

## "What Can I Bring Him?" Isaiah 60:1-7 and Matthew 2:1-12

([www.biblegateway.com/bible?passage=isaiah+60:1-7](http://www.biblegateway.com/bible?passage=isaiah+60:1-7))  
([www.biblegateway.com/bible?passage=matthew+2:1-12](http://www.biblegateway.com/bible?passage=matthew+2:1-12))

**Dr. David W. Swink**

Chilson Hills Church, Brighton, Michigan  
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### **Buying gifts is difficult!**

We all get caught up in all kinds of questions about gifts we buy for family and friends. What kind of gift can I buy that will be appropriate? If I buy this gift, will she like it? What will other people think if I bring this gift to the party? Gift buying is difficult. I'm so glad Christmas is over. I don't have to think of buying another gift for quite some time. It is an amazing experience. Indeed it is difficult to describe how it feels to come out of toy store with three presents and nothing left in your life savings. Those gifts that you have to buy for people who will be opening them in front of other people are especially difficult. What you think will be the perfect gift turns out to be a royal flop when every one laughs at it. I heard of one friend at a neighborhood party who realizing the parenting problems of the couple down the street gave them the latest book on child raising--co-authored by Queen Elizabeth and Dr. Kevorkian. He still wonders why no one in the neighborhood will speak to him. Gift buying is one of the most difficult problems of Christmas.

### **We can blame Christmas gift giving on the first gift givers.**

The three Magi from Iraq started the whole thing. Can you imagine what they went through trying to decide what to give the infant Jesus. The gift had to be small. After all they were traveling by camel for hundreds of miles. The gift had to be worthy of a King. But, they needed to carry it across acres of desert filled with thieves that make our drug induced crazies look like kindergartners. Their gift needed to be worthy of their status as Magi of the East. However, they couldn't be too extravagant or they might show up this youngster. Their gift buying problem was enormous. What could they bring Him?

You know the story. They decided to bring Jesus gifts of gold, frankincense, and myrrh. On the surface these gifts seem to be all right. Obviously, gold is helpful to anyone. Frankincense is a royal perfume that is easily converted to cash. Myrrh is the problem; however. What ever could have caused these wise and thoughtful men to purchase embalming spices for an infant king? Maybe they knew something that Mary and Joseph would not know until 33 years later.

These three Magi came bringing gifts. Gifts that were thoughtfully chosen and thoughtfully given. They knew the reality of gift giving. Gifts are reflections of the giver. Gifts symbolize the giver and the relationship with the gift receiver. Sometimes true gifts do not meet the immediate needs of the one who is receiving the gift.

William Willimon, chaplain to Duke University writes *"When our first child was born, an old professor came by and presented us with a gift for the baby, a book, all wrapped in fine paper, tied with a bow. Imagine our surprise when, upon unwrapping the gift, we discovered that it was a book, a very old, leather-bound copy of Shakespeare's plays. We thought, what a strange gift for a baby! How odd. An old book, written in archaic language, given to a baby who will not be able to read it for many years to come. And then we realized: the gift was not the book; the gift was the giver. The old professor had given us himself. He had given our child that thing most precious to himself--his own love of the language, his admiration for Shakespeare. His gift was an expression of his deepest joy at the birth of our child, his hope for the future of this new human being."*

The Magi thoughtfully brought gifts that reflected their best. Their gifts were not immediately practical. But, their gifts were most of all themselves. As great as they were they did not come close to the gift God was giving to them. As gentile, pagan Arabs from Iraq, they brought a Jewish child important and valuable gifts. The twelve verses in Matthew's gospel demonstrate for us the power of God's gift to them. Here Matthew proclaims for all the world to know the fulfillment of Isaiah's prophecy. With the advent of Jesus Christ coming into the world, "*nations and kings will come to the light of your dawning day. Open your eyes! Look around! Crowds are coming... Treasures from across the sea and the wealth of nations will be brought to you. Your country will be covered with caravans of young camels from Midian and Ephah.... I will accept them as offerings and bring honor to my temple.*" (Isaiah 60:3,4,5b,7b) ([www.biblegateway.com/bible?passage=isaiah+60:3;4;5b;7b](http://www.biblegateway.com/bible?passage=isaiah+60:3;4;5b;7b)) God sent Jesus, God's only son that the world through him can be saved. The greatest gift of all is God's acceptance of the entire world, not just the Jews. Edward Markham's poem captures the essence of God's action.

***He drew a circle that shut me out--  
Heretic, rebel, a thing to flout.  
But Love and I had the wit to win:  
We drew a circle that took him in.***

God drew a circle that included the world when Jesus was born in Bethlehem. God's gift was a gift of love for every man, woman, and child on planet Earth. The Magi came from the east as foreign gentiles to give themselves in worship to God's son. While they were on their knees; however, the wind in Israel was changing. The world was changing even while Joseph and Mary were accepting the gifts. The shift is dramatic:

- exit the shepherds, enter the Magi,
- exit the stables, enter the palace;
- exit poverty, enter wealth;
- exit angels, enter dreams and visions;
- exit Mary's lullaby, enter the grief wail of all the mothers of Bethlehem.

God's gift of love is not always received with joy. God's circle of love is not always received with peace. God's great gift of love and grace sometimes is received with hate and exclusion.

What gift will you bring to the savior in this new year of 2009? As you ponder the great gift of God's saving love in and through Christ Jesus, how will you respond? Will you be with the Magi bringing the gift of yourself on your knees in worship? Or, will you be with the vast majority of people just doing your own thing and trying not to be involved? What gift will you bring to Christ Jesus during this year?

I hope and pray that your gifts will follow the model of the Magi. I hope your response to God's love will be the loving gift of yourself to God. Let me suggest a process to follow that will help your gift giving. Let your attitude be one of responsive love. Let your focus be personal. And, let your action be on a day by day basis.

### **Let Your attitude this year be one of: RESPONSIVE LOVE**

Throughout Holy Scripture the first action is always God's. God creates the world, then we experience the joy of being called to be co-creators with God. God sets up the moral laws, then we choose to keep the law or break the law. God creates the opportunity for a new and saving relationship with God through Christ Jesus, then we have the choice to respond or reject God's love. God acts in history, in our time and place, to provide for us the opportunity of eternal life with God. God is the Lover. God is the one who acts on your behalf. God acted through Jesus coming into the world as the Babe of Bethelhem, then the Magi came to worship Christ.

When you contemplate the reality of God's action for you, then the appropriate response is your gift of love to God. So often we find ourselves caught in our self centered webs that we ignore God completely. Sometimes, we take on an attitude of antagonism toward God. We want nothing to do with giving anything. The truth is God does not want your gift if it is given out of duty, peer pressure, or fear of retribution. God wants a loving relationship with you. Like a parent with a child, God was and is willing to give everything out of love for you. Are you willing to respond with love? The attitude of gratitude is active, responsive love for Christ.

How you give yourself to God, your time, your skills, your talents, your energy, and your money is an indication of your responsive love for Christ. God drew a circle that included you. Will you live within God's circle of eternal love this year?

## **Let Your Primary Life Focus be: A PERSONAL RELATIONSHIP WITH CHRIST**

God invites you to be a member of God's team whose goal is to transform the world. If you are going to be an active, successful team member, then you will be the person Christ created you to be. Every coach of every team on the planet will teach over and over again the lesson of focusing upon your gifts, your role, your energy while the game is going forward. Who you are is important to God. Your personal skills and gifts are important to God's creative enterprise. Your focus needs to be your personal relationship with Jesus Christ. Forget about what other people are thinking or doing. When a team member begins to focus on other people, the team begins to fall apart.

Let me share a personal memory here. In basketball, most positions on the five member first team are chosen by physical size and skill. A six foot eleven inch person is not usually a point guard. The same logic applies for the five foot ten inch person who can play point guard but not the center position. If the guard will play his position and the center his position, then the team will have an opportunity of winning. But, if the center looks around and thinks the guard is not doing the job he thinks he should. Then, the center begins to try to be the guard. At that point, chaos comes into the team roster.

On God's team the same reality is present. The Holy Spirit gives you gifts to build up God's team. You are given the energy, time, talent, and skill to give yourself to God this year. As long as your focus is to be the person Christ created you to be and use the gifts the Holy Spirit gives you personally, God's team will go forth in victory and transform the world. If you let your focus shift to others, then you and God's team will have problems. A negative attitude, complaining, fussing and fuming, and burn out come from a focus that is not upon Christ.

This year let your primary focus be your relationship with Jesus Christ and growing and using the spiritual gifts and opportunities God is giving to you. Focus upon what you can do for Christ and Christ's church this year!

## **Let Your action be: DAY BY DAY**

We can be side tracked this year with pious talk. We hear well meaning people say that God has a plan for each of us. Then, we focus on finding the plan. Then, we wait for God's plan to be revealed. Ultimately we end frustrated because we cannot find God's plan. Such thinking is a pious trap. The trap is that we end up either trying to second guess God on what is happened in our past. Or, we focus on the great plan for the future which is impossible for us to know.

The real alternative to this pious trap is found in the teachings of Jesus. In Matthew 6: 25-34 ([www.biblegateway.com/bible?passage=matthew+6:25-34](http://www.biblegateway.com/bible?passage=matthew+6:25-34)) Jesus tells us to focus upon doing God's work in the present day. A wonderful song takes Jesus' teaching and puts it to music. In the musical Godspell the cast sings: Day by day there are three things we can do. We can God see God more clearly, love God more dearly, follow God more nearly: day by day.

In 2009, your challenge is to let go of the stress and anxiety of an economy gone sour and grow in your love and trust for God. God will give you the creativity you need to thrive each day in the new year. Let your action plan be to see God each day in your ordinary life, love God more and more each day, and follow God as God leads you each day!

## **What can you give to God this year.**

You can give yourself each day. You can decide to share your love for God each day. You can give your offering to God each week. You can use your spiritual gifts to build up God's Beloved Community each week. You can share God's love with everyone you meet each day. You can choose to be God's hands and feet as you live with a Worship attitude day by day.