



“True Christmas Worship” (Selected Scripture)

Daniel Henderson – GS3357

One Christmas Day the Blake family was caught up in many of the typical trappings of the season. Things were not going so well. Dad was at his wits end with the malfunctioning tree lights that would not stay on. Mom was in the kitchen sobbing after burning the Christmas casserole. Twin brothers Josh and Jared were in their room screaming as they argued over the new controller for the video games. Older sister Aubrey was in her room pouting because she was not allowed to go to her boyfriend’s house for the day.

Witnessing all of this, 4 year old Amber slipped into her bedroom. Kneeling by her bed she earnestly prayed, “Dear God, forgive us our Christmases as we forgive those who Christmas against us.”

Like the Blake family, we can easily miss the point of the Christmas season. The value of the family is often eclipsed by the frenzy. Giving is overshadowed by greed. A silent night is drowned out by shopping. Worship is replaced by work, worry and weariness.

Wise Men Really Do Still Seek Him

This Christmas let’s revisit the mysterious characters known as the Magi. They can inspire our true worship. As we seek to have Christ-honoring and spiritually meaningful Christmas, we can learn much from these Christ-seekers from the East.

Without too much speculation or detail, it is important to note a few facts about the Magi. These men were students of astrology and astronomy, probably from Persia (modern-day Iran). There is no evidence that there were only three, just that they brought three gifts. They were not from the Orient, nor were they kings. They likely rode on Arabian steeds rather than camels, as is traditionally depicted.

They were likely aware of Balaam’s prophecy of the star out of Jacob (Numbers 24:17). We know that the Jews expected a star as a sign of the birth of the Messiah. Somehow, in God’s providence these Magi were aware and eager to understand more.

The Magi's example of real worship is notable. I hope it will help you cut through all the clutter of Christmas in order to come back to the heart of worship. We see six characteristics that show us what it means to worship well at Christmas.

Six Keys to Experience True Christmas Worship (Matthew 2:1-11)

Acknowledgement (v. 2)

The account of the Magi's worship journey begins with these words, *"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, saying, 'Where is He who has been born King of the Jews? For we have seen His star in the East . . .'"*

Authentic celebrations of Christmas can only occur when we first acknowledge the identity and character of the centerpiece of the season. The wise men had been shown by God that the one they sought was not just another religious leader or political figure. He was the King of the Jews, spoken of in prophecy and anticipated by the faithful.

A.W. Tozer wrote, "The essence of idolatry is the entertainment of thoughts about God that are unworthy of Him." Real Christmas worship involves a clear and accurate appreciation for who Christ is. As Warren Wiersbe said, "I am not worshipping Him because of what He will do for me, but because of what He is to me." Worship begins by acknowledging Jesus for who He really is.

The prophet Isaiah spoke of this anticipated King, *"For a child will be born to us, a son will be given to us; And the government will rest on His shoulders; And His name will be called Wonderful Counselor, Mighty God, Eternal Father, Prince of Peace. There will be no end to the increase of His government or of peace, on the throne of David and over his kingdom, to establish it and to uphold it with justice and righteousness From then on and forevermore. The zeal of the LORD of hosts will accomplish this."* (Isaiah 9:6-7)

Nathanael, the prospective disciple, acknowledged the identity of the King when he said to Jesus, *"Rabbi, You are the Son of God; You are the King of Israel"* (John 1:49). When He stood before Pilate at His trial Christ testified, *"You say correctly that I am a king. For this I have been born, and for this I have come into the world, to testify to the truth. Everyone who is of the truth hears My voice."* (John 18:37) Someday in eternity, we will stand before this one who came as a baby on that Christmas night. His identity will be indisputable, *"And on His robe and on His thigh He has a name written, 'KING OF KINGS, AND LORD OF LORDS'"* (Revelation 19:16).

Over the years, I have shared some key principles of worship. Three come to mind as we think our need to acknowledge Christ this season:

- **Worship involves revelation and response.** It is the response of all that I am, to the revelation of all that He is.

- **To worship “in spirit”** involves possession of, submission to, and illumination by the Spirit of God. I cannot worship effectively apart from the absolute control and wisdom of the Holy Spirit.
- **To worship “in truth”** involves the truth of God revealed in creation, Christ and the Scriptures – renewing my mind and received in my heart.

The Magi responded to the revelation given them, even though it was somewhat obscure and mysterious. We can't help but feel astonishment as we observe their faith and determination to find and worship the young King.

This Christmas, thank the Lord for the full and glorious revelation you have received in His word, His son and the beauty of His world. Worship Him in spirit and in truth, as His indwelling Spirit helps you to acknowledged Christ the Lord in this season of celebration.

Attentiveness (v. 2)

These men were accustomed to gazing at the stars. Yet, they were able to recognize this unique star that would direct them to the Christ child. The passage tells us, “. . . *For we have seen His star in the East . . .*” Among a countless array of stars in the sky, they were aware that they had seen “His star.”

Every Christmas we face the challenge of missing the moment of worship because there are so very many distractions that dull our sensitivity to the central message of Christ. Myriads of lights, commercials, traffic jams and activities can keep us from paying attention to His person and message.

Another principle of worship tells us:

- **The enemies of true worship** are ignorance, idolatry, impurity, and insincerity.

This Christmas, don't let the confusion of the busy season, the attraction of materialism, the temptations of your heart or the mere religious activities distract you from paying full attention to the one who is worthy of your undivided attention and worship.

Action (v. 2)

Three other principles I've taught over the years tell us:

- **Worship is giving, not receiving.** The question is not, “What did I get out of the service?” but “What did God receive from me?”
- **Worship is participative, not passive.** Worship is a verb, and by definition involves bowing down in order to attribute worth to God.
- **Worship involves attitude and action.** It is experienced in my innermost being; but, to be sincere, worship must result in acts of sacrificial obedience.

Notice the words of the Magi, “. . . *and (we) have come to worship Him.*” Having seen the star, these wise men were not content to worship from afar. They were determined to make the long trek to find the child. Their worship was more than acknowledgment and attentiveness – but resulted in sacrificial action. For them, it required the thoughtful preparation of gifts, the sacrifice of many days of travel and the inconvenience of rearranging their lives and schedules.

What thoughtful, sacrificial and determined acts of worship will we engage in this Christmas? The New Testament tells us, “*Therefore I urge you, brethren, by the mercies of God, to present your bodies a living and holy sacrifice, acceptable to God, which is your spiritual service of worship.*” *Romans 12:1* May the spirit of giving start with our worship of the King as we act in sincere adoration of Him.

Anticipation (vv. 9 & 10)

The passage tells us of the trap Herod was trying to set. After consulting with his advisors about the prophecies of the Messiah, and His future birth in Bethlehem, Herod told the Magi to go find the child. His intention was to use the Magi in order to locate and destroy this “king” who threatened Herod’s rule. As we know, God later warned the Magi to avoid Herod’s trap and go home by a different route.

After this initial interchange with Herod, the Bible says, “*When they heard the king, they departed; and behold, the star which they had seen in the East went before them, till it came and stood over where the young Child was. When they saw the star, they rejoiced with exceedingly great joy.*”

God now directed these Magi in a very direct and supernatural way, with a stellar manifestation of His glory. The Magi rejoiced with inexpressible, abounding joy – not because of the star, but because of where the star would take them. Their joy was centered in the privilege of worshiping this young King.

A.W. Tozer said, “We are called to an everlasting preoccupation with God.” This 24/7 preoccupation is one of great anticipation and joy, knowing how worthy our King is and how “worth it” it is to experience His person and presence.

I’ve often said . . .

- **My private expression of worship** on Monday through Saturday will determine the fullness of my experience of congregational worship on Sunday.

Psalm 122:1 says, “*I was glad when they said to me, ‘Let us go to the house of the LORD.’*” In Psalm 84:1&2 we read, “*How lovely are Your dwelling places, O LORD of hosts! My soul longed and even yearned for the courts of the LORD; My heart and my flesh sing for joy to the living God.*”

May God give us a consistent anticipation for the joy of daily worship, leading to great rejoicing in our corporate worship – especially at the Christmas season.

Abandonment (v. 11)

Notice this profound commentary, “*And when they had come into the house, they saw the young Child with Mary His mother, and fell down and worshiped Him.*” What a powerful picture of true worship. These grown, dignified and respected men see the young Jesus with his mother. In humble and utter abandonment, they fall on their faces in worship.

Consider this principle of worship:

- **Worship is vertical, not horizontal.** God is the audience. I am the performer, invited by His grace to offer a solo to Him. Everyone else is my back-up choir. My goal is not to appease any human on-lookers but to bring pleasure to an audience of one – Him.

We all can relate to the temptation of worrying more about our dignity than His worthiness when we are in worship. We are often more conscious about the opinions of on lookers than the call of the Savior to praise Him in complete freedom and sincerity.

The Bible compels us abandon our souls and bodies to Him. *Come, let us worship and bow down, Let us kneel before the LORD our Maker. (Psalm 95:6)*. Revelation gives us a glimpse of our worship in Heaven. Surrounded by myriads and myriads of angels we will declare His worth with loud and unrestrained voice. In this futuristic biblical account it says, “*the elders fell down and worshiped.*” (*Revelation 5:11-14*)

May our worship be so Christ-focused and unrestrained this Christmas season that we too will honor Him in sweet and sincere abandon.

Adoration (v. 11)

In the familiar narrative, we are told, “*And when they had opened their treasures, they presented gifts to Him: gold, frankincense, and myrrh.*”

We’ve heard of the beautiful symbolism of these gifts. Gold was a gift for royalty. Christ is the King of the Jews and King of Kings. Frankincense was an expensive fragrance used in worship. This symbolizes Christ’s deity. Myrrh seemed a strange gift for a newborn king as it was most commonly used for embalming the dead. Perhaps God led these Magi even in the selection of their gifts as this particular item pointed to his sacrificial death as Savior and Redeemer of the world.

This Christmas we should give our first and best gifts to the “guest of honor” at the birthday celebration. Will these gifts be thoughtful, sacrificial and worthy of Christ?

King David said, “*. . .I will not offer burnt offerings to the LORD my God which cost me nothing’. So David bought the threshing floor and the oxen for fifty shekels of silver*” (2 Samuel 24:24). In that same spirit, Paul reminds us, “*Each one must do just as he has purposed in his heart, not grudgingly or under compulsion, for God loves a cheerful giver. And God is able to make all grace abound to you, so that always having all sufficiency in everything, you may have an abundance for every good deed.*” (2 Corinthians 9:7-8)

Oh Come Let Us Adore Him!

Let’s allow the revelation of all He is to evoke a response of all we are –in true Christmas worship.

William Temple, Archbishop of Canterbury in the mid-20th century said, “To worship is to quicken the conscience by the Holiness of God, to feed the mind with the truth of God, to purge the imagination by the beauty of God, to open the heart to the love of God and devote the will to the purpose of God.”

Oh Lord, let this be the nature of our worship this Christmas – for our good, and Your glory!

CONCLUSION:

What will it take in my life for me to truly adore Him this Christmas?

True Christmas Worship

For Further Application and Discussion

1. Read Psalm 84. What stands out to you about the surpassing value of an intimate life of worship? How could you apply this Psalm to the Christmas season and all of the lesser things that compete for our attention and focus? How is the focus of worshipping Christ a superior source of blessing? How will you practice this conviction in this season?
2. Notice the joy of Magi in Matthew 2:10. How will you experience this same kind of joy during this Christmas season? (Notice these passages: Psalm 26:8, 42:1, 2&4, 119:14, 122:1; Jeremiah 15:16; John 15:11, 17:13-14.) Write out a simple prayer, saying, “Lord, this Christmas I will experience joy by . . .” (Finish the prayer in your own words.)
3. Consider the abandonment of worship pictured by the Magi in vs. 11 as they fell down before young Jesus. How can you express your worship of “the Newborn King” with a similar sense of abandon during this holiday season? Think about Romans 6:13-19, 12:1&2, Philippians 1:20&21.
4. Notice the sacrifice and thoughtfulness involved in the gifts the Magi brought to Jesus (Matthew 2:11). What sacrificial and thoughtful gift will you offer him this week to demonstrate his worth? How can you do it with the same spirit as the Magi? (See 2

Samuel 24:24.) How can God work in you to bring this to pass? (See 2 Corinthians 8:1-7 & 9:6-14.)

5. With so many distractions of the commercialism of Christmas, how can you focus on the purity of worship of Christ? How can you model the spirit of the Apostle Paul as noted in Philippians 3:7-10? Pray today that God's Spirit will work in you to help you set aside the lesser things in order to enjoy the only thing.