

HOME GROUP AND DEVOTIONAL QUESTIONS – “THE BIG GIVE” (WEEK 5 and WRAP UP)

Our friends in Mexico celebrate the birth of Jesus all the way through January 6. On the nights leading up to Christmas Eve they visit from house to house with caroling, and are told they must “go away – there is no room in the inn!” The stable scene is set up in most houses, but baby Jesus is not placed in the manger until Christmas Eve night. The “big give” day for Christmas in much of Mexico is on January 6 – known as “Three Kings Day.” I kind of like that approach because the emphasis is more on Jesus on Christmas Eve and Christmas, rather than a jolly man in a red suit who brings gifts to US! It also is more accurate as a time line – you will see in today’s reading that the wise men visited Jesus well after Christmas, when the family had moved into a “house” (Matthew 2:11). The valuable gifts were also timely. When King Herod realized he was “tricked” by the wise men he flew into a rage and slaughtered all the male children in Bethlehem to get rid of the child “born as king of the Jews.” The family of Jesus was forced to flee to a foreign land (Egypt) and go into hiding. It appears the gifts of the wise men helped support the family during this difficult time.

Do a group reading of the story of the wise men – Matthew 2:1-12.

The gift bringers are called different things in different Bible versions – “*Wise Men*” or “Kings of the Orient” or “Magi.”

Our best understanding is they were probably from Persia (in the east) and perhaps in a line of wise men (scholars) who were acquainted with the Jewish Scriptures. They may have learned from the Jewish prophet Daniel, who had been a powerful “wise man” and advisor to the kings of Babylon and Persia.

Why were they looking for a *star* as a sign of the birth of a powerful Jewish king? Read the prophecy of Balaam in Numbers 24:15-17 (“I see him, but not now; I behold him, but not near. A star will come out of Jacob; a scepter will rise out of Israel”).

When you read the Matthew 2 story of the Wise men from the East do you see any unusual qualities of this “star”?

How could a “star” lead them first to Jerusalem and then to Bethlehem and come to stand DIRECTLY – and unquestionably – over only the house where Jesus was staying on that night?

Could the “star” be seen by anyone other than these Wise Men? If so, why didn’t Herod follow it himself?

Note: The Bible word for star can also be translated as “shining” or “radiance.” Could it be that a shining angel was leading them, or perhaps the glory of God (Compare the way God led the people of Israel through the wilderness by a “pillar of fire” at night)?

Why did the “star” lead them first to Jerusalem (Note: it seems they stopped following the star and asked where the scriptures say the Messiah would be born – then the star reappeared and they followed it to the right house)?

Note that the Wise Men were not led directly to Jesus by miracle star – they were led first to a place where *they must inquire of the word of God*. See Matthew 2:4-6. God may miraculously move in a person’s heart to look for Jesus, but God always uses His word to bring us into his true presence as worshipers “in Spirit and truth.” It is our privilege to share God’s word with those who feel a leading in their hearts from the Holy Spirit.

Note: We are told there were three gifts, not that there were just three wise men. Would King Herod and all of Jerusalem really be “troubled” or “distressed” by just three old men riding into town on camels?

What three gifts did the Wise Men bring to Jesus and his family?

What is the significance of these three gifts? Gold is sort of obvious; but look up the uses of “frankincense” and “myrrh.” Why were these specific gifts brought to Jesus?

As we wrap up our series on “The Big Give” let’s remember these **three important lessons**:

1. **God is the biggest “Giver” of all!** Read John 3:16 and James 1:17.
2. **God also calls his followers to be “big givers.”** We are created in the image of God – to become like God in what we value. We are the recipients of the gift of Jesus, as God’s only begotten Son and our Savior. (John 3:16). We should be thankful to God for His Big Give, and we should work to become more like our Heavenly Father by being generous toward others.
3. **When we give, we should become like the Wise Men laying our gifts before Jesus.** See Colossians 3:23 (“*Whatever* you do, do it with all your hearts; as for the Lord and not just for men”) and 2 Corinthians 8:5 (they gave joyously because “*they gave themselves first to the Lord ...*”).

And let’s also discuss **three important application questions**:

1. **Have you truly and fully received the greatest gift of all?** Have you received Jesus as your Lord? If not, why not today? Tell your home group leader that you are ready to put your faith in Jesus and confess Him as your personal Savior. If you are not in a home group, pick up your phone right now and call Scott (314-650-8066) or Michael (314-779-7051) or Fredy (314-438-7051) and we will help you!
2. **Are you being generous with the blessings God has given you?** Are you giving a regular and generous gift to the church? Are you being compassionate to those in need? Are you supporting a missionary? Are you growing in the gift of giving? Are you giving more now (as a proportion of what God has given you) than you were last year?
3. **Are you giving directly to God as your response of thankfulness and love for the gift of Jesus?** Wrap up your discussion time by exploring together some ways (and types of gifts) you can give directly to God, and how you can do that in a joyful way. Think about a) “gifts” that correspond with the Kingly gift of “gold” -- gifts that express his kingship (authority) in your life; b) Gifts that correspond with the priestly gift of Frankincense – think of gifts of worship; and c) gifts that correspond with the Myrrh that was a vital component of the burial spices – what should we give to the one who gave his life for us?