**Sunday, January 3rd, 2021**

**Matthew 2:1-12**

The Christmas season is a time of giving gifts.

But often it is hard to find just the right gift.

We often spend a lot of time looking for the perfect gift

          for a family member, or friend, or coworker.

But suppose you wished to give a gift to Jesus, what would it be?

How could we possibly select a gift for the One

          who not only has everything, but who made everything?

Yet the Wise Men did.

They are an excellent example for all of us.

Before they left home,

          they carefully selected gifts to give the new born King.

We are familiar with the gifts they brought with them on the journey:

          gold, frankincense, and myrrh.

But in addition to these three tangible gifts,

          they gave the Savior some gifts we can give him today:

          their hope, their time, and their worship.

The wandering wise men gave Jesus their hope.

When everyone else saw a night sky, this small group of men saw the light.

The sight of the star sparked a desire in their hearts which sent them packing.

They went seeking Jesus.

They hoped to find him.

When the star was not visible, they held on to their hope,

          seeking, asking for directions, always looking,

          always hoping to see the star again.

When night comes to our world, what do we see?

          The darkness, or the stars?

          Hopelessness, or hopefulness?

God's light shines in our darkness.

Often, just as he did so long ago, God uses the darkness

          to reveal his light, his presence, his love.

Whenever our hearts are shadowed by the darkness

          of loneliness, grief, disappointment, or doubt,

          we can look for the light that only God can give.

Jesus promised:

          "I am the light of the world.

          Those who follow me will never live in darkness,

          but will have the light that gives life."

We can give God our hope for Christmas.

When we give him our hope and trust,

          He is able to wipe away our doubts and fears.

While we are giving, we can give God our time.

The wise men did.

Before they gave God their gifts, they gave their presence.

It is likely that these men traveled as long as two years

          before locating the prince of heaven.

Before that one incredible moment when they knelt before Jesus,

          the wise men spent many moments,

          months, perhaps years, searching,

          in anticipation of that encounter.

They devoted their time, to seeking the Savior,

          regardless of how much time would be required.

They never said, "this trip is taking too much time, trouble, work, or money."

They never limited their time seeking him.

They kept going, and asking, and seeking, until they came face to face with him.

We can also give Jesus the gift of our time.

God has promised:

       "You will seek him and find him, when you seek him with all of your heart.”

When we spend time with God,

          He can change our lives, forever.

When we give God the gift of our time,

          He can do amazing things through us.

When they did find him, the wise men gave Jesus another gift: their worship.

It is probable that these were men of great wealth.

          How else could they embark on an extended journey

                    and still have gifts to give at its end?

It is likely these men had influence.

          How else could they have commanded an audience with Herod?

They must have had intellect.

          How else could they have navigated across thousands of miles

                   of terrain following a star?

Men of wealth, influence, and intellect:

          What did they do when they saw Jesus?

          They fell down and worshiped him.

Worship is a gift which extends to the giver as well.

Through worship, we come to see God more clearly.

God invites us, through worship,

          to see his face so he can change ours.

God loves to change the faces of his children.

By his fingers, wrinkles of worry are rubbed away.

Shadows of shame and doubt become portraits of grace and trust.

He relaxes clenched jaws and smooths furrowed brows.

In worship, we simply stand before God with a prepared and willing heart

          and let God do his work.

And he does.

He wipes away the tears.

He mops away the perspiration.

He softens our furrowed brows.

He touches our cheeks.

He changes our faces as we worship,

          as we offer Him our thanksgiving and praise.

As we share our thoughts, concerns, and questions, with God,

          we discover the peace and joy God wants to give us.

The gifts of hope, time, and worship.

Three gifts wise ones still give.

Gifts God is thrilled to receive.

AMEN