

“What Will You Bring Him?”

Date: January 3, 2016

Place: Lakewood UMC

Texts: Matthew 6:19-21; Mt. 2:1-11 Theme: Stewardship, Giving

Occasion: Epiphany, New Years

Some say that the Wise Men started this whole idea of bringing gifts to the Lord. And yes, they are the first ones recorded who brought gifts to the baby Jesus. But people had been bringing gifts to the Lord's Temple for hundreds of years before Jesus was even born.

So we can't exactly pin it on those guys from the East. Though we do recognize, that in their seeking Christ and honoring Him with gifts, Matthew is telling us that salvation will be open to all people and not just to the Jewish nation.

The Wise Men represent the gentiles outside of the Jewish faith. They came to honor this new-born baby, whom they believed was a King, based on their interpretation of the stars. God had guided them to this place, and they felt compelled to honor him.

And so they brought him gifts. They gave him gold, an appropriate gift for a king. And it would have assisted Mary and Joseph financially during their time in exile in Egypt, when they fled the wrath of Herod.

They brought him frankincense, a powerful smelling incense which was the usual gift given to a priest. And they also gave him myrrh. This one must have caused Mary some alarm; it was used as an ancient embalming fluid.

Myrrh was the spice used to rub the body in final preparation for burial, a foretelling of things to come in Jesus' life.

Gold and frankincense and myrrh, these were the gifts brought by the magi from the East. What will you bring him?

Here we stand at the brink of a brand new year. Have you reconsidered what your gift to the Lord will be in 2016? The beginning of a new year is an excellent time to do a financial re-assessment, on one's own personal finances, as well as their giving to the Church.

Now, someone might say, "Pastor, right after Christmas is a terrible time to ask people to think about giving. All the bills they generated in December are going to be coming due. Why now?" And my response is this, "Why not now? Is there really any time of year that people like to hear sermons about money?"

In fact, if you ask people what turns them off to church, the answer given often is: "All they talk about is money down there. All that church wants is my money." Now that's not true here at Lakewood. First, money is not all we talk about and you know that.

Second, money is not all we want from you. In fact we want a whole lot more. When a person joins a United Methodist Church, they promise to (and I quote) "faithfully participate in its ministries by your prayers, your presence, your gifts, your service and your witness."

God has blessed us, friends. God has blessed us with life itself. God has blessed us with eternal life through the saving grace of His Son, Jesus Christ, whose birthday we just celebrated. Ultimately, everything in the universe belongs to God, and we are merely caretakers, stewards of God's bounty.

What we bring and give to the Lord is our faithful response to the outrageously generous love of God. A true story about a nine year old boy who lived in a rural town in Tennessee:

His house was in a poor area of the community. A church nearby had a bus ministry that came knocking on his door one afternoon. The pastor asked him if he had ever been to church. The boy had not. The pastor asked him if he had heard the greatest love story ever told. The boy had not.

So, the pastor proceeded to share the Gospel with him, telling him about God's love revealed in Jesus Christ, how Jesus died on a cross so that his sins could be forgiven. At the end, the pastor asked the boy if he wanted to receive this free gift of salvation from God. The boy did, knelt on his knees and received Christ into his heart.

The pastor asked him if he could pick him up on the bus the next day and take him to church. The boy agreed. The next morning the pastor arrived. When he knocked on the door there was no answer. He went inside and found the boy still sleeping. He woke him up and the boy got dressed. As he rode on the bus the pastor gave him a donut to eat for breakfast.

Now keep in mind that this boy had never been to church before. The church was a real big one. The little kid just sat there, clueless as to what was going on. Several minutes into the service the ushers began to take up the collection. The boy didn't understand what was going on.

All of a sudden it hit him what was taking place. These people were giving money to Jesus. He then reflected on the free gift he had received just 24 hours earlier. He searched his pockets, front and back, and couldn't find a thing to give Jesus.

The ushers were now several rows behind the one he was sitting in, so he got up in front of God and all those people and

walked back to where the ushers were, about 8 rows back by now. He took the plate from one of the ushers, put it on the floor and then stood inside it. He lifted up his head and said, “Jesus, I don’t have anything to give you today, but just me. I give you me.”

You see, that’s what God wants from each one of us. He wants all of who we are. Once we give our lives to Christ, our life is no longer our own; it belongs to the Lord. Stewardship, my friends, is everything we do after we say “Yes” to the Lord Jesus Christ.

God isn’t satisfied with 10% of who we are and what we have, God wants to be Lord of all 100%. Our faithful response to all that God has given us is to offer God our time, our talents and our treasures. What will you give this coming year?

I know that doesn’t help you in deciding how much money you should donate to the church, specifically. But I hope it encourages you to take a step forward, just like that little boy did, and give God more of yourself.

For some, that might mean to increase their offering to Lakewood. For others it might mean more of your time in service. For others it might mean more of your devotion to the Lord. For others, it might mean to surrender to God those habits and attitudes that you know are displeasing to God.

In the coming weeks we’re going to be talking more about our faithful response to God, through our stewardship of time, talent and treasure. It is my prayer, that each of us give prayerful consideration to what they will offer God this coming year.

May God grant you a year filled with peace, health and happiness, in the name of the Father, Son and Holy Spirit. Amen.