

**Introduction:**

- A. *Illus.*: In March 2002 I read this in the *Chicago Tribune*: “Afghanistan's symbol of hope returned home Thursday after 29 years in exile, eager to unite a country besieged by war, ethnic rivalries and bickering warlords.” The article was about Afghanistan’s former ruler, **Mohammed Zahir Shah**, who was 87 years old when he was finally able to return to his land after some 30 years in exile. The article went on:

“On Thursday, thousands of invited guests lined up for hours at the airport and people gathered on the streets leading to a refurbished seven-bedroom villa to see the former ruler. Delegations arrived from across Afghanistan's 32 provinces. Governors and their advisers, members of women's groups carrying posters of the king, most of the interim administration, royalists, warlords, men in turbans and others in suits all converged on the pockmarked runway where shells of bombed airplanes lay. Two red carpets were laid out. The newly trained honor guard was on hand, and young women and children in traditional embroidered dress greeted Zahir Shah with flowers and poems.”

- A. I hope you're thinking of the contrast when Israel's Messiah was born, when he came to his own people. Luke says the shepherds rejoiced and told people what they'd seen and heard, as it had been told them by the angels. He says that old Simeon and Anna met the infant Jesus in the temple with great joy and relief. And later the magi from the east came with news of a star announcing the birth of the King of the Jews. But no one from Jerusalem—*no one!*—went with them the last six miles to Bethlehem to see, let alone to celebrate, the birth of their long-awaited King. Turn to **Matt 2:9-11**
- B. **Here is that precious picture of these mysterious magi, students of stars and prophecies, dusty from their long journey, bowing before the infant Jesus, presenting gifts fit for a king.**

**I. THE MAGI WERE THE FIRST OF US TO BRING THEIR TREASURES IN WORSHIP OF KING JESUS**

- A. God spoke very clearly to the magi—in part, I think, because he knew they’d listen. He knew they’d see. They were pagans—probably Zoroastrians, believing in an all-powerful and wise God—but they probably knew the prophecies of Balaam, Daniel and Isaiah. The Jews they met in Jerusalem knew those prophecies, too, but almost no one there had eyes to see or ears to hear.
- B. The magi knew that the King of the Jews had been born because the star they saw, given its timing and placement, was proof to them. It must have been confusing to get to Jerusalem only to be met with blank faces all the way to the palace. I wonder if they had second thoughts? But then they learned from Herod’s Bible scholars that the Messiah was to be born in Bethlehem, only a half dozen miles further, and they knew they were on the right track.

**Then, when they left Herod’s presence... there was the star!** I’m inclined to think that they hadn’t seen it once they knew they were heading toward Israel and now... there it is again! I think they might have been overjoyed to see the star not only because it was clearly leading them to Bethlehem, but because now they knew that the star was in agreement with the Scriptures they’d just heard. **Two divine witnesses, two Godsend.** No wonder they were filled with “*exceedingly great joy*”! “*It’s really true!!*”

- C. If they were overjoyed to see the star leading them to the place where the child was, imagine their joy upon seeing Jesus! There is a sense of wonder in holding any baby, isn’t there. We stare at this miracle, this life, this uniquely beautiful baby, and we peer into the future. What will they be? What will those little eyes see? What will knowing this child mean to us? **But the magi saw in the infant Jesus something no one else has ever seen in the face of a baby—they saw the Savior, the King of the Jews, God-with-us.** And they knew it.

If they were students of biblical prophecy, as many think they were, they knew that this was the King who would bring all things under God's control. Daniel the prophet who had lived in their land and among their magi predecessors, had written in **Dan 7:13-14**, *“In my vision at night I looked, and there before me was one like a son of man, coming with the clouds of heaven. He approached the Ancient of Days and was led into his presence. He was given authority, glory and sovereign power; all nations and peoples of every language worshiped him. His dominion is an everlasting dominion that will not pass away, and his kingdom is one that will never be destroyed.”*

And that, I'm quite certain, is the Ruler the magi traveled to see, the one whose birth was signaled by the star. And that is who they saw in the arms of his mother. Imagine, if you can, looking at a baby and knowing you were seeing the person who would fulfill that extraordinary prophecy! That you touched the hand and stroked the cheek of a king with *an everlasting dominion!*

- D. *“Then they opened their treasures and presented him with gifts of gold, frankincense and myrrh.”* Much is made of these gifts as symbols of different aspects of Jesus' life—kingship, deity and death. I'm not sure that was the point. It is most likely that they are all extravagant and delightful gifts fit for a king. Myrrh, so often portrayed as the “bitter perfume” of death was a treasured wedding gift. These treasures were extravagant expressions of royal recognition. They were the magi's way of saying, *“We may not have the opportunity to bow before this king and worship him when he is grown and comes into his kingdom so we will do it now. This is the King, ‘whose kingdom will never be destroyed,’ whom we worship!”*
- E. You wonder what happened to these magi. The Bible says nothing but the traditions are that they became devoted Christians and may even have been martyred. **Whatever the truth is, it seems impossible to me that people who made such an exemplary journey to bow before Jesus,**

**and to present such treasures, would not be changed men.** That's the thing about coming to Jesus. In coming to him, he changes us! This is the very epitome of what it is to worship the Lord Jesus Christ. I'm confident that God in his grace met their faith with his salvation and glory!

It is common, of course, to read this and consider how little we have to bring to the King. *"I have no gift to bring... to lay before the king... I played my drum for Him, pa rum pum pum pum, Me and my drum."* Songs and poems suggest we give our very selves. Illus.: our two neighbor boys, Daniel and Zach, were in their church's Christmas pageant a week or two ago. Daniel was old enough to grab the coveted part of the second wise man, but Zach, being too young, was cast as Daniel's frankincense. Dressed like a fancy bottle, which Daniel got to turn around to face the baby Jesus. Perhaps that picture—to come to Jesus as the magi's **gift**—fits us better than being one of the givers. But there's a twist in our story of coming to King Jesus because...

## **II. BEFORE WE BRING OUR TREASURES TO KING JESUS WE BRING ... OUR TRASH**

You know the expression, *"One man's trash is another man's treasure"*? Well, that is uniquely true of Jesus. Illus.: I had lunch last week with **Kyle**. He was a kid in our youth group years ago in Pennsylvania. He and four other boys really took a toll on our group because of their behavior. I'd heard that Kyle faced many dark years. Joined the army. Became an alcoholic. Failed marriages. Alienated a lot of people. Just a mess.

Then a couple years ago, John and Kaye Lyons were attending their church in Maine where they vacation and there was a presentation by Teen Challenge—a ministry focused on helping people of all ages with addictions. One of the guys in that group was Kyle.

He told me when we met that he'd been invited to a Teen Challenge banquet and heard the testimonies of changed lives. *Sounds great*, he thought. *I think God wants me to do that*, he thought. *But there's no way. I'm not ready for that*, he thought. The very next week all his jobs fell through. The people whose

place he was staying at told him he had to go. His car was repossessed. He literally had no place to go. So, by the mercy of God, having no options left, he called his pastor and asked if he'd take him to Teen Challenge. There he returned like a prodigal son to his heavenly Father. It was really difficult to get clean but he's doing well, and is now working at Teen Challenge here in Chicago.

Through all those dark years he'd attended church off and on. "*You baptized me,*" he reminded me, "*In a pool. There were two of us. I never forgot the Lord. I always wanted to go to church.*" That's a kind of upside-down magi story. **Because worship starts when broken people who have no treasures bring themselves and their trash to Jesus.**

A. In **Matt 20:28** Jesus, the King, said something incredible:

*"The Son of Man did not come to be served, but to serve, and to give his life as a ransom for many."* So we bring him our trash:

1. We bring our diseased hearts to Jesus for his healing. Remember how Jesus healed the paralyzed man by saying, "*Your sins are forgiven you*"? Not because sins caused his paralysis but because forgiving sin is the greater healing. So we bring our sick souls to Jesus.
2. We bring our debts for Jesus to pay. We are like the man in Jesus' parable whose debt to his master is far, far beyond his ability to ever repay so the master simply forgives it. *What can I give to Jesus to repay him?* Nothing. Nothing at all. His forgiveness is a free gift.
3. We bring our doubts to Jesus for reassurance. At the very end of Matthew "*the eleven disciples went to Galilee, to the mountain where Jesus had told them to go. When they saw him, they worshiped him; but some doubted.*" They saw Jesus risen from the dead and some doubted! That was Thomas, of course, and perhaps others. Yet none were disowned. Tradition tells us that Thomas became the first missionary to India, where he was martyred for Jesus. Anyone who *wants* to believe in the Lord will find the Lord helps them find

him. *Seek and you will find.* Like those magi moved toward Jesus by the most unlikely witnesses—a star, a murderous king, and stone-deaf Bible scholars.

4. We bring our death for Jesus to defeat. Jesus' very last words in Matthew are, *"And surely I am with you always, to the very end of the age."* Always—to the grave's edge and to the life beyond. Jesus also promised in **Matt 8:11**, *"I say to you that many will come from the east and the west, and will take their places at the feast with Abraham, Isaac and Jacob in the kingdom of heaven."* Jesus took my death and yours so we can be at that ever-living feast. O death, where is your sting!

- B. Now, as those whom Jesus has healed, ransomed, strengthened and resurrected, we come to bow down and worship him. Of course, we have treasures to give him now. He loves gifts that come carried in faith:

- *"Lord, I don't have much money, but I want to give you this."*
- *"Lord, I'm afraid of stepping into all the heartache in my friend's life, but I will do it for you."*
- *"Lord, persecuted Christians seem so far away but I will pray for them today."*
- *"Jesus, I know it would please you if I'd get smaller so I will stop being so defensive."*

*Illus.:* I remember a time when things seemed to be falling apart for me. Mercifully, I don't recall the details any more, but I do remember praying, *"Lord, I have nothing valuable to give you. All I have is this sordid little kingdom I've guarded and ruled in my heart. It's nothing. It's worthless. But I have ruled here and now I give it to you."*

- C. Our worship is made rich, not by the treasures we bring to Jesus, but the treasures he brought to us. The angel said to them, *"Do not be afraid. I bring you good news that will cause great joy for all the people. Today in the town of David a Savior has been born to you; he is the Messiah, the Lord... Glory to God in the highest heaven, and on earth peace to those on whom his favor rests."*