

The Lowly and The Wise

Matthew 2:1-12 (KJV)

1 Now when Jesus was born in Bethlehem of Judaea in the days of Herod the king, behold, there came wise men from the east to Jerusalem, **2** Saying, Where is he that is born King of the Jews? for we have seen his star in the east, and are come to worship him. **3** When Herod the king had heard these things, he was troubled, and all Jerusalem with him. **4** And when he had gathered all the chief priests and scribes of the people together, he demanded of them where Christ should be born. **5** And they said unto him, In Bethlehem of Judaea: for thus it is written by the prophet, **6** And thou Bethlehem, in the land of Juda, art not the least among the princes of Juda: for out of thee shall come a Governor, that shall rule my people Israel. **7** Then Herod, when he had privily called the wise men, enquired of them diligently what time the star appeared. **8** And he sent them to Bethlehem, and said, Go and search diligently for the young child; and when ye have found him, bring me word again, that I may come and worship him also. **9** When they had heard the king, they departed; and, lo, the star, which they saw in the east, went before them, till it came and stood over where the young child was. **10** When they saw the star, they rejoiced with exceeding great joy. **11** And when they were come into the house, they saw the young child with Mary his mother, and fell down, and worshipped him: and when they had opened their treasures, they presented unto him gifts; gold, and frankincense and myrrh. **12** And being warned of God in a dream that they should not return to Herod, they departed into their own country another way.

Worshipping God is about leaving some things behind and bringing some things to Him.

While there are a number of people who were a part of the birth of Jesus, our focus today will be on the shepherds and wise Men. The shepherds will represent the Jewish people while the wise men will represent Gentile people. Gentiles, of course is anyone who is not a Jew.

It is important to realize that Jesus came to the Jewish people as their Messiah. He was to be loved and worshipped by them.

There are many prophecies in the Old Testament that foretell Jesus' birth.

Here are two:

Isaiah prophesied the virgin birth of Jesus in Isaiah 7:14. The prophet Isaiah addresses the "house of David," meaning the family and descendants of King David, and speaks of a virgin giving birth to the child. Isaiah says that this will be a sign from God. He also says that the child would be referred to as "Immanuel," which means, "God with us." The New Testament books of Matthew and Luke record details involving the birth of Jesus, who was born about 700 years after the time of Isaiah, saying that he was born of a virgin named Mary and is the Son of God.

In Micah 5:2, there is a prophecy that reveals that Bethlehem would be the birthplace of the Messiah. It eliminates all other cities and towns throughout the world as a place in which the Messiah could be born. It narrows the possibilities to one tiny village just south of Jerusalem.

What a glorious night for the shepherds!

While they were watching their flocks an angel appeared to them and told them of the birth of Jesus. Their response was "Let us now go..." They were so excited about the announcement of the birth of Jesus that they left their flocks behind so they could go worship.

Meanwhile, a star appeared in the heavens to some wise men, probably astrologers. We don't know how many and exactly where they came from. We do know that they came from a long way and that it took them a long time to get there.

They came to the house of Mary and Joseph, not the manger. It is believed that Jesus was about two years old, because Herod had all the male babies two years old and younger killed, hoping that Jesus would be among them.

The wise men brought treasures with them, gold, frankincense and myrrh.

So while the Shepherds left their flocks behind to go worship Jesus, the wise men travelled a long way and brought treasures with them when they came to worship Jesus.

Worship involves leaving some things behind as did the shepherds, and bringing some things with you as did the wise men.

What is worship? Worship means adoration, a feeling of profound love and admiration, to love without question or to excess; to show devotion. Our love for God should be manifested in our worship of Him. There is nothing more fulfilling than being in the presence of God, worshipping Him with all of your heart.

Worship begins with a knowledge or revelation of who you are worshipping. This knowledge and revelation must come from the Word of God. The night that the angel of the Lord appeared to the shepherds was a night of revelation and understanding for them. No doubt that whatever they had learned prior to that night about who God was had just been eclipsed by the glory of the Lord that was shining around them. Tradition and past experience must give way to Biblical truths and greater revelation.

True biblical worship so satisfies our total personality that we don't have to shop around for man-made substitutes. William Temple made this clear in his masterful definition of worship:

For worship is the submission of all our nature to God. It is the quickening of conscience by His holiness; the nourishment of mind with His truth; the purifying of imagination by His beauty; the opening of the heart to His love; the surrender of will to His purpose – and all of this gathered up in adoration, the most selfless emotion of which our nature is capable and therefore the chief remedy for that self-centeredness which is our original sin and the source of all actual sin.

The shepherds were being called or summoned to a higher place of worship and adoration than they had ever been before. They were so impacted by the multitude of heavenly host that they all agreed to leave their flocks to go worship. If you want to come to Jesus and become all He wants you to be, you may have to leave some things behind.

The principal of “leaving things behind” is introduced to us in the Old Testament. When a man desires to be married he must leave his mother behind. If a woman wants to be married, she has to leave her home. In order to obey the call of God on his life, Abraham had to leave his home country behind.

Sometimes God will call on us to leave some things behind as a form of worship to show our love and devotion to Him. One of the Ten Commandments tells us in Exodus 20:3, "Thou shalt have no other gods before me." God should always be first in our lives. Other "gods" in our lives can be jobs, success, beauty, money, etc.

In Matthew 19:16-22, a story is told of one who came to Jesus. He was young and he was rich. He refers to Jesus as "Good Master" in an attempt to show Jesus that he knows Him, that he has learned of Him. This rich young man then asks, "What must I do?" This young man made it clear that he was obedient to the commandments, but when Jesus asked him to sell everything he owned and come follow Him, the young man couldn't do it. There were some things that he could not leave behind, and it cost the young man the relationship with Jesus that he sought after.

The shepherds being poor and lowly had nothing to bring with them as the wise men did, but there were some things they could leave behind. The shepherds, as a type of the Jewish people realized that the path they had been on was not leading them to growth and fulfillment in their relationship with God. But that night everything changed, and it changed with fresh and new revelation. Jesus had been born and the shepherds were willing to leave everything behind to worship him.

The shepherds were a type of the Jewish people. They had been instructed by the Old Testament to love and worship God. In the Book of Deuteronomy, Moses instructed them, "And thou shalt love the Lord thy God with all thine heart, and with all thy soul, and with all thy might." (Deut. 6:5)

They were tempted on many occasions to worship idols and to sin against God. They would turn their back on God and leave Him behind. When they would turn back to God, they were often times too poor to bring treasures, but there were always things they could leave behind, as a sacrifice of worship.

What would it have been like to have received an angelic invitation, to be the first of the human race to visit God manifest in the flesh and have nothing to bring? To arrive empty handed? All of that was about to change! A new precedent was about to be established! There were some wise men on their way and they were

not coming empty handed! They were Gentiles and they were going to show the New Testament worshipper that there is more to worship than leaving things behind. When you come to worship, you bring gifts that tell Jesus you know who he is and you are giving him worship that he is worthy of.

Of the gospel writers, Matthew is the only one who mentions wise men. Mark and John make no comment whatsoever about the birth of Christ, while Luke, who writes the most about the events surrounding His birth, leaves this scene out. Matthew's single, brief passage has sparked a great deal of imaginative speculation over the centuries and has raised a lot of questions.

The Bible nowhere states how many wise men came and visited Joseph, Mary and Jesus. Although Matthew mentions three types of gifts they presented, there may have been two, three, or more of them. Some have even thought there might be as many as twelve!

Regardless of how many there were, the question remains, "Who were they?" Because the wise men saw and followed a star, many believe that they were pagan astrologers.

One of the most evocative or haunting images from any Christmas scene must be that of the wise men attending Jesus' birth, and the star hovering over the stable where He was born. But so few people actually know what the Bible really says about this event, or what it actually means for us today.

In Matthew 2:1, we read, "Now when Jesus was born in Bethlehem of Judaea in the days of Herod the king, behold, there came wise men from the east to Jerusalem,"

The actual journey of these wise men could easily have taken a long time. It would appear from Matthew 2:7 that the star, which the wise men had seen, had appeared at the moment of Jesus' birth. But the wise men had arrived after he was born. If they saw the star at the moment of Jesus' birth, then it would have taken up to two years for the wise men to arrive.

We should note that King Herod wanted to know the exact time the star had appeared, presumably so he could pinpoint the exact moment of Jesus' birth. He

later proceeded to have all baby boys killed who were two years old and under. This would indicate that Jesus had been born up to two years previously. So the wise men did not arrive at the same time as the shepherds, who arrived the same day as the birth. Indeed, Jesus' family was no longer in a stable; they were living in a house at that time.

It is important to note that King Herod was not the rightful king. He wasn't even a Jew. King Herod was an Edomite. He was not of the seed of Jacob, but of Esau. He was appointed by the Roman government to be the King of Israel. The wise men brought him no gifts. They only went to him for directions to the real King of Kings. That is no doubt why the Holy Ghost led the wise men away from him and when they left Jesus they were instructed to go another way.

When we begin to see Jesus more and more clearly, we realize that we have to leave or turn away from the things we bow to or pay homage to. Jesus should be the only King in our lives.

Notice, in Matthew 2:11, "And when they were come into the house, they saw the young child with Mary his mother, and fell down, and worshipped him: and when they had opened their treasures, they presented unto him gifts; gold, and frankincense, and myrrh." The gifts had further significance by reflecting on the character of the life of Jesus. They were also prophetic in that they represented who He was and what He would ultimately suffer. Their worship and adoration of him were in large part represented in what they brought to him.

The gold was a type of his royalty. He was the King of the Jews; as a matter of fact, He was and is the King of Kings! All of the wise men recognized this. They completely by passed King Herod, They brought him nothing and gave their complete allegiance to Jesus.

They brought him frankincense which was aromatic or an incense. It was a type of His divinity. They brought Him gifts. He was the priest that would offer Himself as a sacrifice. He was God in flesh, thereby making him qualified to offer Himself as a sacrifice. It is impossible to know how the wise men came to bring him frankincense other than the Holy Ghost revealing it to them.

Among their treasures was myrrh. Myrrh is literally prophesying to Joseph and Mary the death and burial and Jesus. Myrrh was a perfume used for embalming. Myrrh was a type of his suffering or humanity.

The wise men worshipped based on their God given revelation of him. They worshipped the One who was king, priest and the One would sacrifice himself for their redemption.

Conclusion

Today, we may not bring literal gifts to Him, but we can bring to him the rest of our life, making Him the true king of our life so that everything we do is based on His will and purpose. We can bring to him our desires, meaning that our lives are not going to be based on things that make us happy, but things that make Him happy. We can bring our love: our love for Him, our love for ourselves and our love for others. We can bring Him our faith that is our total belief system - our life, family, finances, and children. We can bring Him our faith in the future, which is retirement, traveling, hobbies, health, and even rapture or death. We can bring Him our faith in Heaven itself.

So yes, when we come to Jesus, we leave sin and worldliness behind. We say “goodbye” to sinful habits and addictions. This shows us and Jesus really how much we love Him and want to please Him. It is worship! We worship with the shepherds when we leave our sinful past behind us and do His will for our lives.

We bring him gifts of faith and obedience, showing that we trust Him and submit our lives to Him. All of our desires, hopes and dreams are now in His hands and we serve him and worship him. Not just on Christmas Day as we celebrate His birth, but every day of our lives.

Robertson McQuilkin, former president of Columbia International University of Columbia, South Carolina, wrote this testimony:

Life was heavy on me. My dearest friend and intimate companion, my delightful wife Muriel, was slipping away, one painful loss at a time, as Alzheimer’s disease ravaged her brain. Just as the full impact of what was happening to us hit home, the life of Bob, our eldest son, was snuffed out in a diving accident.

Two years later, to care for Muriel, I left my life work at its peak. I was numb. Not bitter, let alone angry. Why should I be? That's the way life is, life in a broken world. But the passion in my love for God had evaporated, leaving a residue of resignation where once had been vibrant faith.

I knew that I was in deep trouble, and I did the only thing I knew to do—I went away to a mountain hideaway for prayer and fasting. It took about twenty-four hours to shake free of preoccupation with my own wounds and to focus on the excellences of God. As I did, slowly love began to be rekindled. And with love came joy.

I wrote God a love letter, naming forty-one of his marvelous gifts to me, spotlighting eleven of his grandest acts in history, and exulting in ten of his characteristics that exceed my imagination. Surely he enjoyed my gratitude—who doesn't appreciate gratitude?

But I discovered something else. Something happened to me. I call it the reflex action of thanksgiving. My love flamed up from the dying embers, and my spirit soared. I discovered that ingratitude impoverishes—but that a heavy heart lifts on the wings of praise.