

Grace to You :: *Unleashing God's Truth, One Verse at a Time*

What the Magi Mean to Christmas, Part 2

Scripture: Selected Scriptures

Code: 81-6

Matthew opens the New Testament, of course, and in his gospel he begins with the birth of the Son of God. Matthew wants us to know that this child who was born in Bethlehem is God's King, the Anointed Messiah, the one who came to establish a spiritual kingdom, and then a global kingdom, and then an eternal kingdom. And so it's important that we look at the royal credentials of the Child that is born. Matthew opens in the 1st chapter, the opening 17 verses, with the royal lineage of Jesus. He is from the family of David; His descendants go back to David. That is royal right, royal authority, royal heritage.

In the gospel of Luke, you have a genealogy of Mary. And, of course, Mary also is from the line of David. So through Mary, He has royal blood; and through Joseph, He has royal right, royal privilege. He is born then as God's promised King, that David would have a son in the future who would be God's King is what the Old Testament promises; Christ fulfills that. By His genealogy, we know He's a son of David.

We also see His royalty, not only from the human side, but the divine side, because chapter 1, verses 18 to 25 talk about the fact that He was born of a virgin; that, in fact, Mary had never known her husband at all. What was conceived in her was done by the Holy Spirit, so that He is not the product of Joseph and Mary, but He is the work of God planted in the womb of Mary. He is a King then by heritage, in a human sense. He is a King by creation in a divine sense. He is the Son of God carried in the womb of Mary.

It is important for Matthew also to continue to point to the royalty of Christ by letting us know that the dominating king makers of the ancient world, from the Middle East known as magi, come to crown this young King. They deliver to Him the only coronation that He ever had. He had no coronation at the hands of the people to whom He belonged, the Jewish people. He had no coronation from those who ruled in Israel: the elite, the Sanhedrin, the chief priests, the scribes, the rabbis, the religious authorities. He had no coronation from any of His own nation. But He did have a coronation from the Gentile world from far away, from the Middle East; and the magi come to crown Him King, to give Him a fitting coronation as the newborn Anointed One of God.

Matthew also wants us to know that He is a King because He is a threat to the reigning king in Israel. There is a king there, a king appointed by the Romans by the name of Herod, who has been given the title King of the Jews, though he is not a Jew. He is an Idumean. He comes from Edomites. He's a descendent of Esau, not Isaac. And yet he points to the true King by seeing Him as a threat to his own false kingship. So from a negative side, Herod becomes a testifier to the true King, the Lord Jesus Christ. And then, of course, the testimony of the magi are interspersed with that of Herod, and we're going to look at them together as we look at those 12 verses again.

Now just who are the magi? Who are they? That is not a translatable word. It has come down to our time now and connected with magic and magician, things like that. But, originally, magi was a name

of a tribe, and they were a very astute tribe, a very advanced tribe in the ancient world. They were a very highly educated tribe. In fact, the law of the Medes and the Persians, which was the defining law in the Middle East, the highest level of education was really the law of the magi. They had developed into the most elite, literate people in the Middle Eastern world. They had within their tribe a hereditary priesthood. So they were priests, they were highly religious. There was superstitions in their religion, as well as science in their religion. They did believe in one god, although not the God of the Bible, but they did believe in one god. They even believed that there was going to come a savior sometime into the world. They believed in demons; they believed in angels. So their tribe had been influenced by the Jews of the Old Testament somehow in the Middle East, and they had elements of Judaism and a lot in common with them.

The magi really were influenced because the Jews were taken captive into Babylon. the Babylonian captivity really culminated in 586 B.C. It reached its sort of completion. Jews were deported into Babylon. The Babylonians came, conquered Jerusalem, conquered the southern kingdom of Judah, and hauled off the Jews to the Middle East to the Babylonian kingdom. Some of them returned, as we know, after 70 years; but many of them remained and intermarried. And among those who were deported were prophets. Ezekiel went there, and particularly Daniel went there.

Daniel rose to prominence in the Middle Eastern kingdom, and Daniel became, according to Daniel 5:11, the chief of the magi, having been trained in the law of the Medes and the Persians with his friends when they arrived there. He ascended because of his immense capability and skill to being the chief over these very elite priestly leaders and influencers. Daniel actually became prime minister, and for over 60 years had a prime minister role in the Middle East that transcended several of those empires during the Babylonians, the Medes, and the Persians, he was there.

He was also a prophet of God, and so he exposed particularly the magi to the truth about the coming great King Messiah. He wrote a lot about Messiah in his prophecy, including the time that Messiah would come. Even details that in chapter 9, something of the character of Messiah, something of the accomplishments of Messiah; Daniel laid that all out.

Daniel also was familiar with the rest of the Old Testament and the other prophets, and would have been used by God to teach them a lot. They taught him the law of the Medes and the Persians; he taught the magi the Old Testament. Some of them came then to believe in the true God and to believe in His promise of a coming King.

In God's time then, when it was time for the King to arrive, God announced the arrival of the King by the appearance of His star. It's called His star. These magi say, in verse 2, His star: "We saw His star in the east." And I told you last time, that is not likely a heavenly body, a meteor, or a comet, nor is it some kind of actual star. But rather His star is the sign of the Son of Man, the shekinah glory of God, the bright light associated with the arrival of the Son of Man.

We see it in Matthew 24 when He comes again. When He descends from heaven to earth in His second coming it says, "The sign of the Son of Man will appear in heaven." And we know in Revelation that the whole world goes dark, goes black, then appears the sign of the Son of Man blazing light in heaven, and then His second coming. The sign marks His second coming. I think it was the same sign that marked His first coming. It appeared in the east, the magi saw it, and in connection with what they knew about God's timing, they knew Messiah would come 69 times 7 after the decree of Artaxerxes in 444 B.C. to rebuild Jerusalem, because that's what Daniel said. The time

was then, they knew the time of it. They waited for the moment and God declared the moment by the appearance of a star. And we can assume that that occurred at the time of the birth of the Lord. And then for the next couple of months, they're moving toward Jerusalem to see the King, and they receive the word from the star and from the prophets that He has been born, and that is sufficient for them to go to Jerusalem to find Him and to crown Him as God's promised King.

That's the back story behind where we are in Matthew, chapter 2. They are the official king makers of the east. Nobody is appointed a king in those Middle Eastern massive empires unless they are affirmed by the magi. They are the ones given the authority because of their high level of elite status. They are like the senate or the supreme court rolled into one, and it is their responsibility to identify kings. No one reigns without their approval. They have recently deposed the reigning king in the Middle East just before the birth of Christ, they are looking for a new king.

They are also the devout enemies of Rome in the west. You have the two massive empires in that part of the world: Rome in the west and the Middle Eastern empires in the east. They are enemies. And it may well be that behind their interest in this King was the thought that they could again, maybe this time successfully engage Rome in a battle, and conquer Rome and take over the rest of that part of the world. So there's a lot going on at this time. This particular group of magi are not so much motivated politically or militarily, however, as they are spiritually. They are God-fearing Gentiles. They have been raised in the Middle East. They have been raised in paganism. But through the influence of Daniel and the Jews who remained and intermarried in the Middle East, they have come to believe in the Old Testament, the God of the Old Testament, the promises of the Old Testament, and God's promised King.

So we see at the beginning of this chapter that Jesus was born in Bethlehem of Judea. Herod was the king of the Jews at that time. Magi from the east arrived in Jerusalem. We talked about their arrival last time. They asked a question: "Where is He who has been born King of the Jews? We saw His star in the east and have come to worship Him." They're there to worship Him. They're not on a political mission, although it has political implications. They're not on a military mission, although maybe in the back of their minds they thought that might be a reality. They're coming as worshipers. They're coming as worshipers, and their worship is appropriately being offered to a King as evidenced by the gifts that they bring, which are coronation kind of gifts – and we'll explain that a little more.

The problem is this: there is already a king in Israel, and it is Herod: Herod the Great he called himself – not a modest man by any means. He calls himself Herod the Great. He had been given that title even though he was not a Jew. He was an Edomite, or an Idumean. He has been literally put in that position by Rome. Rome basically ruled the world at that time in the west. And whenever they occupied a country, they put leaders in and rulers in that represented Roman power. They were tolerant. They allowed people to kind of go their own way in terms of their social and religious life. But they kept a tight military control, they kept authority, and they highly taxed the nations they occupied to support their kingdom.

So Rome is in power, but they need someone to represent them. They found that someone in this man Herod the Great. He represents Rome. He's kind of an acceptable person, because he's a Middle Easterner, even though he's an Edomite. He's not a Roman, and he found some acceptance among the Jews, at least for awhile. The early part of his career demonstrated a large measure of success in the things that he was able to do from a leadership standpoint. The latter part of his

career was an outright total disaster, as we'll see in a moment.

But think about these magi who come to worship Him. They have nothing to guide them but the testimony of the Jews that they have met in the captivity. They have some knowledge of the Old Testament. They are skilled scientists, but their science is mixed with some superstition, so they're into both astronomy and astrology. They are enthusiastically engaging in a long, long journey from the Middle East, because they are convinced that God is the true God, the Old Testament is the true book, and this could be the true King. They are direct contrast to the Jewish leadership.

The leaders of Israel, the rabbis, the chief priests, the scribes, the high priest were completely indifferent to the birth of the Lord Jesus Christ. This is what John means when he says in the 1st chapter, "He came unto His own and His own received Him not." But here are these Middle Eastern king makers, these Gentiles who come from afar to worship the one His own people refused to worship, and actually murdered at the hands of the Romans.

So that is the scene as we come to verse 3 where we pick up the text again. We go from the arrival to the immediate agitation. I told you last time, this is not three men with three gifts and three camels. There are no camels in the story. We have no idea how many of them there were; nothing says there are three of them. The entourage itself would have numbered in the thousands, because they were so important, they are on such a long journey they would have been accompanied by animals and animal keepers, and servants, and all kinds of cooks, and the soldiers who would have gone along with them to make sure they were safe. This would have been a very, very huge entourage that showed up in Jerusalem. And when they get there, they ask the question, "Where is He who has been born King of the Jews?"

And you might expect at that moment that Herod would stick his hand in the air and say, "I'm right over here. I'm the King of the Jews. The Romans gave me that title; I deserve that title. I managed to bring about a measure of peace in this place, and I have been honored by having that title." That is why Herod was troubled, he was troubled. It means to be agitated, to be shaken. It is translated in Matthew 14:26 the very same word "afraid." He is terrified at what's happening. He would have had some normal fear of the entourage itself, of the power of the Middle Easterners. They were a kind of mysterious people. There were legends about them that made them even appear more fearful than they were. They no doubt are armed, and they are very large. He is frightened of them.

But more than that, he is frightened because they are saying there is another King of the Jews, which means it's not him. Had he not received his title from Rome? Would not they recognize that? And had he not earned that title by years of successful struggle? It also says in verse 3 that all Jerusalem was troubled with him, and that would be because they knew when Herod was troubled, trouble was coming to everybody; he spread his trouble around. By the end of his life, or near the end of his life, he is an insane madman, driven by fear and jealousy and revenge in an irrational way. But as I said, early in his career, he was a very successful leader and served the Romans well. I'll give you some of the reasons why.

He was first installed as a young governor in the area of Galilee, and he swiftly and effectively destroyed bands of gorillas that were wreaking havoc in that part of the land of Israel, and the Romans appreciated his ability militarily to quell those terrorist uprisings. He was very efficient in developing a system to collect taxes from the Jewish people and make sure they got back to Rome. Rome saw him primarily in those two roles: keep the peace and collect the taxes. He was, according

to some historians, a rather capable orator, and a somewhat clever diplomat. He was a decisive leader who could take action and turn defeat into victory. He was the only ruler in Israel, the land of Palestine, who ever succeeded in keeping the peace over a protected period of time, and bringing order out of disorder. So he had some skills. In times of difficulty, he lowered the taxes to make things easier; and in a famine that came in 25 B.C. he took some of his own gold possessions in his own palace and melted them down so that he could purchase corn for the people. So he had demonstrated some interest in their welfare as well.

He was a great builder, and this is probably what history will know most about him. He was a great builder. He built a theater in Jerusalem, and then he built what's called an amphitheater or a hippodrome, which is a racetrack, outside of Jerusalem. He built a magnificent palace for himself, the Herodian Palace. And in 19 B.C. he began to build the temple, not because he was honoring God, but because he was a builder, and it was going to be an honor to him. And it was all overlaid with gold by the time we see it appear during the time of our Lord's ministry. He started in 19 B.C.; 50 years later it wasn't finished. He spent his whole life building it, adding to it, embellishing it for his own reputation's sake. He successfully restored Samaria and renamed it in honor of one of the Romans; brought about the peace and the development of Samaria. He built one of the most magnificent port cities in the Ancient World, the city of Caesarea, and named it after Caesar.

You can still see the ruins of the port itself that Herod built if you go there today. He embellished cities like Antioch and Beirut, and Damascus, and Tyre, and Sidon, and Rhodes, and even Athens. He built a massive fortress, one of the incredible things to see if you're in the land of Israel, the fortress at Masada. He built that in the middle of the desert on a high mountain. He did just about anything and everything a leader could do to demonstrate his prowess.

However, increasingly he became marked by fear and vengeance and hostility and a kind of insanity. He was hopelessly suspicious – and suspicion will drive people crazy, as you know. He was suspicious of everyone. He thought everyone was after him: everyone wanted his life, everyone wanted his throne. So he was constantly plotting to murder people. He didn't need any evidence, he just assumed that they were after him, and murdered them anyway.

There was a family of Hasmoneans that were very prominent during the Maccabean period, the period before him between the Old and the New Testament. They were descendants from the Maccabees, the original Maccabees, the deliverers of Israel in that intertestamental period, and the people favored the Hasmoneans and wanted them to rule over them. Because Herod feared their popularity, he plotted to murder, not some of them, all of them.

He had ten wives; that'll tell you how foolish he was. He had twelve children. His most notable wife, Mariamne – that's her name – her brother Aristobulus became high priest, and he thought that Aristobulus, the brother of his wife, posed a threat to him, so he planned to murder him. He murdered him by inviting him to go swimming in the Jordan River and drowning him there. Then Herod provided a huge funeral for Aristobulus, and attended the funeral and cried publicly. Deceitful, power-mad, treacherous. He had his wife killed in a phony trumped up adultery charge. He then executed her mother Alexandria. He then murdered his two sons, the two that he thought could most threaten his throne. His lust for power and suspicion and insane eagerness to avenge himself enslaved him, so that five days before his death he ordered his sons execution, and even a third son was killed. Cruel, blood-thirsty, panicky, terrified.

When he was about to die – and he would have been in his 70s or so – when he was about to die he retired to Jericho, historians say, and he gave orders that the authorities in Jerusalem collect all the most distinguished citizens of Jerusalem, that they all be collected and arrested and held captive on invented charges, and all put in prison, and he said, “Keep them in prison; and the moment I die, slaughter them all.” The reason he said was that no one would mourn his death. He was determined that some tears were going to be shed when he died, even if they weren’t for him. Now do you understand why he was trouble when the wise men came? So wonderful to have history like this, ancient history, so that we know these kinds of things that explain the very simple, straightforward words of Scripture.

He is asked the question, “Where is He who has been born King of the Jews?” The assumption of the question is that Herod would certainly know and be thrilled, because the King of the Jews was the one long promised by the prophets. I don’t think the magi thought they were a threat to him. I think they might have assumed that he would say, “Oh, well, of course I know. Here’s exactly where He is.” But that was not the case. This is a man who is in panic, and when he gets panicked, lots of people die, and that’s why Jerusalem is troubled. The great city with its magnificent religious institutions, wonderful unparalleled Herodian temple overlaid with gold still in the process of being built, the city with its aristocratic priesthood, its benevolent institutions, the city with the Scripture had absolutely not only no knowledge of the King that had been born, but no interest in the King that had been born. They were self-satisfied. They were rejecters from the get-go, from the beginning to the end. This story really foreshadows the whole story of their rejection of their King, the Lord from heaven. There was not room for Him in the inn. There was not room for Him in the temple. There was not room for Him in their hearts. They were worried not about the new King, they were worried about the old one. Jerusalem knew when Herod’s afraid, rebellion, bloodshed, and suffering is inevitable.

Well, Herod’s agitation, verse 4, leads to this: “Gathering together all the chief priests and scribes of the people, he inquired of them where the Messiah was to be born.” He knew about the Messiah. Every Jew celebrated the coming of Messiah. Messiah was on the hearts and lips of many. He knew the ultimate King of the Jews would be the messianic King that God would send. He knew King of the Jews and Messiah in the final sense were one and the same. He’s not going to kill the magi, they’re too much of a threat to him, and there’s massive power behind them, if not in his presence at the very time. He’s not going to start a war that he can’t win. But he also knows he’s got to find the King and kill Him. It’s a whole lot easier to kill one child than to fight the Middle Eastern armies.

So he hatches his plot and he calls together the theologians and the religious leaders, those who were the scribes, the experts in the Old Testament, the law in the Scripture, the chief priests – that group is the priestly aristocracy that ran the religion – and he calls them in and he says, “Where is Messiah to be born?” which again demonstrates that he’s not Jewish and he’s ignorant of Scripture, because every Jew knew the answer to that question, every Jew. How did every Jew know where Messiah was to be born? Because in Micah, chapter 5 and verse 2, the prophet said He would be born in Bethlehem; everybody knew that. He was to be born in Bethlehem.

In John, chapter 7, you have an indication of that. “Some of the people, when they heard these words were saying concerning Jesus, ‘This certainly is the Prophet.’ Others were saying, ‘This is the Christ.’ Others were saying, ‘Surely the Christ is not going to come from Galilee, is He?’ – then verse 42 – ‘Has not the Scripture said that Christ comes from the descendants of David, and from Bethlehem, the village where David was?’” Everybody knew Messiah was going to be born in

Bethlehem, everybody knew it. Scribes and Pharisees knew it, the chief priest knew it. So they respond, verse 5: "They said to him, 'In Bethlehem of Judea; for this is what has been written by the prophet:' – from Micah 5:2 – 'And you, Bethlehem, land of Judah, are by no means least among the leaders of Judah; for out of you shall come forth a Ruler who will shepherd My people Israel.'" The shepherd King. A shepherd who is a Ruler? That's rare, that's unusual, but that's David. David was the shepherd ruler. Messiah will be the shepherd Ruler. Micah 5:2 makes that prophecy; all the Jews knew it.

The Old Testament says He'll be born in Bethlehem, the scribes and Pharisees say He'll be born in Bethlehem, the high priests and chief priest say He'll be born in Bethlehem, the populations say He'll be born in Bethlehem, and Jesus was born in Bethlehem, verse 1, chapter 2. They're orthodox literalists, perfect knowledge of Scripture, never touched in their souls by this reality that the Child had been born and in Bethlehem. They're so in love with the darkness of their own damning religion of self-righteousness they can't see the shepherd King when He arrives. So no sooner is Jesus born than people are divided into groups. There are the hatred and hostile group.

I should say there is the hatred and hostility group. Those people who, like Herod, see this birth, this boy, this person, as interfering in their lives, as being a threat to their ambition, destiny, control, power, position, place, will. Jesus interferes in their lives, interferes in their plans. They want nothing to do with Him; they want their own life, their own way, their own purposes, their own ambitions. They don't want anybody else lording it over them. The Jews even say that: "We will not have this Man to reign over us." They said that just before they executed Him at the cross. So there are those who are the haters of Christ, those hostile to Him.

And then there's that second group, the indifferent, the rest of the populous of Israel. It doesn't seem to make the slightest difference to them. They couldn't care less, so engrossed in their religion, temple ritual, legal accusations against other people, pushing themselves up higher on the righteous ladder by being accusatory of everybody who wasn't as good as they were. That's the kind of religion the Pharisees and the rabbis espoused. So self-righteous. He means nothing to them. They don't need a savior; they don't need Him.

And today we have the same thing. We have a world of people who are just indifferent, doesn't matter to them. There's a third group, and that's represented by the magi, and those are the adoring worshipers. You have those who resent Christ and the threat that He brings to their own independence. You have those who couldn't care less, because they're caught up in their own religion. And then you have the true worshipers. And I guess you have to ask yourself where you are, because that's the ultimate question.

So the arrival and the agitation to results. Then Herod puts on an act, verse 7: "Herod secretly called the magi." The first meeting was public. It must have been a massive display of pomp and circumstance in and of itself. But he needs a secret meeting, so he calls a second meeting with the magi and determined from them the exact time the star appeared. This is why I think it's likely that the star appeared, the shekinah appeared when the Child was born. The birth of the Lord was marked in the east by a star. It was marked around Jerusalem by the angels, right, who showed up and declared it to the shepherds. But in the east, the sign of the coming of the Son of Man appears in the east. The exact time the star appeared he wants to know, because that will tell him how old the Child is, so he knows what to be looking for age-wise. He's got to find this King, and he can't be looking at every possible child. He wants more detail.

In fact, he is very diligent about this, verse 8: “He sent them to Bethlehem and said, ‘Go and search carefully for the Child. I don’t want any haphazard effort at this, search carefully for the Child; and when you have found Him, report to me, so that I too may come and worship Him.’” Apparently they told him the time the sign appeared, so he said, “Go to Bethlehem. You do the work. You go, you find the Child. Come report to me.” What was his intention; to worship? No. Go over to verse 16. “When Herod saw that he’d been tricked by the magi,” – who never came back and told him what he wanted to know – “he became very enraged, sent and slew all the male children who were in Bethlehem and all its vicinity, from two years old and under, according to the time which he had determined from the magi.”

Again, he would have known when the star appeared, it’s certain months later. Any child two years or under, just to be sure, he slaughters. The hypocrisy of it, the act that he puts on, “Go and search carefully for the Child. When you have found Him, report to me, so that I too may come and worship Him.” The magi were going to be unwitting instruments of the killing of the Messiah, diabolical cunning on Satan’s part through Herod.

Verse 9: “After hearing the king, they went their way;” – they have no reason to think he’s lying to them – “and the star, which they had seen in the east,” – and I just point out, sometimes we get the notion that this star led them all the way. That’s not what the text actually says. It appeared in the east. He was to be born certainly in Israel. He is God’s King, the true God, the Old Testament God. They knew they were headed for Israel. They saw the star in the east announcing His birth. They don’t see the star again until they get to Jerusalem. And when they leave Herod and go their way to look for the Child, the star, which they had seen in the east reappears and takes them right to Bethlehem five-and-a-half miles away and right over the house where the Child is. The shekinah glory is shining.

This is so wonderful. “When they saw the star, they rejoiced exceedingly with great joy.” Do you know that that verse is the reason there’s so much joy in all the Christmas carols? “Joy to the world, the Lord has come.” That’s the sentiment of the magi, not Israel, not the leaders of Israel, not the people of Jerusalem. That’s those Gentile magi. This is true worship. They are true God-fearing Gentiles; and when they saw the star, they rejoiced exceedingly with great joy. They saw there their friend, the star again, the shekinah. Nothing indicates that Herod saw it. Nothing indicates other saw it. They saw it. “And they came” – verse 11 – “into the house and they saw the Child with Mary His mother.” No longer in the manger. Wise men, as they’re called, didn’t come to the manger.

I told you last week, they weren’t kings, there weren’t three of them, they didn’t have camels, and they didn’t go to the manger. But other than that, they came into the house, because months have passed, and the little family is not going anywhere until they hear from the Lord. And the Lord’s not going to let them go anywhere until He ready to let them go; and they’re not going to be going anywhere until a coronation takes place, an appropriate coronation. The Lord is going to bring about a coronation of His King. It’s not going to come at the hands of the Jews, it’s going to come at the hands of these Middle Eastern king makers. But there will be a coronation. After the coronation, they’re going to be sent not back into Israel, not to Nazareth, but into Egypt, so that He isn’t slaughtered with all the rest of the male children.

So they find the house where the three of them are living, they fell to the ground and worshiped Him. Again, they said, “We come to worship Him.” They rejoiced exceedingly with great joy, and they

worshiped Him. They were true worshipers. And, again, I said this last week, I say it again, at the very beginning of the arrival of Christ it was pretty clear to any reader of Scripture, He would be the Savior of the world, because the world shows up even before the Jews crown Him King. They fell down to the ground and worshiped Him. Literally, that's flat. That's homage to a king.

Cornelius and his friends, in Acts 10, tried to worship Peter, and Peter said, "Get up, get up, get up. Don't worship me, worship only God." Revelation 19 and Revelation 22, John falls down to worship an angel, and both times the angel says, "Get up. Worship God." And I say that just to remind you, they worshiped Him, not Mary, not Mary. They worshiped Him. And no one said get up.

The Bible says, "Worship God, worship God," and this is God. They worshiped God. And their hearts are full of joy. True worshipers should be marked by joy. This should be the theme of our entire life. It'll be the theme of heaven. If any one thing marks heaven joy is it – joy, joy, joy, joy, joy. It should mark us here, because our Redeemer has come and saved us from our sins, and is making a place for us in the glory of His eternal heaven – joy, joy, joy.

And they brought gifts, interesting gifts. They opened their treasures and presented to Him gifts of gold, frankincense, and myrrh. And I don't think these were the kind of things that were just tokens, I think they lavished them on that little family – gold for a long time, gold for a good part of their lives into the future; frankincense, myrrh. These are fascinating gifts. They are gifts that have significance, because they not only are a reality that was necessary in the Ancient World, but they symbolized some things. Gold, by the way, is just precious. With gold, you're wealthy. So when you think about Jesus being poor, it's not likely that He was poor. The little family, when they went back to Nazareth, took gold with them. And also Joseph was an employed man who ran some kind of a construction business. When it says that He became poor, it doesn't mean He became humanly poor, it means that He gave up His divine riches to take on the form of a servant as a human being.

So they brought gold. Gold was used extensively in the building of the temple. Its contents, back in the Old Testament, it was used for jewelry, it was used for utensils, it was currency. Gold was the most valuable thing. So gold was fit for a king. Kings had crowns made of gold, medallions made of gold, and jewelry made of gold, and scepters made of gold. So we could say that the gold not only had value in and of itself, but that it was suitable for a king.

And then they brought also frankincense. Literally that means pure incense; this is incense. In the Ancient World there were certain trees with a kind of gum rosin on the surface, and they would make an incision in the tree and out would come this white liquid. These kinds of trees still exist in that part of the world and down into Africa. A juice would come out. It had various uses. Sometimes it was mixed with meal in an offering, like in Leviticus 2, the meal offerings. It was used as a gift for a wedding; it had purposes for a wedding. It was fragrant. It had a kind of ointment benefit.

And then there was myrrh. Myrrh was derived from a small tree in the Middle East used for perfuming. It was a smelly world, smelly world. And remember back in Proverbs 7 it talked about perfuming a bed, and in Psalm 45:8 it talks about perfuming your clothing. It was used by young ladies in Esther 2 to make themselves more desirable and more attractive. It was used in bridal processions as in Song of Solomon, chapter 3. It was used profusely to produce fragrance. Mingled with wine, Mark 15, it was used as an anesthetic, and it was always used in preparing a body for burial, and it was used in preparing the body of Jesus for burial.

So we might say this: the gold signifies that He is a King. The incense, or the myrrh rather signifies that He is a Man. How so? In what sense? That He's come down into a very difficult world. He's come down into a world that's corrupt, repugnant, pungent in its vile character. And myrrh was used to mitigate that corruption. So myrrh speaks of humanity, life in this world.

Frankincense's origin, the church father said, speaks of His deity, because incense in the Bible is always offered to God. It's always offered to God. Exodus 30:34 says it was not for the people, it was for God. Ezekiel 16:18, God says, "My incense." So gold speaks of Christ as a King, myrrh speaks of Christ as a Man, and frankincense speaks of Christ as God. Gold for a king, myrrh for a man, incense for God. Fitting gifts: gold, myrrh, incense.

Interesting portion of Scripture back in Isaiah 60 looks at the second coming of Christ: "Arise, shine; your light has come, the glory of the Lord has risen upon you." It talks about the Lord appearing in verse 2. "His glory will appear upon you." This is the second coming of Christ.

Notice this in verse 6: "They will bring gold and frankincense." No myrrh. No myrrh in Isaiah 60, verse 6. Why? Because when He comes, it'll be gold for a king, incense for God, but He will not come as a man subject to all the difficulties and challenges of living in this world. So they identified Him in magnificent ways with their gifts, and enriched that little family at least for the duration of their time. They weren't about to go back to Nazareth, they were really on their way to Egypt for awhile.

That all ends in verse 12, at least this portion of it, for the magi. They disappear from the scene. "Having been warned by God in a dream not to return to Herod, the magi left for their own country by another way." God spoke to Joseph through a dream. He spoke to the magi through a dream. He speaks to Joseph again in verse 13: "Behold, an angel of the Lord appeared to Joseph in a dream and said, "Get up! Take the Child and His mother and flee to Egypt. Remain there until I tell you. Herod's going to search for the Child to destroy Him." God used dreams in those days for means of His revelation to do His will.

So the magi come on the scene, they disappear. But the story of Herod is not over. But the bottom line just in pulling it all together is to remind you of something I said a little while ago. There are only three groups that are clearly identified when Christ comes: those who resent Him, those who are indifferent to Him, and those who worship Him. You're in one of them. The first two are damning, and being indifferent is as damning as being hostile. Jesus put it this way: "He that is not with Me is against Me." You want to be among those worshiping with the magi.

Father, we thank You for a wonderful celebration of the Lord's birth this morning as we gather together. Thank You for the reminder of the truth of Scripture and the richness of the account of it. Lord, we definitely are grateful. We rejoice with exceeding joy, overwhelming joy, that you have made us part of the worshipers. We are those who worship Christ, have no confidence in the flesh, not trusting in ourselves or our works, or our accomplishments, or our religion, or ceremonies; trusting only in Christ, believing only in Him. We have become part of His kingdom, children of God.

That is a relationship that can ever change. Nothing will ever separate us from Him, nothing. Nothing will ever cancel the promises made to us in Christ and the inheritance reserved for us in heaven – incorruptible, undefiled, unfading – until we enter that place to receive what You have promised to

us. We bow with the magi as true worshipers; with exceeding joy, we rejoice over the gift of Christ our Savior with thankful hearts. We ask that You would show us a fresh and anew daily the reasons for this joy as You continue to reveal to us the glories of Christ on the pages of Scripture. We pray in His name. Amen.

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