

Christmas Gift

by Jim Cymbala

The Christmas story highlights the three reactions to Jesus' birth: aversion and hatred, rejection tinged with hatred, and indifference due to being too busy.

Duration: 30:17

Scripture: Genesis 3:15, Deuteronomy 18:15, Matthew 2:1-6, John 6:9, John 21:25

Topics: "Christmas"

Description

In this sermon, the speaker discusses the reactions people have towards Jesus. He emphasizes the importance of recognizing Jesus as the true king and the answer to everything in our lives. The speaker mentions that Jesus warned about being consumed by the cares of this world and not recognizing his presence when he returns. He encourages the congregation to trust in Jesus and confess him as their Savior. The sermon concludes with a prayer for blessings, love, and a call for those who want to accept Jesus to stand up and receive prayer.

Transcript

So today we want to look at another part of the Christmas story. Let's read a good part. I think it's 12 verses.

Let's look at Matthew 2, verses one through 12. After Jesus was born in Bethlehem in Judea, during the time of King Herod, magi, or wise men, or kings 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. When King Herod heard this, he was disturbed, and all Jerusalem with him.

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. In Bethlehem, in Judea, not too far, by the way, from Jerusalem, they replied, for this is what the prophet has written. And now they go back and quote from the prophet Micah, but you, Bethlehem, this is hundreds of years before, but you, Bethlehem, in the land of Judea are by no means least among the rulers of Judea, for out of you, this small little town, will come a ruler who will shepherd my people Israel.

Imagine, that was written hundreds of years before, naming the town where the Messiah would be born. So when the wise men asked, and Herod wanted to investigate, they said, oh, we know, it's Bethlehem, because it was written hundreds of years before. Then Herod, who was very wicked and didn't want to

give up his kingship to anybody, called the Magi secretly and found out from them the exact time the star had appeared.

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. Yeah, sure.

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. And when they saw the star, they were overjoyed. On coming to the house, this is not the manger now, 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. And having been warned in a dream not to go back to Herod, they returned to their country by another route. And such is the story, only told by Luke, of what we call the three wise men, the three Magi.

And in many nativity scenes, you see, as in the one in the Christmas show, you see a slight discrepancy with the historical fact, the shepherds came the night he was born, and Luke tells that story, and came to the manger. Imagine, the Son of God was born in a manger where animals were kept. And it wasn't until later that the wise men from the east came, and they brought gifts and worshiped him, was Jesus a week old, two weeks old, a month old, a few days old? We don't know, but we know that Mary now, and Joseph, because she had given birth to the baby, were staying there in Bethlehem for a while.

This famous scene, let's relive it for a second. Who were these men? Most likely riding on camels. They came from what we would call today Iran, Persia.

And they were astrologers. They searched the sky, they also studied religious lore and tradition. But they weren't Jewish, and they weren't believers, as far as we know, in the one God of the Old Testament.

But they were searching after truth, and God sovereignly chose to reveal to them a star which appeared, which was unusual, and which they began to believe, because if you study that history of that era, there was a discussion and a talk, not just in Persia, but all around, that something was about to happen, earth-shattering and important, right around that period of time. There seems to have been some planetary discoveries and signs in the sky, and they picked up this star, and they began to follow it, and it led them to Jerusalem. And all they knew was that this star marked the birth of a king.

And because they were led to Jerusalem, they put it together that it must be the king of the Jews, the Messiah that was promised in so many places in the Old Testament. So they came there, and there was a big stir in the town, you know, three guys riding in huge camels, riding on these camels, come into town, and start asking, where is he that is born king of the Jews? When Herod heard the word king, he went, no, I am the king. You wanna talk to a king, you talk to me.

No, no, we're looking for the new king. And Herod, that did not make him a happy camper to hear there was a new king of any kind. So he called the religious leaders, you know, Herod was much hated by the Jewish people because he was a mixed breed.

He wasn't purely Jewish, and that aggravated the purists among the Pharisees, especially, and the Jewish people to no end. So he went to the religious leaders and said, they're looking for this new king. Where's he born? I don't know, I don't know the scriptures.

And they said, oh, well, we know where he's born. Gonna be born in Bethlehem. And they quoted that passage in Micah that was written more than 400 years before.

Imagine that. So he met them privately and said to them, listen, you go to Bethlehem and you find this baby or find this king or whatever, whoever he is, and come back and report to me because I am so interested to know about this new king. Let me come and worship him with you.

They went and somehow the star reappeared or began to move or somehow God supernaturally led them that short distance to Bethlehem. And now they were led somehow to a house and there was Mary with the baby. And they knelt down, they bowed down, they worshiped him.

And let me see if you know your Bible. They brought out gifts of gold, frankincense, and myrrh. Now, tradition has it that there were three and that's only based on gold, frankincense, and myrrh.

There's no explicit teaching in the Bible how many wise men there were. There could have been two. For a while, a couple hundred years, it was taught there were 12 wise men, like a little cavalcade of people riding into town.

But now we settle and most people believe because of the three gifts that each one had a gift, gold, frankincense, myrrh, three wise men. Whatever it was, it doesn't matter. God brought people to come looking for the baby that was born, the king, his king.

And as we read this story, we're struck by the fact why didn't anybody go with them to Bethlehem? If someone says they saw the star and you're Jewish and you know the passage and you're sending them to Bethlehem, why wouldn't you go yourself? Accompany them. This is gonna be the fulfillment of what the scripture says. And here we find, brothers and sisters, ladies and gentlemen, we find three reactions to Jesus, even as he's just born, which have continued to this very day.

The three reactions to Jesus, his birth, have continued to this moment if you mention his name and begin to talk about him and share him with your friends. Like come to the church, come to the Christmas show. Let me tell you what Jesus has done in my life.

You can phrase it different ways, but these are the three general reactions amongst so much of the population. First of all, there's hatred, represented by Herod. Herod hated the thought of another king because he was king, and that continues to this day.

Why many people detest the thought of Jesus is they know that this Jesus, now grown up, crucified for our sins, resurrected on the third day, he stands for let me be your king. I want to rule over your life, but for good. I will bless you.

I will forgive you. I will help you. I will solve your problems.

I will give you direction. I will give you purpose in life. But the human reaction for so many of us is I don't want another king.

I'm in charge, and if you serve Jesus and really are a Christian, you have to give up running your life. You have to give it to the king of kings and the Lord of lords. Can we all say amen to that? In the media and in so much of our culture, which is man-centered, me, my plans, I want, I'm planning, I've got this mapped up.

Don't tell me there's someone else I have to bow to. I ain't bowing to nobody, and that's a reaction today. And notice, just like Jesus prophesied, if they hate me, they're gonna hate you.

He knew that because of the way he came and what his claims are, that many people would not just say no, they would detest and have animosity toward the thought that there's another king exactly like Herod. Rejection tinged with hatred. But then there's another reaction, and this is by religious folks, and this is very remarkable.

All the religious leaders, not one of them went to Bethlehem, not one. Three wise men from Persia, from Iran, went following the star. You would think all the Pharisees and Sadducees and priests and teachers of the law would have run along and said, let us see this new king.

But don't you see, religion can also reject the living Jesus, because we want our traditions. We want to keep gathering. We're not bothered by going through the rituals of the Catholic mass or a Protestant service as long as nobody interferes with our lives.

Don't rock the boat. Don't rock my boat. I am already religious.

Don't tell me some fanatical, radical idea that there's a living Jesus who's gonna lead me and guide me and help me and take over my life. I want religion, I don't want Jesus. I'll observe the Sabbath on Sunday or on Saturday, and I'll take communion once in a while.

And if my kids are in trouble, I want them prayed for. But as terms of the real living Jesus taking over my life, no thanks, no thanks. And of course, for the priests and the leaders, there were a lot of perks involved with things as it was.

A new Jesus would mean, a living Jesus, a new king would mean I lose my power over the people. They won't bow down and give me respectful greetings in the marketplace. They're gonna be just taken up with this new Jesus, this king, I'm gonna lose my perks, my power.

I won't be the center of attraction. I like being the center of attraction. And that can happen to pastors and religious leaders.

Jesus can get lost in his own church, am I correct or not? We can be mentioning his name, but there's no reality that people don't have an encounter with him, that people really don't know him. They don't worship him, they go through a ritual, but it's really centered on the charismatic leader, male or female or whatever the show might be. So that's a typical reaction still.

Religious folks many times say adios to Jesus. I want religion, I don't want a relationship with him. That's true today.

When you say to some people, you need to be born again. Hey, don't tell me I need to be born again. I've been going to church, I was confirmed, I was baptized, I'm going here, what do you mean I need to be born again? Jesus said you need to be born again.

No, that's emotional crazy stuff. I like going to church once in a while, especially Christmas and Easter, I never miss. But everyday Jesus, no, no, no, no, no.

And then lastly, that general population, it says everybody was talking in Jerusalem about these wise men and their message that there's a king born in Bethlehem. And they found out it was Bethlehem. Why

weren't all the people going? Why wouldn't you go along with those wise men and say I want to be there when they find the king that we've been waiting for for hundreds of years, my goodness.

Genesis prophesied, there's a hint of one coming even in early chapters of Genesis. And then Moses said God is going to raise up one day a prophet greater than me. You must obey everything, he says.

All those references in the Old Testament to the coming king, the Messiah, the Deliverer, the Savior, and now nobody's going there. Out there with the wise men, well of course, that's the same reason that nobody went when he was being tried. All the miracles that he did, all the people he taught, turning loaves of bread and fishes into food for thousands.

All the people, John says, if the whole world were a book, you couldn't contain all the good things that Jesus did. And yet when he was tried and they said crucify him, I'm asking you now, where were all the people who said no, don't touch him, don't hurt him, this is a good man, look what he did for me. Where were they? All I hear about, I read about is the crowd saying give us Barabbas, crucify Jesus.

Am I right? Same reason they didn't go to Bethlehem. You know why? Not Herod's hatred, not the religious establishments aversion to him, but they were just too busy. Hey listen, you gotta make a living.

Gotta raise your kids. There's a new show on TV. I've been following the idol, the voice, whatever.

And my voice is not John the Baptist's voice, it's another voice. I gotta watch the thing, I gotta be texting, I gotta go on the internet, I gotta go online, I gotta go on the chat, I gotta find out everything that's going on, who has time to be talking about what a king, eternal life, a savior is born? Who has time for that? Man, I'm trying to make a living. I'm working overtime so we can go to PR for Christmas.

Who has time to be talking about Bethlehem? I wanna talk about Ponce, or San Juan, or Jamaica, or Trinidad. I got no time to be going to Bethlehem. I know, but he's the king, he's the one you're waiting for.

He's the answer to everything in your life. I know, I know, some other time, I'm just busy. Jesus talked about this all the time.

He said, beware of the cares of this life. When he comes back again, people will be eating, drinking, doing business, and they won't even know until it's too late that he's here. So those are the three reactions still to this day.

Am I right or wrong? How many follow what I'm saying here? Just lift up your hand. These are the three reactions. Aversion and hatred, I don't want another, no king.

I'm king, hey, look at me, I'm king of my life. Okay, I'm not a fool, what do you think? I'm some low life that needs someone to help me? That's Herod. Then the religious establishment saying, hey, don't rock the boat.

I don't mind religion, just don't get fanatical. That's why maybe some of you are here like that today. You don't mind religion, you don't mind even coming here, but Jesus taking over your life, no, no, no, no, no, no.

Oh, no, no. Changing the way you talk, the way you react to people, getting rid of that prejudice, asking Jesus to get rid of that bitterness and unforgiveness you have toward people, no, no, no. He's not coming in there.

That's my kitchen, nobody comes in my kitchen. And then thirdly, just what, what, Bethlehem? I don't know, I'm just busy. I'm just busy.

There's a new sneaker coming out. I'm waiting on line on Fulton Street. I gotta get the new Jordans, you know what I'm saying? Don't tell me that's not true.

People are all occupied with stuff that's gonna pass away in a millisecond. But for the eternal things, you see, it's what happened the night he was born, no room. Why was he born in a stable? That was prophetic.

No room. Put him with the animals. Why? Because there was no room.

That's what we all have to be sensitive now. Are we giving room to Jesus in our hearts, in our lives? But the wise men did go, and they brought gifts of gold, frankincense, and myrrh. There's beautiful symbolism.

Gold, that's royal, that's for a king. Kings were adorned in gold. Some kings had gold on their throne.

Some had it on their chariots. Gold, gold is for a king. And that little house wherever Mary was, those wise men came from so far.

Man, I wish we all had that kind of determination to find Jesus. They traveled all that way, followed a crazy star they saw in the sky, and it brought them home to where Jesus was, and they gave him gold because he's the king. He's the king whose kingdom has no end.

Presidents come, presidents go. Queens come, queens go. I was reading a book recently about Charles Lindbergh, the first person who flew across the Atlantic Avenue.

Across the Atlantic Avenue. All right, I was just checking to see if you were listening. I knew what I was saying.

All right, have mercy. Come on, we're in church. He flew across the Atlantic Ocean.

First one to ever do it. Did you know that he was so celebrated when he did that because at times he was flying only 20 feet above the water, and he had to fight to stay awake, and 100 things could have gone wrong. But when he landed in France or wherever he landed there in Europe, I think it was France, it was like he was the Messiah.

Man, he's flown across the Atlantic Ocean. Nobody thought that could be done in an airplane. Airplanes were new, and if you saw his airplane, it's smaller than some of the cars they're selling today.

But who knows him today? Some of you don't even know the name I just mentioned. It's all new to you. You see, what's big one day, it's all passe.

I always think about that when it comes to style. You know, it used to be you can't go out, parents used to say to their children, you can't go out, your jeans are ripped. You can't wear those and go out.

Today, it's you can't go out, they're not ripped enough. You cannot go out, you gotta rip them more. Am I right? And everybody is trying to look GQ and all of that, but when you look at pictures like in the 70s and 80s, you see an old movie on TV about Serpico or somebody back in New York history and all that, you see people in the 60s, 70s, you see the Afros, you see the skirts, you see whatever is going on.

Remember platform shoes? And the girls were elevated. They were up there, I'm saying. They didn't need to go to the balcony.

They had their own balcony right in the shoe. And now people look at that and go, look at that double knit suit. Look at the way that was.

Big old, you know, the thing there, the cuffs, bell bottoms. Everybody's laughing like, I can't believe I wore that. But when you wore it, no, you were fine when you wore it.

You were looking good when you wore it, right? That was like, that's strong. Well, don't you realize how you're dressed today? Someone's gonna see pictures of you for Jesus Terrace and you're gonna laugh at how you're dressed today. No, I'm not gonna laugh.

I took time to put this outfit together. No, you're gonna laugh just like they did because it all just comes and goes. But Jesus, he's the king that reigns forever.

Come on, let us say amen to him. And then frankincense. Now, frankincense did not speak of a king.

Frankincense was used by only one main people to the Jewish mind, and that was the priest. Frankincense was what you put on the altar of incense. Notice, frankincense, it's incense.

That spoke of a priest because this baby that was born, that they were bowing down, he's not gonna be just king. He's a king that lowers himself to where we are, not some king who says, you gotta come to where I am. No, he's a king that says, I will come to where you are and I will lift you up because I'm gonna be not just your king, I'm gonna be your high priest.

That's what they burn as a sweet fragrance to God in the holy place, between the holy place and the holy of holies. There was an altar of incense where they burned that incense. So this baby that was born, he was gonna be a priest.

What was a priest to do? To go between God and the person. You couldn't approach God because you were too sinful. So the priest was the mediator between me, sinful me, and holy God.

I needed a priest to represent me, to provide a sacrifice. And our high priest, are you ready? This priest who got frankincense given to him as a baby, he will not only present the sacrifice as a priest, he will be the sacrifice. He will present his own body and his hands that have holes in them.

He's not just the priest, he's the sacrifice. Oh, blessed be his name forever. We can now boldly come into God's presence, why? Because we're good? No, because Jesus is our priest, he's our sacrifice.

Come on, let us say a loud amen to that. And then finally myrrh, and myrrh was used for one main thing, that's what they put on dead bodies to preserve them so they wouldn't stink. That's what they wrapped the corpses in.

Not just king, not just priest, but like I said, the sacrifice too. Already he wasn't a month old maybe. And already there's already the prophetic hint.

He came to die. He won't see 35 years old. If you're over 35 years old here today, Jesus never got to your age.

Never saw 35. Because to become the sacrifice and the priest and the king, the road to that was a cross, was Calvary. Remember that when you celebrate Christmas, you see the nativity scene.

He came, yes, as king, yes, as high priest. But he came as the lamb of God who would take away the sin of the world. He died for us.

I am not worthy of it, I have no idea what he saw in me or you, but how many are so happy? He came and died for us on a cross. Shed his blood, shed his blood. Did you hear me? Shed his blood so that our sins will be washed away.

Oh, by the way, as I close, you don't have to give him gold. You don't have to give him frankincense. He doesn't need your myrrh now, that's all done.

What he wants is worship and praise. He wants your heart to say, I love you, God. I praise you, God, you've been so good to me.

You've been so merciful, you've been so faithful. I give you the sacrifice of praise. That's what the Bible says.

Give him the sacrifice of praise. Give him the sacrifice of thanksgiving. Don't bow down and give him gold, frankincense and myrrh.

Give him your praise. And by the way, if you're not a believer today, if you're not a believer today, you know the sacrifice he wants from you. Don't praise him, not yet.

Give him your heart. That's what he wants is your heart. He don't want any material thing from you.

He just wants you to say, Lord, take my life, make it what you want it to be. Save me, deliver me, change me, do whatever you want to do with me, because I acknowledge I'm not gonna be like Karen or the religious leaders. I'm not gonna be with the population that said I'm too busy to go and see him.

I give you my life. Let's bow our heads. Anybody here, you just feel like, Pastor, I love him.

He's been so good to me. I owe him praise. I owe him worship.

I've been distracted by the cares of life, even by discouragements and heartbreak. And I've lost sight of what he's done for me and who he is. Or maybe you're here today and say, Pastor, no, no, no, I wanna give him my heart.

Maybe you once served him, but now you're back in charge and now you wanna come back, reconsecrate your life to him. Or maybe you're coming for the first time and say, I believe that Jesus is the promised one, the Son of God, the Savior of the world. Stand up right now where you're sitting.

Stand up right where you are. Anybody that just said, Pastor, pray with me as we end this service because I have so much to thank him for or I need him in my life, just stand up right where you're sitting. Don't be embarrassed.

Even if you're a Christian and you just say, you know what, I'm convicted today that I need to praise him more. That's for you too. That's for you too.

We're gonna have a dismissal prayer right now, but all of you that came forward, would you look at me just for one second? I don't know why you're up here. Maybe some of you are believers who just say, oh, I'm not where I need to be. I just wanna praise God today.

I owe him. I owe him so much. I owe him everything.

Or maybe you're coming forward and you're just like, I wanna serve this Jesus. I believe he is king. I believe he is the priest I need.

He's the sacrifice I need. I believe he died for me. Father God, I thank you for the people who have come forward.

I thank you for all of us that are here. We're here because of you. And we recognize that you are gold, king.

You are frankincense. You are not only our priest, but you're our sacrifice. You're myrrh.

You died for us. Gracias, Señor, por todo, Señor. Te amo, Señor.

Te amo mucho, Señor. We love you today. We praise you today.

The only reason we're alive and we're standing here is because of your faithfulness, your mercy, and your grace. Would you bless my friends today, Lord, especially those who have come forward. Help them to begin following you now, walking, trusting you, not trying to be religious, but trusting you to do work in them as they receive you in their hearts.

Congregation, repeat after me. Dear God, forgive me of my sin. I believe that Jesus is the Savior.

Not only of the world, but of me. He shed his blood so that my sins could be washed away. I believe in my heart and I confess that with my mouth.

In Jesus' name, in Jesus' name. Can we all just put our hands together and, come on, don't clap for me, clap for him. Let's give him a clap of praise.

Father, bless the rest of the day. Get us all home safely. Help us to love each other more than ever before.

We pray in Jesus' name. And everyone said, turn around and give someone a hug.

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