

How Would Jesus Celebrate Christmas?

Part 1

Matthew 2:1-12

When Queen Elizabeth was alive, she did quite a bit of traveling. And when she traveled, it was a big deal. She came to the United States many times in her 70 years of being queen and each time it was quite the affair. Of course, she had all her luggage, all 4,000 pounds of it. As you can imagine, she always needed her personal protection entourage with her and they had to eat, sleep and be fed and they had all their luggage. But she also traveled with her personal doctor and with him they carried 40 pints of blood in her type in case she needed surgery. She packed three changes of clothes for each day including a funeral outfit in case somebody died. She also traveled with her own hair stylist, lawyer, and dog groomer for her corgi dogs. It was like a small city traveling around and it cost millions of dollars to be able to do it.

Now, contrast that with the time that God Himself came bodily to earth. He came as a baby – a poor child who was born in a barn because they didn't have room for Him and His parents anywhere else. He came with nothing and nobody except those parents. But unlike the Queen's trip, God's presence here will never be forgotten. Nobody had their life changed when the queen came. Nobody still celebrates those trips. Nobody sings queen's trip carols by the fire with cheer. Nobody gives gifts or gets the day off or has family get-togethers to commemorate that time Queen Elizabeth showed up. There are no queen trees decorated with ornaments and tinsel. I'm sure she was a nice lady but there is no comparison between her and Jesus.

The birth of Jesus, as written in **Matthew chapter two**, is a study in comparisons and contrasts. We will see how people reacted to the news of His birth and how they felt about Him. And we will see, I believe, that nothing much has changed. Those extreme contrasts are still there. But while you are turning there to Matthew chapter 2, I want to ask you one more time to think about this question. How do you think Jesus would celebrate Christmas?

It's a question that has been on my mind for a while now and I want to know because however He would celebrate it, that's what I want to do. The Apostle Paul said over and over again that he wanted to be like Christ, to know Him even in His sufferings. (Phil. 3:10) I don't know that I'm there yet. That's deep. But in this Christmas season, we can at least celebrate the way Jesus would celebrate. So, what would that look like? Well, let's turn to **Matthew 2** and let's read **verses 1-12**. And while we do, remember that Jesus is God. He is all God and all man. He was there at the beginning. He was part of creation. This was His plan from before time. His plan was to be born humbly in a rural setting. We don't know for sure if it was a real barn with farm animals in there. But if it was, it was because that was the plan. That's the way God wanted it. We don't know if there were three wise men or three hundred but whatever the number, that is the number God wanted. If there was a goat in that barn, that's the goat God wanted. That was the horse, the mule, the sheep and the giraffe if there was one that God wanted. This was the plan and no detail had been left out because it was God's plan and it was perfect. I have an idea that if there were dogs in that barn, they must have been Blue Heelers because those are God's favorite breed, right? And one might need heelers with all that livestock. Right Bam Bam? Anyway, let's read **Matthew 2:1-12**.

After Jesus was born in Bethlehem in Judea, during the time of King Herod, Magi from the east came to Jerusalem and asked, "Where is the one who has been born king of the Jews? We saw his star when it rose and have come to worship him." 3 When King Herod heard this he was disturbed, and all Jerusalem with him. 4 When he had called together all the people's chief priests and teachers of the law, he asked them where the Messiah was to be born. 5 "In Bethlehem in Judea," they replied, "for this is what the prophet has written: 6 "But you, Bethlehem, in the land of Judah, are by no means least among the rulers of Judah; for out of you will come a ruler

who will shepherd my people Israel.” 7 Then Herod called the Magi secretly and found out from them the exact time the star had appeared. 8 He sent them to Bethlehem and said, “Go and search carefully for the child. As soon as you find him, report to me, so that I too may go and worship him.” 9 After they had heard the king, they went on their way, and the star they had seen when it rose went ahead of them until it stopped over the place where the child was. 10 When they saw the star, they were overjoyed. 11 On coming to the house, they saw the child with his mother Mary, and they bowed down and worshiped him. Then they opened their treasures and presented him with gifts of gold, frankincense and myrrh. 12 And having been warned in a dream not to go back to Herod, they returned to their country by another route.

This passage brings up a lot of questions. Who were these wise men, the Magi, and where did they come from? How many were there? How did they know? What star were they following? What kind of dogs did they have? You know? I have questions. And almost none of them are answered. But what we do know is that they showed up at great sacrifice to themselves. And since God had planned this day from before time began, we know this is what He wanted from the Magi. He wanted this sacrifice from them and I would say today that Jesus would celebrate Christmas with us this year in the same way. He wants the same sacrifice from us that the Magi gave.

Just think of what all those wise men sacrificed. No, we don't know how many there really were or where they came from exactly or much of anything else but they obviously made great sacrifices to go see the baby Jesus. And I'm not just talking about the gifts. I mean it was a huge sacrifice just showing up. They had to travel a long distance. We don't know how far but they weren't from around Israel. We know that much. They were probably from somewhere in Babylon, which is now modern-day Iraq. So, think about traveling by camel or by mule for some 700 miles through the desert. That is quite the sacrifice.

I think about Job's three friends who came to visit him when his world had collapsed. Yea, I know they turned out to be boneheads but I can't get over the fact that they made their way to Job's house and then just sat there with him for a week, not saying anything, just sharing in his grief. That's a good friend. That is a real sacrifice. Maybe you have had a friend do something similar for you. Maybe they just came over and said, *“I just don't want you to be alone tonight so I'll sleep in the other room and I'm here if you need me.”* That is sacrifice.

Do you know that just showing up for church is a sacrifice along those same lines? You have no idea how many times you came to church and smiled at somebody or really asked them how they were doing or gave them a hug or sat next to them when they really needed somebody to do just that. And sometimes that person...is your pastor. And I know it is a sacrifice and I appreciate it.

Do you know how else the Magi sacrificed? They gave a sacrifice of faith. From what I have read, it looks like the Magi were not Jewish but Gentiles and yet they came looking for the Messiah. Now, there had been Magi for centuries before this. We know from the book of Daniel that the Magi were among the highest-ranking officials in Babylon. Their knowledge included astrology and astronomy as well as different types of sorcery and were noted for their ability to interpret dreams. So, you can imagine they had some interesting talks with Daniel back in the day. So, it is fascinating to me to think that these men who had been educated in science, agriculture, math, history, and the occult (MacArthur, page 27) would have shown such faith as to follow a star all those miles to find the Messiah. Some people are so educated they can't believe in anything they can't prove but these wise men were wise enough to know they didn't know everything. And so they saw the star and somehow God allowed them to know what it meant and they just left their homes and families and jobs and by faith went to Bethlehem.

I can imagine a conversation between two of the magi as they ride their camels through the desert. The younger magi looks at the older one and says, *“Now, where are we going?”* The older one says, *“We don't know.”* *“How far do you think it is?”* *“No idea.”* *Well, what are we going to do if we have to cross a river or a lake or even an ocean?”* *“I*

guess God will teach our camels to swim.” That’s the kind of faith that the Magi had. They didn’t know where or when or how long or what exactly they would see or find. They just went. It’s very much like the kind of faith that Abraham showed when God told him to sacrifice his son, Isaac. Do you remember what Abe did? **Genesis 22** says, *“God said, ‘Take your son, your only son, whom you love—Isaac—and go to the region of Moriah. Sacrifice him there as a burnt offering on a mountain I will show you.’”* ³ *Early the next morning Abraham got up and loaded his donkey.*” He didn’t know where he was going or why he had to sacrifice Isaac but he knew he heard from God so he got up early and went. That is faith.

Romans 10 says that faith comes from hearing. You hear from God, believe God and then act on it. Anything more or less than that is not really faith. If you don’t hear from God but you feel like you ought to do something, that’s not faith. If you hear from God, believe God and then question God and give God excuses why you can’t...that’s not faith. Faith is hearing from God, believing God and then acting on it. That is a sacrifice of faith.

So, we have seen that the Magi gave the sacrifice of showing up. They gave their sacrifice of faith. And the most obvious sacrifice was their sacrifice of gifts and they gave them in abundance. And evidently this is where we get the tradition of giving each other gifts at Christmas. As little kids, we all know how we used to look forward to getting gifts on Christmas morning but for most adults, I think, that is not the big deal it used to be. I told all my family that after checking my finances I decided to give everyone in my family a warmly worded text for Christmas. You know, something nice, heartfelt. I heard the story of a little boy that brought his school teacher a gift for Christmas. She took it and noticed it was leaking a little bit. She knew the little boy’s father owned a liquor store so she got some liquid on her finger and asked, *“Is this wine?”* The boy smiled and said no. She took another taste and said, *“Is it champagne?”* No. *“Well, what is it?”* The boy grinned real big and said, *“It’s a puppy!”*

Unfortunately, it’s not recorded that Jesus got a puppy for His birthday but He did get some gold, some frankincense and some myrrh. So, if Jesus were celebrating Christmas with us here this year in person, do you think He would want more gold, frankincense and myrrh? I doubt it. But I do think He would want gifts. I really do. When I ask how you think Jesus would celebrate Christmas, I think He would want gifts again this year like He got the first time but I don’t think it would be those same gifts that He would want from you.

Think about it. The Magi must have been pretty wealthy to afford not just the gifts but the travel and everything it took to get to Jesus. And God gave them that wealth. He gave them the ability to do what they did just like He gives you the ability to do what you do. And God wanted Mary and Joseph to be able to afford to live and so He sent those Magi with just the right gifts, the gifts God had given them.

And that is what He wants from you too. He wants you to give the gifts He has given you. Maybe He has made you as wealthy as the Magi but I suspect most of us have gifts that are not financial. We know from the Apostle Paul who wrote in Romans, 1 Corinthians and Ephesians that there are many different kinds of gifts that God gives us and what better time of year to use those gifts? Maybe you have the gift of speaking or serving, teaching, encouraging, giving, leadership, words of wisdom or mercy. Whatever your gift, God has given that to you and He wants you to use it this Christmas season.

I remember talking to our precious friend, Janet Hart, a few years ago before she passed away. She had gotten to the point where she couldn’t get around like she used to. She couldn’t cook or knit or even write letters like she enjoyed and she had used those gifts to encourage others. I still have and use a scarf and a hat she knit me and I love them. But she was frustrated because she felt she couldn’t use the gifts God had given her.

I told her I knew of another gift she had and it looked to me like God was setting her up to use it even more. Janet was a prayer warrior and now that she couldn’t get around, she had even more time to pray. Some of you, maybe most of you had Janet pray for you at one time or another. How much was that worth? I love this scarf but I’d throw

it away if it meant I could get Janet to pray for me one more time. That was a God-given gift and it was powerful. It was powerful because it was God-given.

And God has given you a gift too, a powerful gift that He wants you to use. I remember as a kid, there was a man in my dad's church who used to say his gift was being able to keep the preacher in line. And he wasn't kidding. He really thought that was his gift. I assure you it was not and it's not yours. Your gift is something God has given you to edify or build up the church. And it is different than my gift and different from his gift or her gift. And if you aren't here or if you just refuse to use your gift, that's just wrong. That is selfish and lazy and not honoring to God or edifying to the church.

If Jesus were celebrating Christmas this year here with us, He would want you to sacrifice your time, your abilities, your faith, your gifts, your desires and most of all yourself. Because God wants you. He wants all of you. He wants to spend Christmas with you just like He did with the Magi.

Now contrast the Magi who came from thousands of miles away and made great sacrifices to worship Jesus with the other characters in the story. What did Herod do? He talked about going to worship Jesus but we all know that's not what he really wanted. He was evil and wanted to kill Him. And there are still those evil people in this world who hate God and everything we as Christians stand for.

But I think most people today, especially in the church like we are, are more like the chief priests and teachers of the law that it talks about in **verse 4**. They knew about God. They were religious. In fact, they were very religious, very pious and outwardly very respectable and clean. They prayed loudly and gave obviously and people admired them and that was their reward. But they missed the point. The point was Jesus. The point was having a relationship with God who came in the flesh whose name was prophesied hundreds of years before. We don't want to be like them either. Notice that they weren't invited to the manger to see Jesus like the Magi and the shepherds were (Luke 2).

Today, if you call yourself a Christian, if you are a follower of Jesus and you are His disciple then Jesus expects some sacrifice from you this Christmas. It's not the stuff He wants. He has no use for gold, frankincense, myrrh or any kind of money. He wants your obedience. **Isaiah chapter 1** says, "*The multitude of your sacrifices—*

what are they to me?" says the Lord. "*I have more than enough of burnt offerings, of rams and the fat of fattened animals; I have no pleasure in the blood of bulls and lambs and goats. Wash and make yourselves clean.*

Take your evil deeds out of my sight; stop doing wrong. 17 Learn to do right; seek justice. Defend the oppressed. Take up the cause of the fatherless; plead the case of the widow. 18 "Come now, let us reason together," says the Lord. "Though your sins are like scarlet, they shall be as white as snow; though they are red as crimson,

*they shall be like wool. 19 If you are willing **and obedient**, you will eat the good things of the land; 20 but if you resist and rebel, you will be devoured by the sword."* For the mouth of the Lord has spoken.

Today, if you don't have that relationship with God through His Son Jesus, all you have to do is believe. Believe that Jesus is God and that He was born in a manger but He was born to die in your place to pay the price you couldn't pay. He died on the cross to pay for your sins and then rose again three days later and wants to celebrate Christmas with you this year in a special way. Ask Him to forgive you of all your sins and to send His Spirit to live inside you and make you more like Him. Do it right now as the music plays.