

The Gifts We Bring



CLARKSBURG BAPTIST CHURCH
ADVENT DEVOTIONAL



As we approach the joyous celebration of the birth of our Savior, Jesus Christ, we are reminded of the profound significance of gift-giving. Just as the Magi presented their precious offerings to the newborn King, we, too, have gifts to bring to our Lord.

This Advent season, we embark on a journey of reflection and devotion, exploring the gifts we hold within our hearts to present before Jesus. Through prayer, scripture, and contemplation, we seek to draw closer to our Lord and Savior, forging a deeper connection with Him and one another as a congregation.

Amid the hustle and bustle of the holiday season, it is easy to lose sight of the true essence of Christmas. This devotional invites you to pause, reflect, and consider the gifts you possess - not wrapped in paper and bows but rooted in faith, love, and gratitude. Together, let us embrace this sacred time of Advent with open hearts and a renewed sense of purpose, offering our most precious gifts to Jesus.

May this devotional serve as a guiding light, leading us towards a more intimate relationship with our Lord, and may it foster a sense of unity within our church family. Through this collective journey of introspection and devotion, may we discover a deeper understanding of the profound love and grace that Jesus brings into our lives

May this Advent season be a time of transformation and renewal as we draw nearer to our Lord and offer Him the gifts of our hearts.

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MATTHEW 2:1-12 NIV

After Jesus was born in Bethlehem in Judea, during the time of King Herod, Magi from the east came to Jerusalem and asked, "Where is the one who has been born king of the Jews? We saw his star when it rose and have come to worship him."

When King Herod heard this he was disturbed, and all Jerusalem with him. When he had called together all the people's chief priests and teachers of the law, he asked them where the Messiah was to be born. "In Bethlehem in Judea," they replied, "for this is what the prophet has written:

"But you, Bethlehem, in the land of Judah,
are by no means least among the rulers of Judah;
for out of you will come a ruler
who will shepherd my people Israel."

Then Herod called the Magi secretly and found out from them the exact time the star had appeared. He sent them to Bethlehem and said, "Go and search carefully for the child. As soon as you find him, report to me, so that I too may go and worship him."

After they had heard the king, they went on their way, and the star they had seen when it rose went ahead of them until it stopped over the place where the child was. When they saw the star, they were overjoyed. On coming to the house, they saw the child with his mother Mary, and they bowed down and worshiped him. Then they opened their treasures and presented him with gifts of gold, frankincense and myrrh. And having been warned in a dream not to go back to Herod, they returned to their country by another route.

THE SEARCH FOR A KING - Week 1

My cherished childhood Christmas memories revolve around our nativity scene. The specific nativity set was hand-sewn by my grandmother long ago.

Gifted by my parents to my own family, this nativity set now serves as a tangible link to my nostalgia while helping convey the timeless story of Jesus to my children.

The nativity scene, depicted in various forms throughout history, invites reflection. Close your eyes and envision it: the characters, sounds, and emotions. Tradition shapes our mental images, like the iconic three wise men—Caspar, Melchior, and Balthazar—although this detail isn't strictly biblical but merely tradition. Scholars agree the magi may have visited Jesus later than commonly believed, finding him not in a stable but in a house.

Who were these wise men, and why did they seek the child? Magi, or royal counselors, were esteemed for their wisdom. Recall Daniel and his friends, wise counselors in their time. Scholars suggest that these magi hailed from Persia, traveling vast distances, possibly guided by ancient prophecies.

Persia, once the conqueror of Babylon, held historical significance. Daniel, centuries earlier, prophesied and spoke in Persia. Now, magi from this region sought a king, possibly aware of prophecies from figures like Daniel. In Jerusalem, they encountered not the newborn king but a perplexed Herod. Astonishingly, the religious leaders, armed with prophecies, failed to act.

This narrative highlights God's grand design—bringing nations to Himself. The magi, Gentiles from afar, embraced the prophesied Messiah, humbly worshiping Him with their lives. Despite the promise of joy for all, some, like the religious leaders, they missed the extraordinary event.

The story foreshadows Jesus' life and death. The magi's kingly gifts contrast with the crown of thorns and cross bestowed by Pilate. Religious leaders who failed to recognize the Christ child later cried, "Crucify him." As distant travelers worshiped Jesus, a Gentile soldier would one day declare Him the Son of God.

In the upcoming Advent weeks, we'll delve into this profound story, exploring the magi's gifts and their deep symbolism. Amidst the fulfilled prophecies, let's not overlook what God is doing today. Like the magi, let's approach the Messiah, proclaiming His worth, humbling ourselves, and seeking true worship.

WEEK 1 - DISCUSSION GUIDE

Share a favorite childhood Christmas memory or Christmas tradition.

As you reflect on the passage from Matthew and this week's devotional, what do you hear God say? Where do you see God at work?

This week's devotional spoke of God's grand design of bringing the nations to Himself. How do you see God doing this in this passage? In Scripture? In the world today? How can you be a part of this grand design?

People all around us are searching. Searching for meaning, truth, and hope, yet so many are missing it. How can you step into someone's story this week to help point them to Jesus?

JESUS IS KING - Week 2

The first gift given by the magi was the gift of gold. Gold was not just a gift of wealth but a recognition of kingship. They came to see a king. A king that had been promised for hundreds of years.

Can you imagine hundreds of years before Jesus was born, His birth was prophesied, and His people were expectant for a King of Kings? It seems unfathomable, but with our God in charge, that is exactly what happened.

This child king would be and still is our Wonderful Counselor, Mighty God, Everlasting Father, Prince of Peace. A Wonderful Counselor. As I ponder that title, it humbles me that His first description is one of counsel. Someone in whom I can place my greatest fears and victories. Someone who holds the secrets of my heart in his hand. He is a trusted confidant and counselor that will never betray me. I can always run and confide in my Mighty God.

Mighty God who spoke our world into existence. Who can make the blind see, the deaf hear, the lame walk, and raise the dead. Who still speaks quietly to our hearts today. To bring change to the world, and He always will.

Everlasting Father. I love my earthly Father. He is a wonderful human, but he is perfectly imperfect. Our Everlasting Father is perfect in every way. He is constant here, before the Earth was formed, and will continue on when it is no more. In a world that changes so quickly and constantly, He is an anchor that keeps me steady.

Prince of Peace-In this time of constant turmoil, this title for Jesus settles my heart. Even though I know our world will never have peace until Jesus returns. Knowing Jesus, the Prince of Peace, having a relationship with him brings peace to his children's hearts. That internal peace will sustain us until He comes back again.

Jesus, our king, will reign with greatness. His government is one of peace that will not end, where He reigns with justice and righteousness forever. That Child that was born, that Son that was given for all of us. When the magi gave the Christ child gold, they declared his royal status and his kingship. This child was a king, and they recognized it. He was, is, and will always be our King!

WEEK 2 - DISCUSSION GUIDE

Share a story of a cherished gift that you received one Christmas.

As you reflect on the passage from Matthew and this week's devotional, what do you hear God say? Where do you see God at work?

This week's devotional spoke of the kingship of Jesus. Their offering of gold was a declaration that this child was a king. What does it mean for you that Jesus is king? What does it mean for the world?

Of the titles given to Jesus (Wonderful Counselor, Mighty God, Everlasting Father, and Prince of Peace), which one stands out to you?

JESUS OUR GREAT HIGH PRIEST - Week 3

When the Magi brought gifts to the Christ Child, one of those gifts was Frankincense. Frankincense is a resinous substance that comes from certain trees in the balsam family. When it hardens, it produces what is considered the finest burning incense in the world. Besides being an extravagant gift, is there anything about this gift that contains a clue concerning the child to whom the gift is given?

In Exodus 30, God instructed Moses to build an altar on which a priest would burn incense. As part of the worship of God and sacrifices offered to God, the priest was commanded to burn incense as “a regular incense offering before the Lord throughout your generations.” God was also very particular about the incense, “sweet spices, stacte, and onycha, and galbanum, sweet spices with pure frankincense (in equal parts), and make an incense blended as by the perfumer, seasoned with salt, pure and holy.” (Exodus 30:1-8, 34-35)

In the Old Testament, the Hebrew word for priest (*côhên*) denotes one who offers sacrifices. The need for a priest was directly connected to a consciousness of sin. As a result of Adam’s sin, all of humankind became separated from a pure and holy God. With no hope of restoring the relationship on their own, it was necessary for someone to intercede on their behalf. In short, a priest represented the people before God and offered prescribed sacrifices, including atoning sacrifices for their sins.

This Christ Child, Jesus, God’s Son, to whom the Magi brought frankincense, lived a sinless life. He willingly went to the cross, the perfect sacrifice, and died for the sins of the world. In offering himself, Jesus was not only the sacrifice but also the priest offering the sacrifice on behalf of all humankind. Jesus rose from the dead and sits at the right hand of God. Therefore, we no longer need an earthly priest to be our advocate before a pure and holy God. We have direct access through Jesus, our Great High Priest. (Hebrews 4:14-16)

Balsam-scented candles are quite popular during Christmas and Advent. While not on the same level as the finest incense in the world, the next time you enter a house where a balsam-scented candle is burning, may it do more than put you in a “Christmas spirit.” May it in some way remind you of Christ, the great High Priest, who offered himself “one sacrifice for sins, once for all” (Hebrews 10:10, 12).

WEEK 3 - DISCUSSION GUIDE

Share a story of the strangest gift that you received one Christmas.

As you reflect on the passage from Matthew and this week's devotional, what do you hear God say? Where do you see God at work?

This week's devotional spoke of the priesthood of Jesus. Jesus came not only as a priest who would understand us but also as the sacrifice necessary for our salvation. How do you respond to this imagery of priest and sacrifice?

Scripture says that this priest is able to understand and empathize with us because he experienced this life just as we do, yet was without sin. Jesus knows you, and He knows your story. Where do you need to know that Jesus is fully present in your life and empathizing with you?

JESUS THE PERFECT SACRIFICE- Week 4

When the Magi arrive to see Jesus, they come to present gifts to the King. Gold, Frankincense, and Myrrh. Myrrh may be the last item listed; however, it might be the most significant gift to foreshadow the sacrifice Jesus would later make on the cross.

Historically, the use of myrrh dates to the Old Testament when the Israelites would use myrrh as a holy anointing oil for priests before entering the holy of holies to perform sacrifices. When Jesus was born, myrrh had a greater value than gold. It was used as a perfume, immune system support, and a key ingredient in embalming liquid to prepare a body for burial. I don't think embalming liquid appears on the top of a baby shower registry in society today. Right? I think I would be pretty freaked out if it did! Although myrrh may have these uses, it was probably not what the Magi intended it to mean. Why would the Magi unintentionally remind Mary and Joseph that in roughly 30 years, they would lose their son? Perhaps God used this gift as a reminder about Jesus' true calling on earth: to rescue us from our sins through His death and resurrection. (Isaiah 53)

In (Mark 15:23), as Jesus hung on the cross, he was offered wine mixed with myrrh. In (John 19:39-40) we see those who came to bury Jesus bring myrrh for part of the embalming process after his death. So, throughout Jesus' life, the gift of myrrh comes full circle. The Magi present it to him at his birth. He is offered a taste right before he dies, then is embalmed in it after his death. So, as we prepare our hearts for this Advent season, let's focus on Jesus's sacrifice. (Hebrews 10:1-18). Christ's sacrifice once and for all. "I have come to do your will, O God," "I will remember their sins and their lawless deeds no more."

God's rescue mission to give us an eternal relationship with him began with the birth of Jesus, was symbolized by the Magi's gift of myrrh, and ended with Jesus as the ultimate sacrifice on the cross. Jesus was born to die, and He was born to die for us (Matt. 1:21). We can never fully appreciate the birth of Christ unless we see it through the lens of the cross. Christmas is ultimately about Christ's love, seen most clearly in His sacrifice for us.

WEEK 4 - DISCUSSION GUIDE

Share a story of a gift you gave someone else, and the person responded,
"Well, it's the thought that counts."

As you reflect on the passage from Matthew and this week's devotional, what
do you hear God say? Where do you see God at work?

This week's devotional spoke of the sacrifice of Jesus. How does the cross
narrative shape or reshape your perspective of the birth narrative of Jesus?

The Christ child would one day grow and offer himself as a sacrifice, once and
for all, for all people. What does it mean for you that the sacrifice of Jesus was
enough, and there is no more sacrifice needed from you, just your faith and
trust?

JESUS OUR LORD - Week 5

While all of the gifts given to Jesus are special in their way, the greatest gift offered to the Christ Child was the magi's offering of themselves. They laid before him and worshiped him, not just as a king but as Lord.

To recognize Jesus as Lord means to recognize Him as more than just a human.

He is fully God. Recognizing Jesus as Lord means recognizing that His sacrifice means everything. There was and is no other human on earth that could do what He did- He saved us. He saw us in our worst, guiltiest, most regretful moments and still said, "I love them just the same. They are still worth everything to Me."

Let's understand that sin is a choice, a choice to love something more than God, even for a moment. A choice to love something that does not love us back that intends to drag us into a pit, that leaves us feeling emptier than before.

Recognizing Jesus as Lord is choosing to see that God is worthy of love over everything and everyone else- it's a choice. It's choosing to see that Jesus is everything we cannot be. To offer ourselves to Jesus requires the first step of willingness. Our willingness comes from a place of understanding who God is and what His heart for us looks like.

When we choose to offer ourselves to God, that means we leave our desires behind because we understand that God's ways are better than our own. It takes trusting that even when He calls us to the scary, unknown places, we trust Him enough to know that He'll provide everything we need and take care of us all the way through our obedience because He's on the other side of obedience waiting for us.

Jesus is the ultimate example of this willing offering. One way to see it is that we were the ones that put Jesus on the cross. No, He chose to go to the cross because He knew obeying His loving Father was going to be more glorifying to Him (see Matthew 26:39). Jesus could have chosen to stay off the cross because it was going to be difficult, painful, and ultimately lead to His physical death- but He remembered you. He saw you and decided you are worth His pain and difficulty and life. He provided absolute salvation for you, a sinner who every day goes against the One who decided you were worth dying for.

This knowledge calls for action, and that action is being like Jesus. So, recognizing Jesus as Lord means being willing to offer everything you have and everything you are to the One who gave you those things because He is worth it and worthy of it.

Will you offer yourself unto Him?

WEEK 5 - DISCUSSION GUIDE

Share your Christmas Eve and Christmas Day traditions.

As you reflect on the passage from Matthew and this week's devotional, what do you hear God say? Where do you see God at work?

The magi could have reported where they had found the child, yet they didn't. They recognized the cost of this trip and their defiance of the king and deemed worthy to come to worship this new king. How do you see these magi offering themselves as the greatest gift to the newborn king?

Many people say they follow Jesus, but few declare Him as Lord. To follow means to imitate, but to declare Lordship is an act of surrender. Where have you not fully given yourself to your Lord? What are you still holding back from Him? Will you surrender it all to follow Him and declare Him Lord?

CHRISTMAS DAY

We have spent the last few weeks reading through Jesus's nativity scene and the magi's visit. These men counted up the cost and traveled great distances to see this newborn king, and when they arrived, they offered elaborate gifts, but as we have seen, the greatest gift they offered King Jesus was themselves. At the sight of the child, they fell down and worshipped him. They came with gifts but left empty-handed but transformed.

As you spend your Christmas day today celebrating and honoring one another with gifts, do not forget what today is all about. The gifts are fun, the food is delicious, and the traditions are sweet, but it is all about Jesus.

Two thousand years ago, Jesus stepped into a broken and hurting world. His coming had been prophesied for centuries, yet the people lost hope. When Jesus arrived, everything changed. Hope had come. The good news of great joy for all people was now present.

We live in a world today where people are losing hope. The world is broken, and people are hurting in terrible ways. They need to know that Jesus has come. This king, who is also our priest, sacrifice, and Lord, has come. He has offered himself as the sacrifice necessary for our eternal hope and salvation. This is the greatest gift we could ever receive.

This king also promised to return one day and make everything new. What more could we offer the king who gave everything to us than our everything to him? Let's declare him as king. Let's declare him as priest. Let's declare him as Lord.

May your Christmas Day be sweet and beautiful. May the gifts you share with one another bring a smile to each other's faces. May the greatest gift you offer this day be the gift of your devotion and your life to Jesus.

Merry Christmas!