

# The Gift that Keeps on Giving

**Big Idea:** The exchanging of gifts at Christmastime is to remind us that God gave us the greatest gift of all in Jesus and the only wise response is to give our best back to Him.

**Text:** Matthew 2:1-11

## 1. **King of the Jews** (and Gentiles!)

We don't know how many magi came to visit Jesus but, from the reaction of Herod, they likely brought a large and impressive entourage. They also likely rode in on Persian steeds, not camels, and they were king-makers, not kings. The magi were consultants to the king and when the king was deposed, as was the case at this time, they were responsible for selecting the next king. The Romans had a weak hold on the Parthean Empire (ancient Iran/Iraq, formerly the Medo-Persian Empire) so Herod was concerned an alliance with the Jews would signify a revolt, and his loss of power. Besides, he was supposed to be "king of the Jews", and so he resorted to the practice so typical of threatened kings in that day - eliminate the competition. Note that this visit may have been up to 2 years after Jesus was born (2:16). They were still in Bethlehem, but in a house by now – not a stable!

These magi were from a priestly tribe of the Medes. They were likely worshippers of the true God because of a legacy of God-fearing magi dating back to the influence of Daniel (Daniel 5:11), 600 years before when the Jews were being held captive in Babylon. Now that's planning ahead!

## 2. **Star of Bethlehem**

While some speculate which natural phenomena God used as the Bethlehem star (ie. a comet, an aligning of planets, a nova or supernova), none of these could do what God uniquely designed this special star to do. Knowing that God performed a miracle makes it important to understand the significance behind it. The creative light we read about in Genesis 1, the beginning of creation, is identified in John 1 as Jesus: *In him was life, and the life was the light of men. The light shines in the darkness, and the darkness has not overcome it* (v. 4,5). Matthew quotes Isaiah 9:2 when he refers to Jesus as the fulfillment of that 700 year old prophecy: *the people dwelling in darkness have seen a great light, and for those dwelling in the region and shadow of death, on them a light has dawned* (4:16). The star of Bethlehem reminds us that Jesus, the Light of the World, has come. *Jesus spoke to them, saying, "I am the light of the world. Whoever follows me will not walk in darkness, but will have the light of life"* (John 8:12).

## 3. **Worthy of Worship**

From the star at the top of our Christmas tree to the presents at the bottom, the story of the magi's visit is the source of many Christmas traditions. Their presents represented the very best gifts given at that time in history but they had even greater significance when given to Jesus: gold was the appropriate gift for royalty; frankincense, the milky sap of the Boswellia tree, was used as incense representing Christ's priestly role; and myrrh, the bitter resin from the Commiphora tree, was used as a medicinal and embalming ointment representing Jesus as Saviour.

Wise men (as well as wise women and children) will always pursue Jesus, the Light of the World, the One worthy of our best gifts because He is our Saviour, High Priest, and King!