

Discipleship Moment

Sermon Text: Matthew 2:1-12

I like to think that my wife, Sara, and I are practical people. I like to think, when it comes to Christmas gifts especially, that I would much prefer something I will use to something that is nice. As I open a gift, usually I think to myself *is this something I will actually use?* Because of this, socks have been a long time favorite Christmas gift. A pair of good, high quality (preferably RedHead brand with a lifetime warranty) socks is a great gift for me. I would rather have one or two nice things than be showered with gifts that have no actual use to me or my family.

But the best gifts, in my opinion, are gifts that have use not only to me, but to others. Over the years I have pastored in the rural Midwest, and every year, the good farmers would give pounds and pounds of bratwurst, sausage, steak, ground chuck, shoulder roasts and the like. This is one of the best presents to me because not only do I get to enjoy this gift but I can involve others in this gift, too. I can make a meal for friends or parishioners or neighbors and bless them with the gift that was given to me. To me this is the best part of a gift: to be able to share it with others.

I think, unless you're particularly selfish, you probably feel the same way. You would rather have something that provides for you and for others, not just for yourself. This is the kind of gift that we hear about in church during the Christmas season: a gift that overflows and benefits others. This works in several ways.

The main gift we hear about is the gift of salvation: when we are saved by God's gift of Jesus Christ we are baptized into a new way of life that leads to generosity, patience, grace, and ultimately love. This gift benefits others even though we are the primary recipient. The other ways are similar: the gift of gold, frankincense, and myrrh possibly made a way for Joseph, Mary, and Jesus to move to Egypt until it was safe; the heavenly experience of Mary and Joseph's experience with the angel Gabriel produced in them the drive and grace to raise Jesus; and the Wisemen's grace of knowledge and astronomy made it possible to proclaim to all people that Jesus is King over everyone, not just the Jews.

God is a great gift giver. He gives us gifts not just for our benefit but that we may benefit others. May we use our time, talent, and treasures as blessings for others!

Going Deeper

Use this resource to start conversations about this week's sermon for your personal devotions, with your family, or with your Life Group. You can use one question per day or all at once.

1. What was a time you received a really bad gift? Why was it bad?
2. What are your favorite kinds of gifts to receive? Why?
3. When was the last time you received a gift that was a blessing to others as well? How did that feel?
4. What are some ways you can use your gifts (either Christmas or spiritual gifts) to bless others this week?
5. Who can you invite to your house for a meal this week? Invite them and enjoy their company!
6. Read Psalm 8 and reflect on God's gifts to humans.