

“Getting Ready for the Party”—Matthew 2:9-11

The text for this sermon, the theme of which is, “Getting Ready for the Party”, is Matthew 2:9-11 → *After listening to the king, they went on their way. And behold, the star that they had seen when it rose went before them until it came to rest over the place where the child was. When they saw the star, they rejoiced exceedingly with great joy. And going into the house they saw the child with Mary His mother, and they fell down and worshiped Him. Then, opening their treasures, they offered Him gifts, gold and frankincense and myrrh.* This is the text.

Dear Brothers and Sisters in Christ Jesus:

“You’re expecting!” Such news concerning the impending birth of a first child into a couple’s life can fill them with excitement and a sense of apprehension at the same time. It definitely sets their life on a whole different course which involves “tons” of changes. From this point on, **their life will never be the same.**

An immediate focus for an expecting couple is the preparations involved with leading up to that one moment in time called birth. There are

announcements to be designed and mailed; the baby room to prepare; birthing classes to attend; baby furniture to acquire; the quest for the “perfect” car seat-stroller-carrier and whatever else is engineered into it; learning from all kinds of sources and trying to decide what you think will be best for your child; and, of course, all the parties at which your baby is “showered” with more stuff. At the very reception of the news of pregnancy **your life is never the same!**

Of course, this is only the beginning of getting ready for the party. From this point on, there are all the birthday and special event parties for which you will prepare throughout the rest of their lives. Interesting how the birth of one individual will change the rest of your life, filling you with the desire to celebrate their life at every major event and turning point **with a party!** Every celebration usually accompanies a gift. This is very fitting since life is a gift and all the gift-giving is a good way to remind ourselves of that fact, especially when you begin to feel like life is a burden, full of suffering and problems, sometimes to the point of feeling like it is a meaningless venture.

The Advent season of the Church year is also a time of getting ready for a party which we call Christmas. Look at how much time, energy and thought is put into all the preparations for the celebration of the birth of Jesus—many of which begin long before the season of Advent. The traditions of the special

services during the season of Advent and/or special devotions while gathered around the advent wreath in many homes are intended to help us prepare for the celebration of the birthday of Jesus with humble, repentant hearts. They help us focus on the fact that Jesus was born to die because of our sins, so that we could be forgiven before God and live eternally with Him!

While there are many of us who are getting ready for the party—the celebration of Jesus’ birth—there are many people who aren’t really sure what the party’s all about. Many are celebrating, giving gifts and special greetings, decorating and so forth thinking that its about family or finding “your one true love” (as depicted in most of the Christmas movies) or experiencing a loving, generous heart of care and concern for you fellow man. We know only too well how every organization under the sun recognizes the “holiday season” as the “season of giving.”

If anyone prepared to celebrate the birthday of Jesus it was certainly the *wise men* in our text. They were probably Gentile astrologers who had a little knowledge of God’s revealed Word in the Old Testament, at least enough knowledge to connect a star to a royal birth among the Jews. God revealed to these men in a way which they would be able to understand that the *king of the Jews* was to be born and they responded by going to the party, prepared to recognize Him in a special way.

Throughout the centuries of the celebration of Jesus' birth, these men were referred to as kings based upon a prophecy about the Messiah's coming in Isaiah 60:3-6. As I read it, see if you can draw comparisons between the prophecy and the account of the *wise men*: *Nations shall come to your light, and kings to the brightness of Your rising. Lift up your eyes all around, and see; they all gather together, they come to you; your sons shall come from afar, and your daughters shall be carried on the hip. Then you shall see and be radiant; your heart shall thrill and exult, because the abundance of the sea shall be turned to you, the wealth of the nations shall come to you. A multitude of camels shall cover you, the young camels of Midian and Ephah; all those from Sheba shall come. They shall bring gold and frankincense, and shall bring good news, the praises of the LORD.*

Notice it was the people who had the revealed Word of the Old Testament, in which God gave them the details about the coming of Christ, who were not prepared for the party. King Herod and the Jewish people were surprised and even trouble at the wise men's inquiry as to where the King of the Jews was to be born. However, let us be cautious. As easy as it may be from our seats to sit in judgment upon these people, could it be that we can be like them? Could it be that we are so involved in our own religious customs and traditions as we prepare for the party that we lose sight of the real reason for the party?

How often have parents prepared so extensively for the birthday party of their child only to find him complaining in disappointment about the gifts; more interested in the gift they brought him than the person who brought it; acting as if he is so entitled to their gifts when opening them that the only time a “thank you” comes out of his mouth is when prompted to mom or dad to say it. And this does not necessarily have to describe a small child. Many times the behavior of adults is no different! We are selfish to the core and our narcissistic actions and attitudes can quickly surface in the face of another party which can feed our selfish natures.

The *wise men* were prepared to celebrate the birth of Jesus properly. After looking for the birth of the *king of the Jews* in the most logical place—the capital city of Jerusalem—they continued their search by following the LORD’s revelation in the star. King Herod sent the wise men to Bethlehem after searching the Scriptures and discovering the Christ’s birthplace from the prophecy in Micah 5:2. Herod’s main focus seems to have been for them to find Him and bring back word so that he could kill Him, as we know from the account which follows in Matthew 2. However, the wise men’s focus was on the special revelation of the star! **It completely changed the course of their lives!**

The visit of the *wise men* is actually kind of an “object lesson” concerning

the purpose of Jesus' coming according to Galatians 3:8-9 → *The Scripture, foreseeing that God would justify the Gentiles by faith, preached the gospel beforehand to Abraham, saying, "In you shall all the nations be blessed."* So then, **those who are of faith** are blessed along with Abraham, the man of faith. Their faith, which led them to this special birthday party for this special king, included them in the promises given through the Scriptures of the Old Testament. Their presence revealed that **all people** can receive the benefits of Christ's suffering, death and resurrection through faith and join in the party celebration with a proper heart!

The *wise men* displayed a much deeper understanding of Jesus than simply a *king of the Jews*. They came prepared for the party according to verses 10-11 of our text: *Going into the house they saw the child with Mary His mother, and they fell down and worshiped Him. Then, opening their treasures, they offered Him gifts, gold and frankincense and myrrh.* They celebrated not just by giving their gifts but they also **fell down and worshiped Him**. They recognized that they were in the presence of God Himself!

It is thought that our tradition of giving gifts in celebration of the birth of Jesus flows from the practice of these *wise men*. However, this practice goes much deeper than simply carrying on a tradition. Our Jesus "birthday party" celebration also takes the form of giving, not because it makes us feel good

or because we “have to.” Rather it is an act of worship in response to Jesus willingly giving His life into death for us **and** for those to whom we give gifts!! 2 Corinthians 8:5 describes those who gave as giving *themselves first to the Lord and then by the will of God to others*. Your forgiveness is a gift, freely given you by Jesus’ life, death and resurrection! Your new life is a gift, given to you by the Holy Spirit, Who is also a gift! Your eternal life is a gift, given by faith in the Person & Work of Jesus, which is also a gift! I guess the party does seem to be all about gifts from God’s perspective, huh? The gifts of His grace, love, and forgiveness in Jesus Christ!

We are prepared for the party when we recognize **in our hearts** Whom we are confessing and worshiping—**Jesus, the One Who has brought us forgiveness, life and salvation!! By faith in Him your life will never be the same!** Amen.

In the words of Jesus from Matthew 10:8 →

Freely you have received, freely give. (NIV)