

The Wise Still Seek Him  
January 3, 2021  
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Let's talk about the Magi. Some people call them the three Wise Men. Or three Kings. The scripture says they came from the east. Looking east from ancient Israel you find Persia. And that makes sense. Because while Judah was being held in Babylonian captivity, Babylon was conquered by the Persians. And so there were lots of Hebrews living in Persia. There still are. And they brought the scriptures with them.

Those ancient people made a big deal out of today's Old Testament Lesson; "A star will come out of Jacob." They believed, correctly it turned out, that a special star would appear to announce the birth of the Messiah. So when they saw the star, they said "wow! We better go and worship."

They set off for Jerusalem because that's where they expected a newborn king to be found. But when they got there, nobody knew what they were talking about. "King? What King? What are you talking about?" And that raises a question for us; How is it possible that people in Persia, 700 miles away, would know to look for Jesus while Jews in Jerusalem, the Jewish capitol, had no idea?

Perhaps they were focussed on the wrong thing! Jesus was born into a world focussed on religious and political strife. Those people were neglecting to prepare for the main event. The Messiah arrived but they were not ready.

Let's don't be like that! Let's don't make the same mistake! Let's don't spend all our time mad about politics and doctrine! Instead let's give attention to preparing our hearts for Christ's return and to serving Him by serving others. That same Jesus who was born in that stable is coming back again. And the wise are still seeking him. Let's be ready!

Eventually the Magi found Jesus. And they bowed down and worshipped Him. And they brought Him gifts.

Gold, Frankincense and Myrrh were the kind of gifts appropriate for the birth of a king. A nation might send emissaries bearing gifts like that to another kingdom upon the birth of a royal heir.

The gift of gold is an obvious choice. The newborn potentate would want to grow up with a treasury full of it.

Frankincense is the rare and expensive produce of evergreen trees that grow in southern Arabia. Harvesters slice into the tree with a hatchet and collect the sap as it flows out. That sap hardens into little clumps. A tiny bit of frankincense, thrown into the fire, would fill an entire home with irresistible aroma. Some have compared it to a drug. It was traded, in ancient times, from Europe all the way to China. And it was so expensive that most people never even got a whiff of it. It was a gift fit for a king.

Myrrh is a similar plant product but it was a little more common. Some myrrh was mixed with olive oil to make scented lotion. Perhaps the baby Jesus enjoyed some of that.

These three gifts may explain why people exchange presents at Christmas time. In this new year, what gifts can we bring to the baby Jesus? Like I do with every other question that comes into my mind I googled that question. I typed into the search box “In this new year, I typed, “what gifts can we bring to the baby Jesus?”

The first result I clicked on was from the New Times which I figured out was a newspaper in Rwanda in Africa. They sent a reporter out on the street to ask that question. “What gift would you give Jesus.” The first reply was from a lady who said that she would give the baby Jesus “his own shelter” Those were her words. The next answer was from another lady who was concerned about Jesus’ voice. Talking to all those people she reasoned, Jesus could lose His voice. She said she would bring Him a microphone. A man who was a DJ replied that he would organise a party for Jesus, hoping that Jesus would get excited and walk on water. Others mentioned baby clothes, a crib, a cell phone and a selfie stick.

The next link I navigated to was asking children what three gifts they would bring to the Baby Jesus. One little boy thought Jesus would like a Nintendo, a Transformer and a blue balloon that says, “It’s a Boy!”

Now to be fair, I don’t think any of these folks had a lot of time to think the question through. And I’m not sure how well any of us could do on that question without a moment to think. So I have taken the liberty of preparing a Baby Jesus Gift Buying Guide for us to use. Looking for the perfect last minute gift? Here are seven good ideas.

1. **Compassion**—For All People. God has placed us smack dab in the middle of hurting, hopeless, wounded people, and we're mostly oblivious to them. The idea of being a disciple of Jesus is to follow in his footsteps; to live as he lived, to love and sacrifice and heal, to see and respond to the deep needs around us in a way that beautifully alters them. If your heart doesn't break for the suffering you see every day, pray for one that does. You are only as faithful as your ability to care for someone else proves you to be.

2. **More Than An Hour On Sunday.** Church attendance is good but it really doesn't change anything unless it changes us. The singing, the sermons, the conversations, and the prayers are good things, but they're not exactly the point. The point is to live a life that changes the temperature of the places we step into once we leave church. A church building is the easiest place in the world to believe. Let's take our faith out of the building.

3. **Real Love For Our Enemies.** Jesus likes it when we do what he asks us to do, especially when we find ourselves in conflict. He tells us that they're worthy of love and decency and gentleness, and that we need to provide it to them. He is crystal clear about how he wants us to respond to difficult people, and none of it involves giving back to them what they gave to us. The face that resembles Jesus, turns its cheek.

4. **A Firsthand Faith.** Spiritual life is too important to live vicariously. Don't just settle for the words of your pastor, Don't say what you think you're supposed to say or believe what you imagine you're supposed to believe, without testing all of it. Put in the time to learn and reflect and listen, and let that personal spiritual investment yield a set of beliefs that you fully own; an intimate relationship with God that needs no middle man.

5. **Dignity In The Face of Diversity.** It's good to remember that not all people believe what we believe. Not everyone thinks the way we think, looks the way we look, worships the way we worship, loves the way we love. How we respond to these differences is one of the loudest testimonies we will ever have. In fact, every person we ever meet has arrived at their beliefs and their choices in the same way that we have. Everyone is a product of their own story. As deeply as we hold our convictions, they hold theirs. They've done all the seeking and questioning and

living that we have, and so they may have something that we can learn from. Let us respect the stories of others when they differ from your own.

**6. A Grace-Giving Heart.** The way we deal with the flaws of other people says a lot about our understanding of God and about our honesty with our own imperfections. Are we generous with judgment and stingy with forgiveness? That's a bad place to live. One of the greatest signs of a truly mature faith is one that understands that we can't do anything spiritual in another person—only God can. When we reach the place where we simply want to reflect the goodness of God toward someone else; when we find our desire to love people instead of fixing them, we're doing what we're designed, equipped, and qualified to do.

**7. Forgiveness.** Forgiveness for our former friends, our ex-business partners, our ex-spouse, our old boss, our kids or that person who hurt us so deeply. Our ability to "let people off the hook" shows that we trust God to make everything right, even if it doesn't seem right to us in the moment. When we forgive someone else, regardless of whether or not we think they deserve it, we're being obedient in faith, we're reflecting the heart of Jesus to them, and we're letting God be God. Revenge, payback, even getting what we deserve, all take a backseat when we let forgiveness drive. Let us put down the stones we'd really like to throw.

Sisters and brothers, in this new year, let us bring to that baby Jesus the very best of what we have received from His hand.