

Matthew 2:11 “The Perfect Gift”

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Date: 24 December 2024

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[0 : 00] You are listening to a message from Southwood Presbyterian Church in Huntsville, Alabama. Our passion is to experience and express grace. Join us.

As we get started this evening, I'd like to invite the kids to join me up here on the steps for just a minute. That is whoever feels like a kid. You can, whatever age you want to be, you're welcome up here.

Anybody in here excited about Christmas? Yeah. Yeah. All right. We have been talking all through the month of December up here on these steps. Some of you have been here.

We've been talking about things that kids get excited about, about Christmas, right? We talked about lights and food and songs and family. And I think we're all out of things for people to be excited about.

Is there any? No? No? Presents. Presents. I did promise we would talk about presents tonight, didn't I? Is anybody here going to get any gifts this year?

[1 : 02] You think? Maybe? Hmm. Maybe. Yeah. Well, all of these things we've been talking about tell us something about Jesus, don't they?

Tons of stuff. And that's the same thing with gifts. Okay? You know, the very best gifts, they will tell you something about the person who's receiving the gift.

Okay? Like if you get lots of books tomorrow, it's probably because you like to read, right? Or if somebody gives you a Lego set, it may be that that person knows that that's just the Lego set that you don't have and that you really like to build Legos.

You know what my family gives me every year? Who knows what this is? Deodorant. Deodorant.

Every year. And I've been trying to figure out what it means. I think it means that they really like the way I smell.

And so they give me this every year. Isn't that? That means that you smell better than you smell.

Oh. Is that what they? Yeah, probably. Yeah. Hmm. Okay.

[2 : 04] Well, I brought a different gift besides deodorant for y'all tonight. Okay? And I'll get to that in just a second. We'll make sure you all get something. But I want to let you know, because some of you are already disappointed, that it's not edible.

That means you can't eat it. Okay? And I know you wanted candy canes, but maybe next year. But listen to me for one more minute, okay? I want to tell you something about gifts. God is the very best giver of all.

Like God gives joy to the world because he knows that the world can be a dark and sad place. But especially at Christmas, what gift do we remember that God gave at Christmas?

Jesus. That he gave us Jesus. That is right. Did you know that that's actually the reason why we give gifts at Christmas? Kids, did y'all know that that's why we give gifts to one another?

Because on that very first Christmas, God gave us the very best gift ever, didn't he? He gave us the very best gift ever, didn't he? He gave us the very best gift ever. He gave us Jesus. Jesus. You might have heard when we were reading the Christmas story earlier from the Bible, what we read earlier, that today in the town of David, a Savior has been born to you.

[3 : 21] God knows us really well, doesn't he? Yes. He does. He knows that. You know what it means that he gave us a Savior? Savior, it means that God knows that we need saving, doesn't he?

That we're not perfect, that we're in the dark on our own, that we sin and we need a Savior. We need someone to forgive our sins, to rescue us from our selfishness.

So that's the first thing that the gift of Jesus tells us. But I want y'all to listen to one more thing it tells us about us. The gift of Jesus shows us how precious, how special we are to God.

Can you remember that? The fact that God would give his very own son to you. Can you imagine somebody wrapping up his own son and sending him to give him to you for Christmas? That's what God does because he loves you so much. So this year, when you open gifts, I want you to remember who gives the very best gift?

[4 : 23] God does. And he gives us Jesus because he loves you so much. Will y'all pray with me for just a second? Let's close our eyes and pray, okay?

Jesus, we thank you so much for being born at Christmas. God, thank you for the gift of your son who shows us your love, who comes to save us from our sins.

We are so thankful for Jesus and for all the chances we have to give and receive gifts and celebrate that perfect gift. I pray that these kids would know that gift and know how much you love them.

And we pray it in Jesus' name. Amen. Thank you. Now listen, as you go down, some of my helpers are going to give you something as a gift.

Do you know what these are? These are glow sticks. And they're a special gift on Christmas Eve because some of you probably don't want to hold a candle tonight. It's okay if you do, if your parents let you.

[5 : 24] But if you'd rather hold a glow stick and light this up when we sing Silent Night Later, you can use this or you can take it home and use it and it will remind you that Jesus is the light of the world and that he gives you his light all the time, okay?

So that's what this gift is going to remind you about yourself. He loves you so much that he gives you light in your life, okay? So as you go back, Miss Angela is going to take this box and she's going to make sure everybody gets one, okay?

Especially the littlest kids and if we run out, big kids, you share yours, okay? I suspect that we all have stories of gifts that prove the point that the best gifts will tell you something about the one who's getting them.

The one I most associate with Christmas Eve is from the movie A Christmas Story, which for years I think has played 24 hours a day on some station on Christmas Eve.

So that's an association for me. Ralphie gets in that story a big pink bunny suit, which he does not like.

[6 : 38] And it tells you nothing about the person who's getting it. It's not a good gift at all. This is, it's not what Ralphie wants. But later on Christmas morning, Ralphie gets the gift that he has been wanting and asking for all along.

It is a Red Ryder BB gun, even though he's been warned that he might shoot his eye out. Even though his mother is sure that it's not safe.

At the very end of Christmas, his father knows that it's what Ralphie really wants, what he's been longing for. And so he pulls it out at the very end and Ralphie is happy.

Matthew tells us in his gospel that a few months after the first Christmas Eve, Jesus gets some gifts that tell us some very important things about him.

Contrary to many of our Christmas decorations and things that you might have heard, the wise men are not at the manger, okay? That's not how it went.

[7 : 47] I don't want to ruin Christmas for you, but they weren't there. They visit Jesus as a small child in a tiny home several months after Jesus is born.

They come following a star, that's true. They come looking for a king, that's true. They want to worship him. And the primary point of their story is that Jesus is that king.

Born a child and yet a king. This is Christ the king. That's what the wise men are highlighting. He is the promised Messiah who, as the prophets tell us, will receive treasures from the kings of the nations who will come and bow before him.

And here, just a few years into his life, it happens already. Matthew chapter 2, listen to verse 11.

Going into the house, the wise men saw the child with Mary his mother, and they fell down and worshipped him.

Then opening their treasures, they offered him gifts, gold and frankincense and myrrh. The clearest thing that these gifts tell us about Jesus is how valuable, how worthy he is.

[9 : 18] These foreign dignitaries have traveled for months. They've brought expensive gifts. It says they're treasures, the things that were most precious and valuable that they could come up with.

And then they worshipped Jesus. That doesn't happen very often, right? This is a unique child. He is worthy of worship.

He's worthy of our very best gifts. Of our disrupting our lives, even. To encounter him. To be able to bow before him.

I hope that's part of your Christmas plans, my Christmas plans. Having whatever else might be on your agenda, disrupted by the fact that King has come.

That he's worthy of all of your worship. All of your attention. All of your time to be focused on him.

Maybe you've never really encountered Jesus before.

[10:21] Or maybe you've forgotten how worthy he is of every moment, of every day. Y'all, worship is not a halfway thing. It's not something we just play around with.

We don't... You can't just bow a little. If someone is worthy of worship, he's a king not worthy just of a season of songs and parties and as much fun as that is.

He's worthy of rejoicing with exceedingly great joy the whole year and our whole lives. That's why we sing, the Lord has come. Let earth receive her king.

Let every heart, every heart prepare him room. How do you prepare room for a king in your heart? It's not easy.

It involves getting off the throne yourself, right? Preparing not to have things be all about you but to bow before his kind kingship.

[11:18] But whether the wise men knew it or not, I want us to notice for a minute tonight how appropriate their specific gifts are.

How well they show us important things about Jesus, the one getting the gifts. Throughout the Bible, gold is the first one, right? Three gifts.

We don't know how many wise men. But the first gift was gold. And it always represents royalty. We see that over and over. Gold is for kings and this is no ordinary king.

He gets gold for sure. Herod, even in this passage, recognizes that the promised Messiah, the anointed one, he's trouble for any other king.

Because he's coming as the king of kings. The one to whom all other kings bow. God has sent us a king. One who will rule justly.

[12:17] One who will really bring peace once and for all. One who will lead us to give our lives to what really matters. If we'll accept his rule over us.

That he's the one who calls all the shots. The second gift is frankincense. Frankincense would have made the Jewish readers of Matthew's gospel think of God's presence being right there.

Think of their relationship with Yahweh, God himself. Because frankincense was used when priests offered sacrifices in the temple.

That's where they would have thought of frankincense. They were offering it to God. Here then is the young child, God with us.

Emmanuel, right? The wonder of wonders that a God would humble himself to be born into this world.

[13:20] The word made flesh. Have you marveled at the incarnation of Jesus yet in this Christmas season?

Have you taken a moment to say, unbelievable. Here is the one who as our great high priest brings us into God's presence.

Who restores our relationship with God by offering the incense of a fragrant sacrifice. Which brings us to the final gift that they bring Jesus.

Myrrh. Again, a very valuable gift. It's honoring Jesus as worthy. But this is a really unusual gift at a birth.

Because myrrh is a spice, as many of you know, that among other things is used to prepare a body for burial. It's used at death. Not at birth.

[14:21] John 19 tells us it was used on Jesus' own body just some 30 years after this. Now again, quite likely this was not the intention of the wise men.

They couldn't have foreseen all of this in detail. But it is a gift that tells us something quite important. And again, quite surprising about the young child.

I mean, first a king already? And then a divine priest to mediate God's presence? And now a child born to die?

That third reality, as shocking as it may seem to us, is fundamental to who Jesus is. It's fundamental to the message of Christmas.

It's not just all happy, happy at Christmas. In order to restore our relationship with God, our king will give his life. A sacrifice for sinners.

[15 : 25] See, sinners are the ones who have earned death, right? Sinners are the ones who should be given myrrh. We're the ones who are going to need that. But this divine king has come way down, hasn't he?

To associate with sinners. To stand in their place. In fact, to rescue them. That's why he's born. He's come to save sinners.

It's in his very name. Three gifts for Jesus that show us wonderful things about him. But as these gifts even demonstrate, they are not themselves the most important gifts given in the Christmas story.

They were really more like first birthday gifts anyway, right? The best gift, kids? The perfect gift of Christmas? What was the best gift of Christmas? Jesus.

Jesus himself is that best gift. The king that God has promised for centuries is who? God himself.

[16 : 33] Providing restoration of relationship through his own presence. Through the fragrant sacrifice of himself. The Lord of life who will be buried.

That his precious people that he loves will be raised forever. However, I suspect we're all going to open some gifts in the days ahead.

Some of them will probably be more fitting and more exciting than others. As you open gifts this year, I really hope that you will remember what I told the kids to remember.

That God is the best giver. So he gives the perfect gift. He knows what we need without even asking.

We have to ask, what do you want? What do you want for Christmas? What do you need? Even our families we have to ask. God knows what you need without even asking. It's not just a little deodorant.

[17 : 34] We have a much bigger problem than that, don't we? A little deodorant is the least of my worries, okay? We have a big need.

And God sends his son. He comes to be born to meet that need. Our need for relationship with him. A king to lead us in the way that we were created to live with purpose in our lives.

A priest to keep us in the presence of the holy God that we were made to live with. By also being the sacrifice that would stand in our place and die for us.

If you always know what to do and how to live all the time. If you've never felt alone.

You always meet your own moral standards as well as those of others. If you've got a purpose that will carry you beyond your own mortality. Then maybe you would say you don't really need Jesus.

[18 : 45] But friend, I would ask you tonight. Have you ever felt insufficient for a situation that you're in before? Have you ever been disappointed in yourself and how you've responded in a tough spot?

Have you ever longed for living and loving beyond this world? And felt like that's what I'm meant for. I was meant to live and love forever.

If you've ever felt like that. Then Jesus is the perfect gift for you to receive this Christmas. He is exactly what you need.

It's why he came. One other thing that makes Jesus the perfect gift. I'll explain it this way. One of the best gifts I ever received was years ago.

When one of my very young daughters at the time wanted for Christmas to give me her favorite baby doll.

[19 : 51] No, I didn't really need that. Not the gift I most needed. But she was trying to communicate with that how valuable I was to her, right?

How much she loved me. That she would give me something that precious to her. Please hear this. That's God's heart for you. At Christmas, God sends his beloved son from his side to our world, to our suffering, to our sin.

Showing us not only how much we need him. That is true. But also how much he loves us. How precious we are to him.

Yes, we need a savior. And yes, God so loved the world that he gave his only son.

[20 : 51] What did he give? It was the most precious thing that he could. This is his son, his eternal companion. His beloved co-divine king.

The son of God will sing love's pure light. The newborn king. The everlasting lord.
The prince of peace. The son of righteousness. The incarnate deity. Emmanuel. The promised savior.

That's who he gives us. As Jesus cries in the manger. As Jesus cries on the cross.
As Jesus cries with joy to bring us home with him. You can know. You should see in those tears that you are precious to God himself.

[21 : 56] He loves you. He gives his son for you. No matter what you feel in this world. Whether you get everything you wanted this Christmas. Or whether you get no other gift the rest of this season.

You get the one that you most need. It shows you not just what you need. But that gift shows you best what you're worth. To the one who made you.
And came back for you. And will never leave you. Joy. Joy. Joy to the world. God gave you his son. To give you everlasting life. Merry Christmas. From God himself. This table is a celebration of that perfect gift.

It's why we celebrate it every Christmas Eve. Jesus on the very night that he was betrayed. Sat with his disciples.

[22 : 59] And he took bread. And he broke it. And he gave it to his disciples. As I'm ministering in his name. Give this bread to you. He said take eat.

This is my body given for you. Do this in remembrance of me. And in the same manner after supper. He took the cup and said. This cup is the new covenant in my blood.

Shed for many. For the forgiveness of sins. Drink from it all of you. For as often as you eat this bread. And drink this cup. You proclaim the Lord's death.

Until he comes. You say my hope. Is in a God. Who would come. And love me enough. To give his very life. For me. That's where my hope is.

If Jesus is a gift. That you think. Not for me. I'm fine with coming to church at Christmas.

[23 : 55] Somebody talked me into it. But I don't stake my life on Jesus. Every day. Then don't take this bread. And this wine tonight.

We would still invite you to come here. In a couple of minutes. When we come forward. We'd invite you to come. And pray with us. As we'll be praying with every group. But we would especially want you to consider.

Receiving the gift. Not of bread and wine. But of Jesus himself. And the everlasting life. That he offers in relationship with him.

It's offered freely to you. By the one who made you. And loves you. And he offers it to you tonight. If you have received that gift. If the gift of Jesus by faith.

Has become your treasure. Possession. If he's the one in whom you find life. In his death. Is your hope of life eternal. Then whether this is your church home. At Southwood or not.

[24 : 52] You come and eat with us. If you're a member in this church. Great. If you're a member in another church. Perhaps here in town. Maybe somewhere else. Visiting tonight. This is your family.

It's not our table. It's Jesus' table. And he welcomes you to come. And taste. And remember as you do. That you are his treasure.

That he loves you so much. That he came to give himself to you. Let's pray and we'll celebrate together. Jesus for this gift. We give you great thanks. And we pray that as you meet us now.

By your spirit. Would you set aside very normal elements. That while they don't change. They would change us. They would do something by your spirit.

In our hearts. That would grow faith in us. That would help us bear up. Under the difficulties of life. That would strengthen our trust in you. That you're with us.

[25 : 49] So we're not alone. Lord would you meet us and help us to love you more. As we taste and see your love for us. In Jesus name. Amen. For more information.

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