

God's Gifts

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[0 : 00] It is really, really good to be back with you. Me and my family have just had one of them last year. Thank goodness it's over. So it's really good to be back with you in the last couple of weeks anyway.

So for those of you who don't know me, I'm Adam Wingrove and I'm married to Emma and we've got two angels, Alice and Levi and I'm an ordinate, so I'm training to be a vicar, so prayers for that would be much appreciated.

Today's message is God's gift. And I hope this sermon really does bring across that message that it's God's gift that we're going to be talking about today.

So to set the scene, we know from the Gospel of Luke that Mary and Joseph were on their way to Bethlehem to take part in the census there.

And of course, it should be no surprise that they were there anyway. Because in Mika 5 verse 2, Bethlehem was prophesied as a special place where the Messiah, who will bring liberation to all, will come from.

[1 : 27] If we go on to slide 3, please. Bethlehem was in the region of Judea and Israel had four separate regions and this one of Judea was under the kingship of King Herod the Great.

Now he was a dangerous man, a really dangerous man to deal with. He was a man who was completely filled with anxiety and trusted no one.

For instance, he killed his first wife, his father-in-law and three of his sons. He wriggled his way into power and he was hated by the Jews because of the heavy taxation.

And more importantly, he sat on the throne of David, which he had no rightful heir to. Next slide, please.

The Magi, also known as the three wise men, were from Babylon. We're not quite sure about how they come to know of the star and which it presented the Messiah.

[2 : 47] The three possibilities are, one, they could have been Jews remained in Babylon from the exile.

And so they knew of the Old Testament prophecy. And two, they may have been Eastern astrologers whom studied ancient manuscripts.

And of course, had old copies of the Old Testament. Or three, they could just be special messengers whom God has chosen and sent on their way.

Which we know that's happened a few times in the Bible. Slide five, please. So Jesus, born.

Three Magi turn up, proclaiming the King of the Jews has been born. Herod's kingship is threatened and tries to have the baby Jesus killed.

[3 : 51] Could you just imagine that? A king wanting to kill a baby because he is threatened. Herod gathers his top advisors and chief priests.

Of which they read to him the prophecy from Micah. And they believed in the prophecy. But they were the first ones to reject Jesus. The Magi are summoned.

And Herod tries to trick them. By asking them to tell him where the King of the Jews is to be born. And so he himself could worship them.

But of course, we know that's not what he intended to do. The Magi found the baby Jesus. And they worshipped him.

They gave him gifts of gold, frankincense, or in other translations, incense, and myrrh. Now these three gifts proclaimed a message of Jesus' purpose, of his destination.

[5 : 01] The whole meaning and ministry of his life. Gold, representing royalty. Frankincense or incense, representing a deity worthy of being exalted high in worship.

And myrrh being used traditionally to anoint a body before burial. Free men.

Who were not known to this nation. Not known to these people. Complete foreigners. Were the first, as Gentiles, potentially.

To worship this baby who is the King of Kings. Slide six, please. This is my late grandfather. He's a Geordie, so we called him Poppy. And traditionally, my whole family, so there would be probably about 40 of us, crammed into my grandparents' living room in Slough.

[6:12] And my granddad would dress up in this Father Christmas costume. And so, of course, my aunties and uncles and cousins were there. And then when Santa suddenly came out of one of the bedrooms, all of us grandchildren suddenly started to behave and were silent.

Because we were in awe of Santa physically in the same room as us. And was frightened of having any bad behaviour. And so, it wasn't until afterwards, my eldest cousin pointed out, Why have you got granddad's slippers on?

And I just remember receiving. I mean, some of the presents were quite naff, to be honest. I mean, a toothbrush. When you're little, it's not that exciting, is it? But anyway.

But the chocolate. And I just remember opening the sweets. And the joyous occasion of being there and receiving such a gift. Just to be in people's and in families' company.

On which I really do miss. Slide seven, please. Now, as a dad of two, I found this year they finally got to understand what Santa is all about.

[7:39] And every single day for a whole month leading up to Christmas, my eldest, Ellis, would be asking which day it is. And we introduced him to the advent calendar.

And he would get so excited on the way to school. And then on the way back from school, he would still ask, Is it Christmas Day yet? And seeing their faces when they walk downstairs and see a whole load of Christmas presents downstairs.

And they open it. And they play with it. And the smiles beaming on their face is a picture that I will never forget. So just as the Magi gave three important proclaiming gifts that proclaim Jesus' life and death, how might we learn to be generous with our most precious gifts, just like the Magi?

Who and what could we give? Why don't you turn to the person next to you and think about a present that someone has given you, completely out of the blue, that has really been, like you've been really joyous about.

It's been a really special gift. Why don't you turn to the person next to you? It doesn't have to be a Christmas present.

[9:07] It doesn't have to be anything. Just a little gift. So a special gift.

Isn't it so nice when someone just, out of the blue, just gives you a really nice gift? Really special gift. And sometimes seeing others with gifts can bring bad memories.

But the gift that God has given us, each and every one of us, is the best gift of all. That before Jesus we were all completely dead to sin as such.

And it was because of Jesus that we are able to be alive in him again. And that death has no effect on us, especially when sin is concerned.

What a precious gift that we have. And that we know as Jesus. And how much of the opportunity we have on a daily basis of telling people that we walk past by.

[10:27] That we stand in the queue next to. Our friends and neighbours that we talk to. Our work colleagues. Our family. Our family. Our family.

Our family. And yet sometimes we just don't even mention that most precious gift. Which is Jesus. and so my challenge today for all of us including myself how can we be more authentic meaningful and thoughtful in the resources that god has given us so some ideas maybe letting a parent with a child go ahead in a queue or someone who is struggling help them out maybe calling on someone who is ill or down or lonely maybe spending time with someone who might be on their own maybe it could be a picture a letter money a poem or even a knitted sweater no matter what the gift is important it's important because it's our worship to god our worship doesn't just contain here in this building but from when we wake up and when we go back to sleep that is our worship and that's our worship to a baby jesus which is the best gift that we could ever have and so coming in to learn now um if we go to the last slide just as the magi gave gifts god gave jesus the best gift for us how might we give amen so as a time of um response i i don't know about you but um christmas is always hectic um and sometimes you're here there and everywhere seeing all of the family and even that is sometimes exhausting um and then to think new year's eve is over and having to get back into the swing of things and so i think it might be a good idea if we have some still and some silence and

just let our hearts and ears be open to see what god might be saying to us right now maybe he might be challenging or bringing things up about how we manage our own resources how can we be more generous to others and how can we worship god more in our everyday life heavenly father may you come and give us peace and comfort may you teach us to use the resources that you have given us wisely may that not only give worship to you but be a blessing to others may we understand more of the gift of jesus to us your beloved creation thank you for saving us and thank you for giving us new life may we just hold all of those who are in our hearts and may we lift them up to you jesus in your name amen we we had a cup of coffee we had a cup here we