

Journeying to Worship My King

Matthew 2:1-12 (NIV)

¹ After Jesus was born in Bethlehem in Judea, during the time of King Herod, Magi from the east came to Jerusalem ² 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." ³ When King Herod heard this he was disturbed, and all Jerusalem with him. ⁴ 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. ⁵ "In Bethlehem in Judea," they replied, "for this is what the prophet has written: ⁶ " '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.' " ⁷ Then Herod called the Magi secretly and found out from them the exact time the star had appeared. ⁸ 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." ⁹ 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. ¹⁰ When they saw the star, they were overjoyed. ¹¹ 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. ¹² And having been warned in a dream not to go back to Herod, they returned to their country by another route.

What's your commute to church look like? Mine's a quick 3 minute 3/4th of a mile drive. We have a number of Layton people here who have a similarly short commute. Then the circle of people coming to Light of the Valley expands. The commute is longer for those coming here from Syracuse, Clearfield, Clinton, West Point, Roy, and others – something like 15-20 minutes. Then there are the people coming from Ogden and Bountiful. Their commute time is 25-30+ minutes. And we have some families coming from even farther out, one that drives an hour each way to be here for worship.

My point is not to make the Layton people feel guilty that you have a short drive or for those coming from Ogden and farther away to hold on to that fact with a sense of pride. My point is that you all gave something to be here. One of the most obvious things that you gave to be here was your time – time commuting to church, time getting ready for church, time spent in church. You also gave of your money as you pumped gas in the car to be here. You literally give your money to God in the offering. You have given your voice in spoken word and song. You are giving your attention to me right now (I assume) and the words being spoken to you. You have done a lot of giving this Sunday morning and every time you come and worship at Light of the Valley.

People have been giving to God in worship for millennia. Some 2000 years ago, the Magi - wise and learned men who studied the stars - gave in coming to worship the one who was born king of the Jews. Although we don't know the exact number or exact origin of these wisemen, we do know that they came from the East. One place east of Jerusalem that had a connection to prophecies of Jesus and employed Magi was Babylon.

The Magi had given already in worship to the one, true God. They had spent years studying the stars, looking for signs, looking for one specific sign that the faithful follower of God – Daniel – had taught them to look for, that "a star will come out of Jacob; a scepter will rise out of Israel." (Numbers 24:17) Once they had seen that special star, they made a choice to come and worship the one they knew as the king of the Jews – not Herod, the one the Romans had made king of the Jews, but a king who would rule and command the obedience of all nations and all peoples.

I'm sure that they, like us, had to get permission to leave to come and worship this king of the Jews. So, they gave of their time off. If they did come from Babylon, they would have to travel over 100 miles to get to Jerusalem, and that's assuming that they had a straight shot path. By road, it was probably over 130 miles. Now, that doesn't sound like a whole lot to us, but none of us drove that this morning to get to church. Still, we could probably do that in under two hours. But they didn't have cars; they had camels. And this is probably a decent sized group. So, a caravan of camels would be necessary for the Magi coming with the gifts they intended to give. Camels in a caravan travel about 20 miles a day. So, you are talking about giving a week-long trip or so just to give worship to this new king.

The Magi were not content to only give of their time; they wanted to give more. They brought expensive gifts, gifts worthy of a king. They brought gold – the most precious metal on earth. They brought frankincense - the same kind of incense often used in the Temple to represent their prayers rising up to God, an aroma that was pleasing to the Lord. They brought myrrh - another sweet-smelling perfume, one that would come up again for Jesus on Good Friday.

Do you think that as the Magi took that week-long journey to worship the one born king of the Jews that they often begrudged the journey? “Hey Melchoir, it’s time to get up. We are going to worship the king of the Jews.” “You know, Gaspar, I had a long and stressful week. I really don’t feel like getting up this morning and continuing the journey. Can you just let me sleep in and we’ll go worship the king of the Jews another day?” “Balthasar, do we really have to trudge through this heat and this desert to worship this king? Can’t we just stay at the Oasis and take a vacation?” “Hey, my body hurts from riding this camel all week and, you know what, the camel stinks. Let’s worship the king of the Jews another time.”

Yeah, I can’t imagine the wisemen complaining like that while they were on their way to worship Jesus, but aren’t these temptations that we face, similar reasons we give to not come and worship our King? Did you think or speak a complaint about what you were giving to be here today to worship your King? Maybe it was that you did have a stressful week and that you are exhausted, but maybe you begrudged coming to worship the one born King of the Jews today for different reasons. Maybe you begrudged coming today because there are other things that you would rather be doing, feel that you need to be doing. Maybe you were given a bit of a guilt trip as some of your family didn’t come with you and they said something like, “There you go off to church instead of spending time with me.”

We want to do what we want to do with our time. We often feel that our lives are dictated for us by work schedules, school schedules, or family schedules. So much of our time is not our own. Then comes our supposed days off, days we often spend running errands, taking care of projects around the home, or doing homework. So, we push back on giving more of our time to come and worship our King instead of finally doing what I want to do like skiing, golfing, playing video games, or simply sleeping in.

Why did the Magi give so much to come and worship the one born the king of the Jews? Why did they not begrudge the miles journeyed, the time given, the treasures given? Because they knew that this king of the Jews was more than just another ruler in a world filled with princes and kings who demand giving from their subjects. This boy was more than a king of just the Jews. “On coming to the house, they saw the child with his mother Mary, and they bowed down and worshiped him.” (verse 11) The Magi worshiped Jesus as *their* King, the King of all nations.

The Magi gave themselves in worship to Jesus because they had been led to him by God through men. Daniel, who in his time was placed in charge of the Magi in the 6th century B.C., no doubt pointed them to the prophecy of the star from Numbers 24 marking the ruler of the nations to come. Daniel knew what his contemporary, Jeremiah the prophet, had said about the new covenant that this ruler of the nations would make, that he would forgive their sins and remember their wickedness no more. They probably knew more than this, enough that they believed in this Jesus as their King before even seeing him, that they believed this Jesus as one who came not to be served but to serve them, as one who would rule by serving them instead of demanding that they give their service to him, as one who would be pierced for their transgressions and who would heal them by his wounds while still being the King of the Jews. For this King, their King, they willingly gave of their time, their talents, and their treasures.

You have been led here today by the same Scriptures that the Magi knew, learned, and studied. You know the temptation to begrudge coming to worship your King Jesus. By the power of God’s Word, you fought that temptation and you came here to give worship to the one who was born the King of the Jews because you know that your King is not one to stand over you, lord his power over you to demand that you as his subjects give him gifts of praise, worship, honor, time, money, travel, etc. You know that your King Jesus has come to serve you, to live under the very law he created in order to keep it for you, to wear a crown of thorns as your King and suffer and die for your sins instead of you taking that punishment, to shepherd you through this perilous life of so many things that want to lead us away from him. This is your King who you came to give worship to.

Because our King has given his whole life to us, his perfection to cover our imperfection, his payment to wipe out the debt of our sins, of all the times we have begrudged giving to our King, that’s why we are motivated to give to God as we do. That’s why we spend the time in the morning getting ready, why we make the drive to Church – whether short or long, why we give our voices in spoken word and song, why we give our attention to God’s Word, why we give monetary gifts to God, why we may even leave loved ones at home who don’t want to journey with us to worship our King. We don’t give these gifts to God because we owe them to him. No, we give all this in worship to him because he is our King who serves us with his whole life, who once in history was born in Bethlehem and then lived under the law for us and completed his ministry by giving his life on the cross. Our King Jesus continues to give his time and talents and treasures serving us, sitting at the right hand of God, ruling over all nations for our good, to care for us, to draw us closer to him. He gave his all for us, and that makes us want to give to God in the ways that we do. Because our King has served us, we give journey to him and bring him our gifts to worship since he has already given everything to us. Amen.