those who've been hidden, forgotten, ignored. Jesus came for the whole world to receive the gift of life and to know, no matter what, it's a gift of love. There's nothing we have to do to earn the gift.

It's ours.

What do we give in return?

What gifts do we bring to proclaim the good news of Christ?

Maybe you're worried, "I don't have gold, frankincense, or myrrh!" That's not what Christ needs today. Jesus needs our gifts of prayer—lifting up the world and for those in need. Christ needs our passion—what are we good at? How do we use those gifts in our work, at school, in our community. Jesus wants the best that we have and to use it to impact others.

And God wants the oldest gift in the box....  
no no, not that! It's the gift of God's love.  
That love might look like feeding our



## Sermon Transcript

neighbors or making sure that they had gifts under their Christmas tree. That love might look like sharing joy through relationships (SLIDE). Unashamed.



Untarnished. It can't run out. It expands the more we share it. Like magi, trusting their instincts to keep going towards the star, we too have a persistent call. Lead with the light. This gift is for you, like flames going from candle to candle, share it with joy. Amen.