

**January 10, 2021**

**Matthew 2:1-12**

In the time of King Herod, after Jesus was born in Bethlehem of Judea, wise men from the East came to Jerusalem, asking, "Where is the child who has been born king of the Jews? For we observed his star at its rising, and have come to pay him homage." When King Herod heard this, he was frightened, and all Jerusalem with him; and calling together all the chief priests and scribes of the people, he inquired of them where the Messiah was to be born. They told him, "In Bethlehem of Judea; for so it has been written by the prophet:

‘And you, Bethlehem, in the land of Judah,  
are by no means least among the rulers of Judah;  
for from you shall come a ruler  
who is to shepherd my people Israel.'"

Then Herod secretly called for the wise men and learned from them the exact time when the star had appeared. Then he sent them to Bethlehem, saying, "Go and search diligently for the child; and when you have found him, bring me word so that I may also go and pay him homage." When they had heard the king, they set out; and there, ahead of them, went the star that they had seen at its rising, until it stopped over the place where the child was. When they saw that the star had stopped, they were overwhelmed with joy. On entering the house, they saw the child with Mary his mother; and they knelt down and paid him homage. Then, opening their treasure chests, they offered him gifts of gold, frankincense, and myrrh. And having been warned in a dream not to return to Herod, they left for their own country by another road.

**Epiphany – What will you give to God this year?**

So, what did you get for Christmas? I ask that question because Christmas really has two parts to it. The first part is receiving. **After all**, God gave us all a gift on Christmas, the gift of his Son, Jesus. Did you get that gift this year? Did you open it? Oh, I truly hope that every one of us here believes that Jesus died for our sins on the cross, and has invited Jesus to live in our hearts. That’s the best Christmas gift of all, the gift of salvation.

Can I share with you some of the other things I got this Christmas?

First of all, I got two really fun Christmas Eve worship services. I loved them both! While they were a bit different this year, the Christmas story was told. It was great.

Then I got some really cool things on Christmas Day. Can I show some of them to you?

[Show presents.]

- Wood burner
- Golf tees & whiffle golf balls
- Coupon book
- Wise men gifts

It's been a great Christmas!

How about you? Did you receive wonderful gifts this Christmas? It's okay to say that, if we did, because the first part of Christmas is receiving great things, beginning with the gift of God's Son, Jesus.

**The Wise Men show** us that the second part of Christmas is giving. They traveled all that way, up to 1,000 miles, like from here to Atlanta. Did you ever think of it like that before? The Wise Men traveled, on foot or on camel, the equivalent of us traveling from here to Atlanta, Georgia – and back! For what? To receive what? Nothing. They didn't want to receive anything. Instead, they

wanted to give. That's the second part of Christmas, isn't it? *Giving* to God. That's what the Wise Men show us.

And, boy, did they give! They gave their time, first of all. A trip like that had to take months, if not a year, to do round trip. Then they gave their worship, their heart. That's why they had come. They told King Herod, ***"We saw his star (while we were) in the east, and have come to worship him."*** They also gave their money, didn't they? (The cost for the trip, and the expensive gold, frankincense and myrrh.)

The Wise Men show us that the second part of Christmas, after we've opened all of our presents and enjoyed them, is giving back to God, out of gratitude.

But what can we give back to God? I'm glad you asked! You were given this **blue paper** when you came in today. [\[See paper at the end of sermon.\]](#) This is a really important paper. On it are some suggestions of things that we can give back to God this year. Today is a good day to look at a paper like this, being at the beginning of a fresh calendar year, when all kinds of people are making all kinds of resolutions. This paper is only for you and God to see. It's private. And everyone should have one. (Does anyone need one?)

For folks watching online, if you would like one of these papers, please email the church office – you can find that email on the church bulletin or here on **the screen**. And we will try to post this paper on our Facebook page and Website for you to download and fill out.

Four times this year I'm going to put this same paper in the bulletin (in March, June, September and December), to keep these gifts we're giving back to God in front of your mind. As we go through them, I want to invite you to grab a pen, or pencil, and check off the ones that apply to you.

Are you ready? Here we go.

**The first step for anyone who wants to give back to God**, after God has given us the greatest gift of all, Jesus, is to give God our faith in his Son. If you already believe in Jesus, or if you are ready to begin believing in him today, then check this one off.

Let me tell you a story, one that was first told by the Danish philosopher Soren Kierkegaard. **He says there once was a boy** who was afraid of the water, but was determined to teach himself to swim. When he thought he had it, he called his father over. His dad came over and the boy splashed his arms and kicked the water with one foot and yelled to his dad, "Look, dad! Look! I'm swimming!" He was splashing his arms in the water and kicking with one foot, but he wasn't really swimming – because all the time he had his other foot sticking out of the water, hanging on to the side of the pool.

Then Kierkegaard asks, how many of us want the people around us to think we're Christians, but we've never really let go of our ties to this world? Just as the boy wasn't swimming because he did not yet surrender himself completely to the water, many people aren't really Christians because they haven't yet

surrendered themselves completely to Jesus. They're not "all in" yet. They're still holding on to the side of the pool, still holding on to the securities of this world: wealth, power, anger, possessions. They haven't let them go.

Do you really believe that Jesus is your Savior? You'll know you do when you are "all in", when Jesus has every part of you and you're not holding anything back.

Are there any parts in the next section on our blue paper that you aren't willing to give to Jesus? Are you "all in", or is your foot still holding on to the side of the pool? Let's take a look at them.

[Look at section #2.]

[For the last one, do the officers commissioning  
Reference Church Leadership Sheet]

Now, if you're like me, you might be thinking right now, "All of these things in the 2<sup>nd</sup> section are great. I wouldn't disagree with any of them. But, man, they're hard! I don't know if I can do these."

But here's the good news. God wants to give you the *power* to go "all in" with him, to leave the shallow side of the pool, and go into the deep end with Jesus. And that's the 3<sup>rd</sup> section of this page. These are the ways that we get the supernatural strength to live completely for Jesus.

[Look at section #3.]

Let me tell you a true story. Ira Griffith Yates was a sheep farmer in **Pecos County Texas**, back during the depression. The economy was so bad that, even though he owned 8,000 acres of land, he was in danger of losing it all because he couldn't pay his mortgage on the land. With little money for clothes or food, his family (like many others) had to live on government subsidy. Day after day, as he grazed his sheep over those rolling West Texas hills, he wondered how he would ever pay his bills. Then a crew from the Transcontinental Oil Company came into the area and asked permission to drill on his land. With nothing to lose, he told them yes. Three long years went by before any drilling was done. Then, on October 5, 1926, drilling finally began.

The first well came up dry. So did the second well. And the third. And the fourth. But then came the fifth well. 500 feet down . . . it came up dry. 800 feet down, still dry. 1,000 feet . . . nothing. Finally, at 1,115 feet they struck oil. So much oil, in fact, that they had no way to transport it all. They closed up the well and dug another. It too struck oil. Then another, and it struck oil. Then another struck more oil. Then another. And another. All told, over 700 wells were dug on Ira Yates property. In 1929, at the height of the depression, they produced over 41 million barrels a year. Ira Yates became an instant millionaire. For on the day he purchased his land he also purchased the oil and mineral rights underneath the land. He owned it all. He sold oil leases to companies from his front porch, collecting as much as \$180,000 in one day.

Yet, just a few days before that he was living on government relief. Why? Because he was sitting on a world of riches, and didn't know it.

You know what? Many Christians are doing the same thing. They are sitting on riches, and don't even know it. **The ways we can receive God's power** are right beneath us, as it were. We are sitting on a wealth of riches, a wealth of strength, a wealth of grace – IF we use them! The choice is ours. I hope you will look over this 3<sup>rd</sup> section seriously and dig down deep into the riches of God that are right at your finger tips all the time.

As I said, I'll be bringing this paper out four times this year, that we all may grow in faith, grow in service, and grow in power in 2021!

Let us pray –

Another important way we can receive God's grace and power in our lives is eating our family meal together – receiving Holy Communion. Let us silently confess our sins to God as we prepare our hearts to receive this undeserved grace.

In the name of Christ, we are forgiven! Glory to God!

As a forgiven people, lightened of the burden of our sins, let us stand as we hear the good news: