

December 4, 2011
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Brentview Baptist Church
'We and the Three Kings'
Generosity

As we begin, can I just remind you where we have been this last while? We have said that all of us as Christ followers are called to make an Impact with our lives. That is possible because when we become followers of Jesus, he places a new heart within us, and he breathes his spirit into us. And like air filling a balloon, the more we are open to his Spirit filling us the more power we have for life and that can make our lives a lot more exciting. Then last week we added that God can leverage our lives in such a way that small things we are involved in can reverberate through time. That God's math says that he can take 2 small fish + 5 loaves = the power of God who can feed 15,000 people plus have 12 baskets of leftovers. In other words as he applies the power of his Holy Spirit (which is within us) to our willingness to be involved in any situation, things can happen which will make practical, eternal and long lasting difference's which go way beyond what we may have dreamed. There is one more dynamic which we need to talk about, let me set it up t his way.

It was one of those days I will never forget. It was a week before Christmas when the contractions began, and we knew that our son Matthew was on the way. So I helped Kathy into the car, loaded Kathy's overnight bag and my bag with magazines and food into the car and off we went to the hospital. That is when things started to go sideways. For the next 18 hours Kathy struggled with contractions. And then all of a sudden Matt's heart beat dropped, and so Kathy was whisked off to the operating room. I was left to pace and pray in the waiting room. A while later a nurse appeared wheeling our little baby boy in a basinet, and headed off to the nursery to give him some extra care. As the nurse walked by I asked her how my wife was. And she replied 'The Doctor will be down shortly to talk to you' and off she went. You can imagine what was running through my head as I went back to the waiting room, worrying about my little boy and wondering if my wife was even alive? It was a pretty tense time for me. About an hour later the Doctor came sauntering down the hallway and when I ran up and asked him how Kathy was. His reply was 'well of course she is fine, why do you ask'?

You can imagine how wonderful it was to sit in the hospital room and talk to Kathy and hold our Matt that night. When I left the hospital around 2:30 am in the morning I was overwhelmed with joy and thankfulness for the gift of our son and the extra gift of still having Kathy alive and well. I remember not knowing exactly what to do to celebrate the joy I was feeling. For it was 2:30 am in the morning, my friends were asleep, Kathy's parents who were taking care of Michelle, had gone back to bed, so what was I supposed to do? So I pulled into an all night pizza place, ordered a Ham and Pineapple Pizza and a glass of wine (I didn't even drink wine). And just sat there, all alone and let the wonder of what I had seen, what I had experienced and what I had been given, simply overwhelm me. Here is the question for this morning, what should our reaction be when we are given gifts or overly blessed by the goodness of God in our lives?

Let me take you to a story that is found in scripture where people experienced a gift from God that went beyond their ability to grasp how wonderful it was, to see how they responded. (Matthew 2:1-12) We have heard this story so often; it is easy to have this picture of a little nativity scene pop up in our mind as we hear it. And because of that it is easy to overlook the fact that we have wrongly squeezed the Wise men into the manger scene, for scripture says they didn't arrive for at least a year later, and by this time Mary and Joseph were living in a house. But I think we have also missed how this story is filled with this overwhelming feeling of awe that goes way beyond what I experienced as I sat in that Pizza joint thinking of the gift of my son and the fact that Kathy was fine. However just like me, the characters in the story struggle to know how to respond to what has just happened.

I think this story begins by giving us an interesting glimpse into the heart and character of God. This is one of those rare occasions when we see the exuberance of God simply overflow from him. It is similar to the time Jesus was on the Mt. of Transfiguration flanked by Moses and Elijah, with the awestruck Peter, James and John looking on. Right in front of them Jesus began to glow with the eternal glory of his godhead. As you read the passage it is almost as if God couldn't hold back that which is in his heart, any longer. And he blurts out 'This is my son in whom I am well pleased'. We see God's excitement concerning what Jesus is about to accomplish as well as God's pride in Jesus expressed here.

I think the story of the Wise men begins with a similar glimpse into the character of God. It is as if, as Jesus arrives on earth, as the day #1 in the journey toward man's salvation kicks off, God is almost overcome with joy. God yells to the Angels 'Throw that special star into the sky' as if to say 'light the Christ Candle'. That Jesus is on his way and it calls for some kind of celestial gesture'. And it is as if the exuberance of God streaks across the sky and the universe stands up and takes note. We know that God's exuberant actions don't go unnoticed for in a town in Persia (modern day Iraq) a group of specially trained astrologers take note. For I believe they had been trained in the school of Gjammas, who taught spiritual mystics (Zoroastrian Priest/Scholars) how to chart the skies and listened to prophecies that were circulating around the Middle East from Rome to Bagdad.

As they did this they discerned that there would be a king who would rule the world coming out of the little province of Judea. I believe that on that day the planet Jupiter and the moon formed a double eclipse of the sun, which was the sign that sent the Wise men on their journey and then one year later as the Wise men left King Herod's palace the 'star' (eclipse) appeared again and seemed to hang over the house Jesus was now in. The story begins with God ecstatic with what just happened and the wise star gazers thrilled with not only what they saw but what it might mean.

I. The Encounter

What do you do when you have seen a once in a life time phenomena in the sky which you believe is a hand written invitation by God to come and see the one who will rule the entire earth? You take it as an invitation to come and meet this Prince and so they set out not knowing how long, how far, or even what they will find. They must have encountered sand storms, robbers, thirst and much hardship.

Then (Matthew 2:1, 2) says they pull up to the king of Judea's palace (Herod), tie up their camels, straighten their clothes, grab their gifts and enter the palace to meet this Prince. Within seconds of meeting Herod it was obvious that he wasn't the one they were looking for. But notice why they came, they came to worship this Prince. Well, what else do you do as respectful politically correct priests but come and bow before this one whom the God of the Universe just proclaimed? But because Herod wasn't the person, they consulted the priests who quickly looked up where their Prince would be born and passed on the information to the Wise men. Isn't it amazing that where wise men seek Jesus the religious are so pleased with how well their church things are going, they didn't even bother to walk the 3 miles to Bethlehem to see the one their bibles had prophesied.

The next morning as they left the palace the star/eclipse appeared again in the sky and they followed it to the exact town the priests had mentioned and somehow it seemed to hang over one particular house. Can you imagine their discussion? Melchior 'For 1 long year I have pictured this moment but never once did I think it would happen in a little house on the poor side of town'. And Casper replied 'Well we have come this far, what do we have to loose?' Now look at (Vs. 11) as they saw the child something happened deep within them, somehow God whispered 'This is he; this is the one who will rule the world'. Instead of a stately bowing they fell flat on their faces in front of the child overwhelmed to be in the presence of eternal/ and heavenly royalty. It is like when I sat in the Pizza parlor, I didn't know what I could do to express what I was feeling. They felt the same as they encountered Jesus (Immanuel) which means God come among us) and then their knees went weak and they fell on their face's and worshipped him for whom the stars and planets changed their natural courses to proclaim his coming.

As we walk into Christmas can I remind you what the entire hubbub is about? God, in Jesus slid into skin, God in Jesus stepped into our time and space so that God in Jesus would walk toward the cross and change our lives and the lives of our families and the lives of our neighbours and the lives of people all over our world. How amazing is it? Well God himself couldn't hold back his enthusiasm for how magnificent was the gift he gave us.

II. Our Generous Involvement

Look what the Wise men do. (Vs. 11) says they generously gave him gifts. Now, here is where it really scares me. For we have men buying gifts for a baby shower. That sounds like it has disaster written all over it. But don't miss this, it is the thought that counts and they have had a year to think about their gifts. I think they did pretty good. For who wouldn't get a little excited about getting gold at a baby shower? But as you look at the gifts they gave, don't miss the way these gifts were given out of thanksgiving and worship for what God was doing in their lives. How these gifts had a way of reverberating beyond what the givers may have expected at first glance.

First Glance: They gave gold, frankincense (an incense, perfume that came all the way from Somalia) and myrrh (a medicine, embalming perfume that came all the way from Yemen and Ethiopia) they gave very expensive gifts. By doing that they were saying how much they worshiped Jesus.

Second Glance: Their gifts had meaning to them, gold meant they saw him as a child of the king, Frankincense said they saw him as someone they worshipped as being connected to God, and Myrrh meant they saw him as having great value. Gold meant he was the King of Kings; Frankincense was used by the priest who offered incense and prayers to God in heaven. In other words he was the priest between us and God the father, and Myrrh was used for embalming and foreshadows his death for our sins. In other words he was the king who would in a priestly way offer himself for our sins. So their gifts went far beyond their best thoughts and in doing that we see that sometimes as we give to others, what happens may be more profound than we first thought.

Third Glance: I am sure the Wise didn't know what was happening as they gave these gifts. I say this because as we have encounters with God where he asks us to be generous, I have found that often things happen as God leverages our gifts which I never could have imagined, for example: Maybe as these gifts were given it happened at the exact time that Mary and Joseph were struggling with the fact that their parents had shunned them because 'they had a child out of wedlock' or maybe Joseph was wondering how they could make ends meet because the job situation in Bethlehem was tight. At that exact moment the Wise men appeared with their gifts, I wonder in the future as Jesus' parents told him over and over again of what happened the day the Wise men came for a visit, if it helped him as he grew from a child into his understanding of his Godhood. I am sure that the Wise men didn't have a clue that they came at the exact moment when Joseph and Mary would need traveling money to go to Egypt to save their child's life. That 1 year before the need a rose God was already preparing them to bring the money needed to meet the need Joseph and Mary didn't even know would exist? You see as we encounter God and are moved to worship and give; more is often at play than we would ever know.

Fourth Glance: One more level, and that happened in the lives of the Wise men (the givers) themselves. For have you ever noticed the progression that happens in their lives? First, they have a soul craving to know God and so they watch the skies. So their first encounter with God was at a distance through the wonders of nature (the eclipses). Then they travel to Jerusalem and have others look in their scriptures to tell them where God needs them to go (a second hand encounter). Now look at (Vs. 12) they personally hear from God through a dream in which God speaks to them. So first they are touched by God through nature, then they hear God through scripture and finally they have a personal encounter with God themselves. As they gave, God did things in the lives of others and even in their own lives which they would have never even contemplated. It is what we talked about as God leverages what we give to do things that will reverberate and make a greater impact that we could ever imagine.

Here is the Pattern of Scripture: As we encounter God and give generously, he takes our gifts and causes a rippling affect in our lives and the lives of those around us. Some time on your own, look up (Luke 19:1-9) for a Zaecheus' story. Or look up (Mark 14:3-9) and you will see the same pattern as a lady encounters Jesus and ends up breaking her bottle of perfume wiping Jesus feet with it. And the smell not only touched the room she was in but it reverberates throughout history.

III. Let me give you a couple Real Examples of this:

Bert and Neri Cachero...Norm Dawson...

Lessons:

Since we have begun this journey of a 'Year of Impact' it has been so exciting to see how so many of you have gotten involved. We have seen folks join the choir and become Small group leaders in our B-true ministries. Many of you have joined our Family Matters ministry and have helped packed over 275 Samaritan Purse Christmas boxes which kids all over the world will be opening and know that people who love Jesus love them. Folks from Encore are leading us in supporting ministries who help free little boys and girls who are being abused in sex trades around the world. Others of you are making care hampers or gifts for your neighbors over Christmas or helping on your kid's soccer team or school band trip because.

Because you have had an encounter with Jesus, your response has been just like the Wise men, you have responded by generously giving your time, energy and finances. Well done! Can I remind you again that as you do this, that God has a way of leveraging your gifts, reverberating down through time and across the world? And things will happen, because of your actions that will go far beyond what you dream could possibly happen. Can I ask you to consider that because people matter to God they should matter to us and because at this time of year it is especially hard for some folks:

1. Go to our Impact board and grab one of the cards that are there and write down what God has nudged you to get involved with. It will be an encouragement to others and may help them with ideas of what they can do.
2. Join us as we care for the Jesus Loves You Society. This is a group of single moms who are bravely raising their kids by themselves, who find this a particularly tough time of the year. So we want to bless them by:

Providing non-perishable food items to carry them through December and January (lists at the back if you are wondering what to give) or you can give a Safeway/Coop card under \$25.00 to help

We want to help the kids of these moms be able to give their moms a Christmas gift. We want to encourage the mom's by buying the kind of present you would buy your mom or your sister that we will place in a room and then let their kids pick a present they can give to their moms. And by doing this we bless the kids and the moms.

keep your heart open to where God wants you to be generous over Christmas

History: There is a new book called 'The Star of Bethlehem: The Legacy of the Magi' By Bradley E. Schafer an Astronomy Professor at Yale University that speaks about a coin that he found that could give us a few clues concerning the Bethlehem star mentioned in (Matthew 2:2;10)



On this Roman coin from Antioch Syria is seen the zodiac sign for Aries the Ram. In trying to understand what the meaning was behind the coin he found that that Aries (Ram) in those days was known as the sign of the Jews. If you look at the coin you will see that it is telling a story of 2 eclipses by the moon in the area of the Aries in the sky in 600 BC. What happened was that Jupiter (known as the regal kingly star) came in close conjunction to the Moon (eclipse). It happened on December 19 in the Eastern sky. Then it happened again on April 17. In some ancient texts and as shown in this coin Matthew's Bethlehem star has historical evidence. It would seem that these learned astrologers and astronomers put the facts together and that is why they showed up approximately a year later in Jerusalem, at King Herod palace expecting to see the newly born king of the Jews.

It would be fair to say that in (Vs. 10) when it says the star appeared again, that it is talking about, that as they began their journey set, they could see the eclipse of the moon and Jupiter in the heavens and then as they traveled, the heavenly wonder had disappeared due to it's yearly orbit only to re-appeared again exactly as they left Herod's palace.

So seeing the Kingly star in the east which may have been this double eclipse they headed out to see this child whom the heavens proclaimed would be a person who would have a profound impact on the world and whom they had found out from Herod would be born in Bethlehem.