

***“The 4<sup>th</sup> Gift”***  
Epiphany Sunday  
Psalm 72:1-7, 10-14; Isaiah 60:1-6; Matthew 2:1-12  
January 2, 2011

*“Arise, shine, for your light has come, and the glory of the LORD rises upon you. See, darkness covers the earth and thick darkness is over the peoples, but the LORD rises upon you and his glory appears over you. Nations will come to your light, and kings to the brightness of your dawn.*

*“Lift up your eyes and look about you: All assemble and come to you; your sons come from afar, and your daughters are carried on the arm. Then you will look and be radiant, your heart will throb and swell with joy; the wealth on the seas will be brought to you, to you the riches of the nations will come.*

*Herds of camels will cover your land, young camels of Midian and Ephah, And all from Sheba will come bearing gold and incense and proclaiming the praise of the LORD.*

Isaiah 60:1-6 (NIV)

*After Jesus was born in Bethlehem in Judea, during the time of King Herod, Magi (or “wise men”) from the east came to Jerusalem and asked, “Where is the one who has been born king of the Jews? We saw his star in the east 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 priest’s and teachers of the law, he asked them where the Christ was to be born. “In Bethlehem in Judea,” they replied, “for this is what the prophet has written: ‘But you, Bethlehem, in the land of Judah, are by no means least among the rulers of Judah; for out of you will come a ruler who will be the shepherd of my people Israel.’”*

*Then Herod 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 make a careful search for the child. As soon as you find him, report to me, so that I too may go and worship him.”*

*After they had heard the king, they went on their way, and the star they had seen in the east went ahead of them until it stopped over the place where the child was. When they saw the star, they were overjoyed. On coming to the house, 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 and of incense and of myrrh. And having been warned in a dream not to go back to Herod, they returned to their country by another route.*

Matthew 2:1-12 (NIV)

Last week we learned that Jesus’ coming into this world was really not “Good News” for all. His coming would come at a cost. “The death of the innocents.” The death of all the innocent children, the males born around the same time as Jesus, on the orders of King Herod. Just like the death of the innocent Egyptian children who were struck down with the plague, while the

Israelites and their children were allowed to flee Egypt, on the way to the Promised Land. A reminder that they did back then, and we still do today, live in a fallen world, where we experience the affects of human sinfulness. In the current world in which we find ourselves in, this time frame between Jesus' first coming and His second coming, we need to hold some very different realities together at the same time: joy and sorrow; peace and violence; love and hate; hope and despair; life and death.

But Jesus, the one who had come to save his people from their sins, that baby born in a manger, the one who had been prophesied by so many, for so many years before, and apparently missed by so many, would grow up to be a man. And he would go on to say, "*I have come that they may have life, and have it to the full*" (John 10:10 NIV). That from the NIV. Most versions read "so that they may have life more abundantly." Or I like the New Living Translation, "My purpose is to give life in all its fulness." The Greek word that is used there is "perissos," meaning exceedingly, going beyond, full measure, more than, exceedingly abundant! Have you ever felt that you are missing out on something? What is it that we are missing out on?

This morning is "Epiphany Sunday" on the Christian church calendar. It is the Sunday in which most of the Christian churches throughout the world celebrate the Wisemen, or the Kings, or the Magi, coming to worship the Christ child.

"Arise, shine, for your light has come, and the glory of the LORD rises upon you. See darkness covers the earth and thick darkness is over the peoples, but the LORD rises upon you and his glory appears over you" (Isaiah 60:1-2).

This is also the first Sunday of the new year, 2011. How many have made New Year's resolutions already? Here it is January 2<sup>nd</sup>, what are you waiting for. Some have probably already broken them? Or, we don't even make them anymore because we don't want to fail. Most of us like new things. We like new cars, new houses, new clothes, a new day. We like the new things we receive at Christmas, a new outlook on life, a new baby. The ultimate purpose of God's "Grand Miracle" - that which C.S. Lewis titled Jesus' birth - becoming one of us, was to make all things new, including us. That is our greatest Christmas gift, if we could just see it. Jesus came for us and became one of us, so that we might become like him. Lewis wrote, "The Son of God became a man to enable men to become the sons of God."

The "Grand Miracle" of Christmas is that God sent His Son, the incarnate one, God actually becoming one among us, "Immanuel," to recreate us into the people He originally designed us to be. It is through Christ that we can become re-born every single day.

*And we know that in all things God works for the good of those who love him, who have been called according to his purpose. For those God foreknew he also predestined to be conformed to the likeness of his Son, that he might be the firstborn among many brothers.*  
Romans 8:28-29

As Christians, we really only have one purpose here on earth. That is one “Grand Purpose,” and that is to be conformed into the likeness of God’s firstborn Son, Jesus Christ. And it is through His birth, the incarnation, that allows that to happen. It is a “Grand Miracle.” The Magi, or Wisemen, or Kings understood that. Which is why they went searching or seeking.

What can we learn from the Magi –

1. They were Serious Seekers. They traveled a long distance. Most likely they had been seeking for quite a while. They searched the scriptures, they searched the world around them. All to find the long awaited Messiah, the Savior of the world, not only for the Israelite people but for Gentiles as well. Which is in direct contrast to the people whom Jesus had originally come to save. Here He was born right under their noses, and most of the Israelites, the Jews, didn’t even notice. Here we are 2,000 years later and most of the Israelites/Jews still haven’t noticed. But the Magi, the Gentiles, they did some serious searching and they found Him.

Their response when they found him: It’s important we recognize the order.

2. They Worshiped Him. “They came from the East and went to Jerusalem and asked, “where is the one who was born king of the Jews? We saw his star in the east and have come to worship him” (v.2). Actually, three times in this passage from Matthew we find the Greek word *proskyneo*, which we interpret as worship, which means “to pay homage.” The word was commonly used to describe the custom of prostrating oneself at the feet of a king. The physical posture is supposed to dramatically express the idea of giving one’s entire self to something or someone! King Herod uses the very same word when he tells the magi to return and report to him when they find the Christ child, because He too wants to go worship, pay homage, to the king. Do you sense the irony in his statement? Can one king really bow down to another king?

And then when the Magi continued on their way and discovered the Christ child with his mother Mary, it says, “and they bowed down and worshiped him” (v.11). It is important that we understand the order here. The Magi didn’t just come to give Jesus gifts. First and foremost, they gave themselves completely to Christ, then they gave their material gifts. First homage. First worship. First, giving themselves completely to Christ. Then, offering their regal gifts.

3. They offered Him Gifts. Not just any gifts, they offered Him gifts of gold, incense, and myrrh. Pretty significant gifts representing lots of value and worth. There is also significance in the three gifts pointing to whom Jesus is and was to become: Gold was the royal metal of kings, frankincense was used by priests in temple worship, and myrrh was used to embalm bodies. Even at the cradle of Jesus, the gifts foretold that he was to be the one true King, the perfect High Priest, and in the end the supreme Savior who would be put to death and rise to new life. Just think about the irony in how we celebrate “Christmas” - the birthday of Jesus. We celebrate the birth of Jesus by giving gifts to other people. What about your gifts for Christ himself?

All the material gifts really mean nothing unless we first give ourselves completely to the Christ. As someone else has pointed out, paying homage to Christ was the Wisemen or the Magi's fourth gift. It turns out that their offering of the fourth gift, paying homage to Christ, was in fact their first gift. The apostle Paul clearly understood the importance of the first gift:

*Therefore, I urge you, brothers, in view of God's mercy, to offer your bodies as living sacrifices, holy and pleasing to God - this is your spiritual act of worship.*

Romans 12:1 (NIV)

What is our first gift? What would it look like if, in view of God's great mercy that He has shown to us - that He gave us His one and only Son, that whoever believes in Him shall not perish but have eternal life - in view of that what would it look like to offer up our bodies as living sacrifices? Perhaps that should be our new year's resolution. I would like to suggest that we make some New Year's resolutions in the four main areas of our lives. We like to separate them but God does not. And the key is balance. Experts say that there is a secret or an art to making good new year's resolutions, resolutions that will change your life forever: one, that you don't make too many, or too big and two, you write them down and you follow up on them, regularly. I would like to suggest that you think about making resolutions in four areas of your life:

### 1. Physical

How about trying to take care of your body just a little bit better during the new year? Perhaps trying to eat better. How many here this morning own a \$1 million dollar racehorse? That's what I thought. But if you did own a \$1 million dollar race horse how much McDonald's and Pizza would you feed him. Not us, right through the drive thru - and Super Size it! Or how about just getting out and exercising, three times a week, 30 minutes a day. Doesn't have to be much. Walking, bicycling, the treadmill . . .

Just think of what we do to our bodies today. We write all over them, we abuse them - physically, sexually, we take in all kinds of substances - some legal, some illegal, we take in much more food than our bodies need. There are not too many of us that don't abuse our bodies in some form or another. Yet God says through His apostle Paul:

*Do you not know that your body is a temple of the Holy Spirit, who is in you, whom you have received from God? You are not your own; you have been bought at a price.*

*Therefore honor God with your body.*

1 Corinthians 6:19-20 (NIV)

### 2. Intellectual (Mind)

In the very next verse of Romans 12, right after Paul tells us to "offer our entire bodies as living sacrifices, holy and pleasing to God, in view of what He has done for us in Jesus, Paul writes: *Do not conform to the pattern of this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind* (Romans 12:2a).

How about reading a good book, 15 - 30 minutes a day. I know what your saying. "I just don't have the time." Well, how much time do you waste a day - watching the television, playing video games, on the computer. Wouldn't that 15-30 minutes of reading a good book be much more beneficial.

What we read, watch on TV, and listen to today becomes who we are tomorrow. The ideas that we put into our hearts and minds today help create who we are tomorrow. We become the stories that we listen to. People look at America and say America has changed over the last 25-50 years, it is not the America that once was. All one needs to do is to look at the stories we have listened to and watched over the past 25 years and you'll know why America has changed.

How do we know if something is beneficial?

*whatever is true, whatever is noble, whatever is right, whatever is pure, whatever is lovely, whatever is admirable - if anything is excellent or praiseworthy - think about such things.*                      Philippians 4:8 (NIV)

Spend times doing those things. How do we know whether something is beneficial or not? Well, for most of us we really do know what is beneficial and what is not if we would just take the time to think about such things. The true test is does it make us more conformed to the image or likeness of Christ or less?

15-30 minutes a day reading a good book, watching a good movie, replacing the 15-30 minutes we spend reading or watching junk, or something that really serves no useful purpose.

### 3. Relational

How much time do you spend in face to face contact with people? Serious "care-free timelessness." Most of the technology that we have today, whether it be our cell phones, e-mail, facebook, twitter, is designed to take the place of face-to-face contact. We can use all those tools to enhance our relationships, but when they take the place of them, then we're not living the type of lives that God designed us to live. He designed us to live in relationship with other people. An article on the front page of USA Today just past this week suggested that when people look back many years from now, 2010 may just be the year that our technology of using facebook, twitter, and e-mail, surpassed that of meeting face-to-face with people.

What is "carefree timelessness?" All you need to do is ask you teenage children. What do teenage children do best? Talk on the phone. How long? Forever! Especially when there is a relationship. Johnny calls Suzy and talks on the phone for hours. And when he gets off you ask Johnny, "who were you talking to?" Johnny says, "Susan." Then you ask, "well, what were you talking about all that time?" And what does Johnny say? "Nothing!" That's "carefree timelessness."

Relationships thrive on "carefree timelessness." It's the reason young people fall in love so easily and lack of it is the reason that the rest of us fall out of love so easily. "Whatever

relationships you bless with carefree timelessness will blossom, whatever ones you starve with carefree timelessness will wither and die.”

What significant person in your life do you have to resolve to spend significant carefree timelessness with over the next year? Resolve to do it, tell that person, mark it down.

#### 4. Spiritual -

Who is the number one person that we need to spend “carefree timelessness with?” God.

*“Now this is eternal life: that they know you, the only true God, and Jesus Christ whom you have sent.”*  
John 17:3 (NIV)

One can know God and really not know God. You can know of God and really not know God. It is mostly about a relationship.

What would happen if we all committed ourselves to worshiping God the Father, Jesus the Son, and the Holy Spirit as being the number one priority in our lives over the next year?

Attending church as often as we can.

Reading the Bible on a regular basis. The Scripture readings that are in the bulletin for the following Sunday.

Journal - writing down the one thing that stands out to you on a given Sunday or perhaps as you prepare for the week. How is God speaking to you? If God appeared to you in a dream last night and told you that He was going to show up at church this morning, but only for a short time, with some very important information, information that could change your life forever, would you have brought some paper and a pen?

But you didn't. What does that suggest? Apparently you didn't come prepared to meet God today.

You see, human behavior is actually very predictable. Which is why it is passed down from generation to generation. Psychologists and sociologists tell us that it is very difficult for people to change. It doesn't just happen. Yes, some people have some dramatic events that happen in their lives, which causes them to change, or some people talk about their conversion experiences, but they are more the exception than the norm. For most people, it is gradual, over time. And it often doesn't just happen. “Our lives change when our habits change.”

We live in a society today which is all about being emotion driven. In some ways it is good, but in many ways it is not. We live in a society today that tells us in so many ways, “if it feels good, just do it!, if not, do whatever you can to avoid it.” But is that how we should judge an activity. We should judge an activity not by how it makes us feel when we start it, but what it produces in us at the end. Has it changed our character? Are we more conformed to the likeness or image of Christ or not?

Jesus, who was with God before the creation of the universe, took on human form and came to re-create all things anew. As John writes in the Book of Revelation (21:5), *“He who was seated on the throne said, ‘I am making everything new!’”*

*Therefore, if anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation; the old has gone, the new has come!*  
2 Corinthians 5:17 (NIV)

The 4<sup>th</sup> Gift is actually the 1<sup>st</sup> gift. The most important gift. It is the gift of ourselves to God. First - complete devotion, homage to Christ - then the other gifts. That should be our “Christmas Offering” as we come to the table this morning to begin the year 2011.

***“The 4<sup>th</sup> Gift”***

Epiphany Sunday

Isaiah 60:1-6; Matthew 2:1-12

January 2, 2011

*“Arise, shine, for your light has come, and the glory of the LORD rises upon you. See, darkness covers the earth and thick darkness is over the peoples, but the LORD rises upon you and his glory appears over you.”*  
Isaiah 60:1-2 (NIV)

*“I have come that they may have life, and have it to the full.”* John 10:10 (NIV)  
*“My purpose is to give life in all its fulness.”* John 10:10 (NLT)

“**The Grand Miracle**’ - Jesus’ birth, was to make all things new, including us. The Son of God became a man to enable man to become the sons of God.” C.S. Lewis

*And we know that in all things God works for the good of those who love him, who have been called according to his purpose. For those God foreknew he also predestined to be conformed to the likeness of his Son, that he might be the firstborn among many brothers.*  
Romans 8:28-29 (NIV)

God’s “**Grand Purpose**” - to be conformed into the image, the likeness, of Jesus Christ.

The Magi were “serious seekers” - seeking the Christ, the long-awaited Messiah

Their response when finding Him:

1<sup>st</sup> - They bowed down and worshiped Him - they gave themselves completely to the Christ.

2<sup>nd</sup> - They presented their gifts.

*Therefore, I urge you, brothers, in view of God’s mercy, to offer your bodies as living sacrifices, holy and pleasing to God - this is your spiritual act of worship.*

Romans 12:1 (NIV)

***Therefore, if anyone is in Christ,  
he is a new creation;  
the old has gone, the new has come!  
2 Corinthians 5:17 (NIV)***

***New Year's Resolutions to Change our Lives Forever:***

1. **Physical** -

*Do you not know that your body is a temple of the Holy Spirit, who is in you, whom you have received from God? You are not your own; you have been bought at a price. Therefore honor God with your body.* 1 Corinthians 6:19-20 (NIV)

**Resolution** (one resolution to improve your physical health over the next year)

2. **Intellectual (Mind)** -

*Do not conform to the pattern of this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind. Then you will be able to test and approve what God's will is - his good, pleasing and perfect will.* Romans 12:2 (NIV)

*whatever is true, whatever is noble, whatever is right, whatever is pure, whatever is lovely, whatever is admirable - if anything is excellent or praiseworthy - think about such things.* Philippians 4:8 (NIV)

**Resolution** (one resolution to improve your mind in 2011)

3. **Relational** -

*"Carefree timelessness"*

*"Whatever relationships you bless with carefree timelessness will blossom, whatever relationships you starve of carefree timelessness will wither and die."*

Matthew Kelly

**Resolution** (one relationship to bless with "carefree timelessness" in 2011)

4. **Spiritual** -

*On coming to the house, 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 and of incense and of myrrh.* Matthew 2:11 (NIV)

*"Now this is eternal life: that they know you, the only true God, and Jesus Christ whom you have sent."* John 17:3 (NIV)

**Resolution** (One resolution to draw closer to God during the new year)