



VILLAGE BIBLE CHURCH

Christmas Is Giving

Matthew 2:1–12

Phil Chapman | December 10, 2023

Today I have the distinct pleasure of leading us into a brand new sermon series titled “Christmas Is...” We’re going to explore some different aspects of the Christmas season, trying to get our focus right back to where it should be, which is Christ. Our times, and actually all previous times, seem to be centered around materialism and consumerism. That’s what we often talk about and strategize about in our homes. But this series will try to revamp that a little bit.



We’re going to look at ways we can celebrate Jesus Christ, this beautiful Baby Who came to us. In this series we’ll explore four specific actions we find in different portions of Scripture: giving, trusting, sharing, and serving. Next week, on the 17th, we’ll focus on “Christmas Is Trusting.” We’ll draw our inspiration from the story of Joseph, Jesus’ adoptive father. The following week, on Christmas Eve, we’ll have three evening services, looking at “Christmas Is Serving” through Mary’s humility and willingness to serve. Then finally, on New Year’s Eve, we’ll look at “Christmas Is Sharing.” We’ll be calling each of us to a moment of action as we see how the shepherds responded when the angels came to them. They went to see Baby Jesus, then they went to the streets to spread the news about the Messiah.

Today we’ll embark on the journey of “Christmas Is Giving.” The reason I’m calling it a journey is that we’ll be traveling with the wise men—the magi. We’ll follow the story as they began their journey, as they met Herod, as they went to Bethlehem to present their gifts and worship Jesus. Turn to Matthew 2, as we look at this story:

¹ Now after Jesus was born in Bethlehem of Judea in the days of Herod the king, behold, wise men from the east came to Jerusalem, ² saying, “Where is he who has been born king of the Jews? For we saw his star when it rose and have come to worship him.” ³ When Herod the king heard this, he was troubled, and all Jerusalem with him; ⁴ and assembling all the chief priests and scribes of the people, he inquired of them where the Christ was to be born. ⁵ They told him, “In Bethlehem of Judea, for so it is written by the prophet:

⁶ “‘And you, O Bethlehem, in the land of Judah,
are by no means least among the rulers of Judah;
for from you shall come a ruler
who will shepherd my people Israel.’”

⁷ Then Herod summoned the wise men secretly and ascertained from them what time the star had appeared. ⁸ And he sent them to Bethlehem, saying, “Go and search diligently for the child, and when you have found him, bring me word, that I too may come and worship him.” ⁹ After listening to the king, they went on their way. And behold, the star that they had seen when it rose went before them until it came to rest over the place where the child was. ¹⁰ When they saw the star, they rejoiced exceedingly with great joy. ¹¹ And going into the house, they saw the child with Mary his mother, and they fell down and worshiped him. Then, opening their treasures, they offered him gifts, gold and frankincense and myrrh. ¹² And being warned in a dream not to return to Herod, they departed to their own country by another way.

As I was preparing to teach about the wise men in Matthew 2, I found numerous directions I could go with this sermon. I could start by going into great detail about the star that guided these men. I could consider what that celestial phenomenon may have been. Was it a conjunction of planets? Was it a super nova? Was it a light that God placed in the sky, kind of like He did in the Exodus? I think it would be really interesting to think about how God used creation to guide them to His Son. But we’re not going to talk about that today.

I could spend time talking about the possibility that the prophet Daniel—whom we'll learn about in our series beginning in January—played a pivotal role in this event. While he was in exile in Babylon, he gave a prophecy that the Messiah would one day be born. This would be a fascinating way to tie together the Old Testament prophecies with what was happening in the New Testament. But we're also not going to go there this morning.

Or I could talk about the number of magi and who they were. Our postcards and nativity sets often depict three men, wearing crowns, bowing down with the shepherds in the stable. I'm not going to talk about the fact that they weren't kings, or that they weren't there when Jesus was born. I'm not going to dig into the possibility that there were way more than three people. There was probably a whole caravan with them.

Or we could examine why King Herod and the people in Jerusalem were so anxious and how King Herod became so angry because he thought the Jews were going to get another king. We could go into great detail, talking about the political and cultural issues of that time. But we're also not going there.

We could go into really great details about the gold, frankincense and myrrh, where each of these came from and how the men might have come by these riches. I read how one person thought these things might have been an inheritance from Daniel. That would be really fun to think about, but we're not going to do that either.

Rather, our focus today is going to be specifically on the act of giving modeled by these magi, from the moment they were compelled by the star to the moment they worshiped Jesus. Then we're going to see how we can mirror what they did in our own walk of faith in Jesus Christ.

Our giving centers on Jesus.

I remember Christmas at the Chapman household when I was a kid. There were four of us boys, so when we'd come down the stairs, we would see dozens and dozens of presents. There was great excitement. I would take those gifts and shake them, hoping that maybe I got one of those things I circled in the Sears catalog. I also remember three big Christmases—the one when I got the Atari 2600, the gaming console that gave my brothers and me hours of joy. Then there was the year I got the red guitar. I still can't play it, but I got it for Christmas. Then I remember the really good year when I received the Apple IIc computer that led me into the new digital world. I was so excited about those gifts. But you know what? As thrilling as that was, even as thrilling as it was to go through the Sears catalog, all of those gifts were designed to fulfill my earthly expectations. They brought me temporary joy and satisfaction.

If you have little kids, you've probably given them a big gift at some point. They've opened it up, but then they set it aside and began playing with the box. You see, these things are fleeting. My Atari 2600, my guitar and my Apple IIc are probably in a landfill somewhere now. They might have been torn apart and recycled. But they're gone. They are now where all earthly possessions go.

But when I look at the story in these 12 verses in Matthew 2, I see everything centers on Jesus. Whose star was this? It was Jesus' star. Who were the magi coming to see? The new King of the Jews. Who was Herod scared of? This Baby. Who did the prophets say would be born in Bethlehem? Jesus, the Anointed One. What did the wise men do when they traveled from Jerusalem to Bethlehem? They looked up and saw the star, then it says, "*they rejoiced with exceedingly great joy.*" It was His star. When they went into the house, they saw Him with His mother. In response, they bowed down at His feet. Who did they give the gifts to? It wasn't Mary and Joseph; they gave them to Jesus. Then who did God protect by warning the wise men not to return to Herod? He was protecting Jesus. Everything about the story centers on Jesus.

So the question I have for us today is are we continuously centering things on Jesus? When we're giving of our time, talents and treasures, is our giving centered on Jesus? I'm not asking you to get religious. I'm asking are you at the point where you have a single mission? As the Blues Brothers said, "We're on a mission from God." We're on a mission to serve Jesus Christ in every way we can. Everything we do should be centered on Him. The magi were being obedient to God, and when we focus on Jesus Christ as our center, we will obey His Word. Just as the scribes in Jerusalem learned where Jesus was born by going to their Scriptures, so we will know what direction we should go to find Him as well.

Our giving isn't always convenient.

Our next point is a crucial reminder: our giving isn't always convenient. Have you ever prepared to go on a trip? Especially if you have a bunch of kids, the amount of energy and planning it requires can be overwhelming. You're getting everything ready—clothes, snacks, activities—all before the trip even begins. Then you get into the car, or in our case multiple cars, and you head out on your journey. There's often chaos and you begin to wonder why in the world you decided to do this. Why are we spending this money? Why are we expending all this energy?

Then you remember that you have one focus, the celebration of the family being together, making stronger connections and some lifetime memories. Now our older kids pull out all those memories. Maybe it was only staying in a hotel for a night, but it was something they haven't forgotten. Because we focused on the end point of family connections and memories, it was worth it.

When we think about the magi and what they had to do for their journey, think about how extremely inconvenienced they were. This wasn't an easy trip. They probably started in Babylon and had to travel all the way to Jerusalem. Think of the resources they had to bring with them. Think of the planning they had to do, figuring out their travel route, how to stay safe along the way. They also had to plan for their responsibilities to be covered while they were gone. They couldn't even have known how long they would be away. After all, they really didn't know exactly where Jesus was. They just headed to Jerusalem, hoping they could figure it out when they got there. This journey was definitely hard to plan for and certainly disrupted their normal lives. But they had a singular focus which was Jesus. They were compelled to come and worship this new King.

I see people all the time here who are allowing themselves to be inconvenienced to help someone else. Oh, that family is in need? Done. I'll be at their house. I'll fix that for them. I'll bake them cookies. I'll bring them a meal. I'll help this person on the street corner. I'm going to give them money. All these things are inconveniences. Why do we do it? Hebrews 12:2 (NIV) reminds us to fix our eyes on Jesus, *"the pioneer and perfecter of faith. For the joy set before him he endured the cross, scorning its shame, and sat down at the right hand of the throne of God."*

Jesus Himself embraced the ultimate inconvenience. He gave Himself in order to give us the gift of salvation. That's what we're trying to reflect to others. We're reflecting the love Jesus has already shown us. Philippians 2:4 says, *"Let each of you look not only to his own interests, but also to the interests of others."* This Scripture encourages us to look out for ways to inconvenience ourselves because we're serving Jesus by blessing others. We seek to reflect the love and grace He has shown to us.

Our giving is usually costly.

I remember on July 25, 1996, I asked my future bride Shari to marry me. I did that by offering her a gift—an engagement ring. That was very costly. Very costly. I was still going to college, so it was hard to come up with the money. But you know what? I had a plan and I put it in place. I worked angles trying to figure it out and finally got it. I negotiated heavily, then bought it. Why? Because it was a significant milestone. That relationship was something I was focused on. My relationship with my future wife was more important to me than anything in this world other than my walk with Christ. Well, it probably wasn't that much money really, but for me it was like millions of dollars.

Do you understand the point? When we really want something, we go after it—and lots of times it costs us money. It can cost lots of time. It can cost a lot of brain energy. When we think about the gifts the magi brought—I'm not talking about the journey right now, just the gifts themselves—we see that they brought gold, frankincense and myrrh.

Gold is very valuable. We still like gold today, but back then it was a gift specifically that would be given to a king. Frankincense was also very valuable and was something priests used in their rituals. It was a gift reflecting Jesus' divinity. Myrrh also was costly as it was used in preparation for a burial. It was foreshadowing what Jesus would eventually do for us. He lived, died and then was resurrected. These gifts were not only costly, but they were significantly symbolic. They highlighted the magi's recognition of Who Jesus was. Just like the engagement ring was highlighting who Shari was in my life, these men were saying to Jesus, "You are the King. You are the Christ. You are the Anointed One."

When we think about the things we give as being costly, our minds usually go to how much money it takes to get them. We might even conclude that the Bible is implying that we should seek to be rich so we can give gifts. "I'd better get more jobs." But I don't think that's what it's saying.

We read this in 2 Corinthians 9:7: *"Each one must give as he has decided in his heart, not reluctantly or under compulsion, for God loves a cheerful giver."* The Gospel of Mark tells us about a widow's offering. She had nothing much at all to offer. Jesus says in Mark 12:43-44, *"Truly, I say to you, this poor widow has put in more than all those who are contributing to the offering box. For they all contributed out of their abundance, but she out of her poverty has put in everything she had, all she had to live on."* You see, it's not really how much it costs.

You know if you have kids or grandkids and they give you a note or a drawing, that thing is awesome. That's way better than those new Jordans you were going to buy me. The value of someone's heart is far more important than the value of the item. You see that guy on the corner who's hungry, you get out your wallet, pull out a \$20 bill and give it to him so he can get food. Or you go to McDonald's and grab him a meal for \$9.87, then they ask you to round up but you say no. Then you give him that. For some of you, that \$9.87 was extremely costly. For others, you wouldn't even think about it. This is where we actually get to the heart of giving. How much is it costing us? It's okay to give that \$9.87 meal to somebody on the corner, or that \$20 bill. That's great. You follow the Holy Spirit's leading. But you don't do any of those things because you want to put it on social media, because you want people to see you. You do it because you're serving Jesus Christ. There is no value that compares with this.

When we understand what Jesus has done for us, nothing compares to that. Nothing in my wallet, nothing in my bank account, no time given can compare. Everything belongs to Him.

I also think when we're reading this story, we need to think about the risk and cost it would have been for the magi. Notice that they didn't go back to King Herod. Remember, he had told them, "Once you find Jesus, come back and tell me." It was because he was threatened when he realized the Scriptures had said there would be a new King of the Jews. He was the king of the Jews, so wanted to kill the Baby. But the magi were warned in a dream by God and compelled by Who Jesus was to not go back to Herod. They listened to their dream that was from God, so they went a different way. It could have cost them their lives.

Think about that for us as believers. Are we willing to lay out our faith and say, "This is who I am and this is what I believe. I know it could cost me. It could cost me my job. It could cost me family members." Sometimes I see people who are older who give their lives to Jesus Christ and become bolder than people who have been in love with Jesus Christ for 30 or 40 years. It's a new-found love and they want to tell everybody about Jesus. They don't care what it costs. But sometimes the more seasoned believers—the more "mature" believers—really take time to weigh out when they're actually going to loudly live out their lives for Jesus. They know there's a cost to it. Sometimes you lose friends. Sometimes you lose family members. I'm not talking about becoming a crazy person, but if that's what the Holy Spirit is guiding you to be, go out and shout, just like we'll see with the shepherds.

Our giving confirms what we believe about Jesus.

This takes us to the core of the Christmas narrative. It reflects the essence of our entire journey. Think about this scene. We don't know how long their trip was, but we know they saw a star. They were probably told from word passed down from Daniel, so somehow when they saw this star they knew it was the King's star. "We need to go meet this new King in Jerusalem" (which was the main city in Israel). They were excited. They couldn't wait to get there.

They walked into Jerusalem and were like, "Okay. This may be the place." They were asking people, "Hey, do you know where the new King of the Jews is?" Herod got word of this and they eventually went to him. "Well, we saw a star on this date, so He was probably born around then." Then they found out they needed to go down to Bethlehem."

So they head down the five miles toward Bethlehem and looking up, they saw the star again. "Oh, my goodness! This is such great joy. We're going to see a King!" The star then stopped over a specific house and they thought, "Okay, this is where the king is?" Notice it wasn't a barn; it was a house. The shepherds were not there.

They knocked on the door. They were looking at each other, wondering what was going to happen. “Just wait, don’t do anything. Let me do the talking.” The door opened and they saw this Baby. Maybe He was running around (he would have been somewhere between eight months and two years old by this time). He was wearing modest clothes. The place didn’t have the grandeur of a king’s home. At this moment, I think many of us might have stuffed that gold back in our pockets, saying, “Hey, it’s really good seeing you guys. Merry Christmas,” then we would be on our way. But what they were about to do truly reflected what they believed. Their actions told everybody there—and they tell us today—exactly what they believed.

What did they do? They fell to their knees and worshiped this Baby. The Holy Spirit had pulled the scales off their eyes and they saw Him for Who He was. “Get the treasures! Come on!” So they gave Him gold, frankincense and myrrh. We don’t know how much, but they probably just kept giving everything they had because they understood Who Jesus is.

Then, instead of risking the cost, they just got out of there? We don’t know how long they stayed. But I wonder, as we approach this Christmas season, if that’s what we do. You see, some of us have some really hard stuff going on. I mean really, really hard. But Jesus hasn’t changed. He is exactly the same today as He was yesterday, and as He will be forever.

Yeah, after He was a Baby, He grew in wisdom and stature and maturity. I know for a fact that He lived an absolutely perfect life. I know for a fact that He went to a cross for you and me, to forgive us of our sins. I know for a fact that His blood has allowed me to be forgiven, because He was a perfect Lamb. I know for a fact that He died and that He was raised again. We call it Easter Sunday. I know for a fact that He ascended into heaven and that right now He sits at the right hand of God the Father. He’s advocating for me. “I got Phil. I know he did that, but I covered that already.” And He’s advocating for many of you, those of you who love Him.

That should be the compelling reason for all you do in giving. I am talking about giving your money, giving of your time, giving of all your attention. Do you truly believe that Jesus is our Savior, that He is the Prince of Peace, that He is the Messiah, that He is the Bread of Life, that He is the Lord of lords, that He’s the Son of God, the Good Shepherd, the Alpha and the Omega, the great I AM, our rock and cornerstone? Do you believe that with all your heart?

If so, simply tell Him, “It’s all Yours. My whole life—the good stuff and the bad stuff. The easy stuff and the super, super hard stuff.”

Friends, I serve a sovereign God. Do you? You see, this Christmas, Jesus should be our entire focus. All of Christmas is about Jesus. Everything about Christmas is about Jesus. Yeah, we should be trusting, sharing, giving and doing all kinds of different things, but our central focus has to be right back on Jesus and Who He is. Amen? Amen.