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“From the Pastor’s Desk”

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WHAT GIFT SHALL WE BRING TO THE CHRIST THE ALABASTER BOX

Throughout the years there has been much discussion over the gifts that the Gospel of Matthew records which were brought to the Christ child by whom the writer refers to as the “*three wise men*.” Some historians felt these three men were kings. But the Scripture does not confirm this. The words “*wise men*” is taken from the Greek word “*majoi*” a Persian word for men who were experts in the study of the stars. Thus it is believed by some that their interest in the stars enabled them to observe something in their minds and hearts enough to make them want to investigate the meaning and purpose of the star.

Therefore, Matthew wrote: “*Now when Jesus was born in Bethlehem of Judaea in the days of Herod the king, behold, there came wise men from the east to Jerusalem, Saying, Where is he that is born King of the Jews? For we have seen his star in the east, and are come to worship him.*” Matthew 2:1.2

Albert Barnes Commentary in reference to these men said: “*The persons here denoted were philosophers, priests, or astronomers. They lived chiefly in Persia and Arabia. They were the learned men of the Eastern nations; devoted to astronomy, to religion, and to medicine. They were held in high esteem by the Persian court, were admitted as counsellors, and followed the camps in war to give advice.*”

Unfortunately these men made a false assumption and assumed this “Kingly child” would be born in Israel’s capitol, Jerusalem. Thus came to the city inquiring as to His whereabouts. Their false assumption that such a child would be welcomed and celebrated by the Jewish community made them unafraid to make known their discovery and thus inquire as to where they might find him in order that they may worship Him. It is sad to read from Matthew’s Gospel how such news did not excite “*all Jerusalem*” to want to do the same but rather the very opposite: “*When Herod the king had heard these things, he was troubled, and all Jerusalem with him.*” Matt. 2:2

It wasn’t because the leaders did not believe what the “wise men” from the east said, in fact it was the very opposite; they did believe. They believed so much that Herod himself sought more information as to the exact time the star appeared and requested that they search a little town called Bethlehem, which was about five miles out of Jerusalem. And if and when they find him that they should return and bring him word that he too may come and worship him (Matt. 2:8)

Upon leaving Jerusalem, the star that they saw at first reappeared and did lead them to where the young child and his mother were and when they arrived the Scripture said, they “*fell down and worshipped Him; and when they had opened their treasures, they presented unto him gifts; gold, frankincense, and myrrh.*” (Matt. 2:11)

Now there have been many different theories of the meaning and symbolism of these gifts advanced by various intellectuals. Some have seen them as gifts one would give to a king because “*myrrh*” was a substance traditionally used in the anointing of kings. Gold on the other hand has been considered representative of “*virtue, incense prayer and myrrh suffering.*” John Chrysostom, a popular theologian of ancient times suggested that the gifts were given not just to a king, but to God, and were much like the sheep which were offered upon as a burnt offering of sacrifice for one’s atonement.

What was amazing to me is the fact that these (three) wise men, (Matthew never told us how many), but Matthew does tell us what they brought to this child whose star they saw in the east...they brought to him what I would like to refer to as their “alabaster box” of gold, frankincense, and myrrh...gifts fit for a king (or as John Chrysostom said) God.

WHAT KIND OF GIFT DO WE BRING TO OUR KING OF KINGS

Matthew tells us about a woman in Bethany that obtained the news that Jesus was at the house of Simon, and suddenly burst into the dining area carrying an alabaster box of very precious ointment. She went over to where Jesus was “as he sat at meat” the Scripture said and opened the box and “*poured the precious ointment upon his head.*” To which when his disciples saw it had indignation. But our Lord went to the woman’s defense.

He said, “*Why trouble ye the woman? for she hath wrought a good work upon me. For ye have the poor always with you; but me ye have not always. For in that she hath poured this ointment on my body, she did it for my burial. Verily I say unto you, Where so ever this gospel shall be preached in the whole world, there shall also this, that this woman hath done, be told for a memorial of her.*” Matt. 26:10-13

Please note...the kind of people who brought the “**alabaster box**” to our Lord. It wasn’t the religious leaders of that day when Christ was born. It was men from the east, possible star gazers. It wasn’t the disciples which broke the alabaster box who Jesus chose to be with him in his three year and half years in ministry...it was another outsider. It wasn’t because they lacked opportunity. They had three years to gather an alabaster box of some kind and show their love to Him.

And of all people to make the most noise and voice his objection to this woman’s generosity was Judas...so when he said, “*Why was not this ointment sold for three hundred pence, and given to the poor?*” But John 12:6 tells us what Judas’ problem was.... “*This he said, not that he cared for the poor; but because he was a thief, and had the bag, and bare what was put therein.*” Or as some eminent critics contend, *And stole what was put in it.*

Now I would not want to charge anyone of being a thief, but at the same time I would caution anyone who resents anything we do for Christ or in His name, for a good cause especially to help give light to those who walk in darkness, to show God’s love by a willingness to serve others in need at their own expense. Such people need not be condemned for breaking their alabaster box, but rather be memorialized for such sacrifice as Jesus said this dear woman of Bethany would be.

Which leads me to the question for every true child of God who also has made their discovery of the Christ child, “**What kind of gift (s) will you and I chose to bring to One who we believe is the Christ, the Son of the living God?**”

Now men of the world have been most critical of the “*wise men gifts.*” I read of one who criticized them as mostly being useless to a poor carpenter and his family. One deist named Thomas Woolston once quipped, “*if they had brought sugar, soap, and candles they would have acted as wise men.*” But Matthew basically said that they did not come to meet the Christ child’s need, but rather to allow Him to meet their need. They needed a Savior. Thus they came to worship him. You see their kind of gift determined their greatest desire. They needed a Savior like we all do to come and save us from our sins. Only Christ can do that.

The gift is not about doing some charitable deed to obtain favor or relieve guilt for our selfishness...It is an expression of worship. It is how we worship One whom we come to know as God, our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ. This is why we never taught our kids to worship Santa, but to worship Him who makes us all want to be Santa and distribute gifts throughout the world to the needy and oppressed. Christ’s Supreme sacrifice is what produces the giving spirit. John 3:16 – tells us: “*For God so loved the world that He gave His only begotten Son...*” ***Our love in giving is the free expression we have learned from God and His Son.***

This is one of the reasons we put up the Christmas tree in the Garden Room each year and invite the congregation to bring a gift to Jesus. We as a church do not keep this to pay our church bills and complete our budget. We take it and give it to others in the name of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ. We are not raising funds for ourselves. We are making an alabaster box for Jesus. We believe that each of our people should be given the opportunity to bring their alabaster box and break it and let the oil flow not for man’s glory but for God’s glory and praise. We are told in the Holy Scriptures, “*Let your light so shine before men, that they may see your good works, and glorify your Father which is in heaven.*” Mat 5:16 I love the Christmas lights that always shine at Christmas time. Oh may we love our Lord so much that our lights will be shining again this year. Amen