

We're in part two of a four-part message series called Come to Worship.

**Last week**, if you were with us, we talked about lifting up holy hands to God and said that it was an entirely appropriate response to God. Next week, we're actually going to talk about pouring out our hearts, and then we're going to learn about bowing our knees, or kneeling before God. Today I want to talk to you about something that is a very powerful way to worship God, and that is bringing our gifts before God, as an act of worship.

**Our reading** today started with the wise men arriving in Jerusalem and asking about the special child who had been born. They saw His star when it appeared in the sky and, knowing that something special had happened, they set out on a journey to – what? To worship Him. The reason they came was to worship Jesus.

Now, King Herod was actually an evil king, and so he began to panic. He was suddenly afraid that his kingdom would be threatened, and so he kind of lied to them and said, “Hey, whenever you find out where He is, tell me, so I can go and worship Him, as well.”

**Verse 9** says this: “*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.*” So, they saw the star, and they followed it.

**Now, we read** that one little verse, and we don't really grasp the full magnitude of what these wise men did. They actually travelled from what would have been known as Persia, or modern-day Iran, all the way to where Jesus was, a distance of, believe it or not, about 900 miles.

If I travel about 900 miles from here, I could end up in Nice, Andorra, Milan or Stockholm, Sweden. It's a very long way, and they did not get there on Ryanair, or anything like it. This was a long, painful journey that they made to worship the One that they believed might be the Saviour.

And **verse 10 shows** us this: “*When they saw the star, they were overjoyed.*” They were overjoyed. In fact, I want to pause on this word, and we're going to kind of camp out and come back to this word quite a bit. They were overjoyed.

**The English translation**, it really has a hard time with what the original language said. There are actually four Greek words that are translated into “they were overjoyed.” Another version of the Bible translates it this way, it says, “They rejoiced exceedingly with great joy.” “They rejoiced exceedingly with great joy.” The Greek words – they literally mean, “They rejoiced with a big, humongous, overarching joy.” That's what it means. It's kind of like compounding joy. It's like, “We're happy about being happy that we're happy that we're happy that He's there.”

It's almost impossible to describe how full of joy they were because we simply don't have words to describe what's being thought of here. For years, the Jewish people had hoped that one day, there might be One who was born that would rescue them. They were waiting for a

Messiah. And so, from the depths of their soul, they're overjoyed, with a humongous, big, gigantic joy because the wise men believe Jesus is that person.

**Here's the problem** with some Christians today: They are underjoyed. They're underjoyed. We should be the most overjoyed people around, and some of us are underjoyed. It makes no sense, to me, to think about the fact that a God who loved us and did something for us that we couldn't earn, and didn't deserve – the fact that anybody would ever be sitting around with a sourpuss Christian look on their face. Right? I mean, to come into worship looking like they're mad, upset about different kinds of things, critical heart, angry about everything, nitpicking everything apart ...

Listen to me, if you're overjoyed, tell your face! Let it smile! Show It.! Let other people around you know. Being a follower of Jesus, you should be full of more joy than anybody else in the world. It doesn't matter how bad life gets – you've got the promise of eternity. You've got a God with you, a God who's working in all things to bring about good to those who love Him and are called according to His purpose, a God who is greater than our enemy: a God who is ever-present, all-knowing, and all-powerful.

Joy isn't about putting a brave face on things; it isn't about ignoring difficult things; and, it's not simply feeling happy. **Acts 16:34** *he was filled with joy because he had come to believe in God—he and his whole household.* **Matthew 28:8** *So the women hurried away from the tomb, afraid yet filled with joy, and ran to tell his disciples.*

Don't you dare ever live underjoyed! You smile! You clap! You worship! You praise! You be great to be around. You be known for what you're for, not for what you're against. You be full of love, and be full of grace. When people see you, they should say, "That's one of the happiest people I've ever met." Why? We're overjoyed we have a Saviour. We're overjoyed we have a Saviour.

The wise men travelled 900 or so miles, and they couldn't wait to worship Him. So, what do they do? **Verse 11 says** this: "*On coming to the house, they saw the child with his mother Mary, and they bowed down and worshiped him.*" We're going to come back to this one, that portion, in week four, and talk about bending our knees. "They bowed down," and what did they do, everybody? They "worshiped him."

Now, how did they worship? I want you to watch very carefully. Scripture says they did what? They worshiped Him, and they **did it how?** "11 *Then they opened their treasures and presented him with gifts of gold, frankincense and myrrh.*" They were overjoyed to bow down to worship and to bring gifts to the One who would save them. They were overjoyed to give. They did not give, underjoyed. They were not upset that they got to give.

It's been debated for centuries as to what these gifts actually meant, or symbolized. The general thinking is that the gold represented His Kingship, that the King of kings and the Lord of lords was born. The frankincense, many people believe, represented His priestly role in the ministry. The myrrh actually was used to help prepare people for burial, and a lot of scholars believe that

that was given to Him, foreshadowing that Jesus was actually born to die. They worshiped Him, and they were overjoyed to bring their gifts, as an act of worship, to kneel down. And, with tremendous joy in their heart, they opened up the best of what they had, and they gave it to Jesus.

Now, you can tell where I'm going. What I want to do is encourage you to bring your gifts, as an act of worship, to God. Last week we talked about lifting up holy hands. Next week we're going to talk about pouring out our hearts. Week four, we're going to talk about bending our knees, and bowing. Today, I'm asking you, maybe like never before, to give to God as an act of worship, to bring your gifts. And now you see why we have kept taking the offering until later.

**And some of you are** going, "Here we go again! Always asking for money." There is certainly something of that here but just as last week was not a sermon about lifting up your hands because it says in the bible we should – this is not another simple 'get your money out' week. Raising your hands in worship is a physical action that flows from a deeper relationship with God. It's an expression of our worship, thankfulness and willingness to surrender. So it is with giving.

**I understand** – I don't like doing the 'you need to give more' message. It is amazing that people have responded to our need for a new cooker and have come forward with donations. No big message; no pressure sales; no pleading, just a statement that it was broken and if anyone wanted to contribute it would be welcome. It is being fitted on Tuesday and we're going to be able to pay it off. Thank you to all those who contributed.

**I love being** around generous people. Why? Because generous people love giving. In fact, you can always tell, when I'm talking about generosity and giving – there are people smiling like this ... and other people are going, "Oh, get me out of here. Rapture, come now. I don't want to deal with this kind of stuff." And what I want to do is, I honestly hope that, over the next few minutes, that the Spirit of God will start doing a work in you, and that if you don't love giving now, you'll start to love to give, to look forward to it, to think about it, to plan to give, be strategic, be overjoyed to give to God, who gave everything to you.

One of the most well-known verses in the Bible? John 3:16? Even if you're not a church person, you probably know this one. It's at football games and **other sporting events**. "*For God so loved the world that he gave his one and only Son, that whoever believes in him shall not perish but have eternal life.*" – not gold, frankincense, or myrrh, but His only Son. That's how much He loved us.

Because love gives. Because God looked at Creation, and he realized that we were separated from him by sin, and the only way we could be made right with Him is if someone innocent would die in our place, someone without sin. So, He became flesh among us, in the person of Jesus, lived the perfect life, died, and rose again, so that anyone who puts their faith in Him would be saved.

Love gives. That's what God does. We love God because God first loved us. Love gives. When you love, you can see it in the lives of people, because love gives.

In fact, **Romans 5:8** says this: *"But God demonstrates his own love for us in this: While we were still sinners, Christ died for us."* God didn't shout His love from heaven; He showed His love on earth. He sent Jesus to die for us because love gives.

Now, as I talk about this, some of you would probably say, "I love God, but giving's hard for me. I'd like to give, but I feel financial pressure. My husband or wife doesn't come to church and it's family money." and I understand that. "I love, but I'm afraid," or, "I'm hesitant," or, "I'm reluctant to give."

Here's an example from the early church: **2 Corinthians 8:1-3** *And now, brothers and sisters, we want you to know about the grace that God has given the Macedonian churches. 2 In the midst of a very severe trial, their overflowing joy and their extreme poverty welled up in rich generosity. 3 For I testify that they gave as much as they were able, and even beyond their ability.*

I want to read to you, from the Old Testament, Proverbs 3. It's a very, very popular portion of Scripture, and there's a portion after it that many people don't really understand falls within the context of this worldwide-known verse. **Proverbs 3, verse 5-6**, says, *"Trust in the Lord with all your heart and lean not on your own understanding; 6 in all your ways submit to him, and he will make your paths straight."* Trust in God. Don't lean on your own ability to understand, but trust in Him.

**Then vs 7-8** *"Do not be wise in your own eyes; fear the Lord and shun evil. 8 This will bring health to your body and nourishment to your bones."* – in other words, don't try to figure it out, that there's higher ways than our ways; there's higher thoughts than our thoughts.

Now, in the context of which this is written – "Trust in the Lord with all your heart, and lean not on your own understanding" – Solomon said this: "9 Honour the Lord with your wealth." This word, honour, it means "to worship." It means "to adore." It means "to praise." So, worship, adore and praise the Lord with your – what? It says, "[Worship] the Lord with your wealth." Worship God with what you have. This is only one of the ways we worship God, but it is a very important way to worship God. They were overjoyed, and they opened up their treasures, and they worshiped Him.

**"9 Honor the Lord"** – worship the Lord – *"with your wealth, with the firstfruits of all your crops; 10 then your barns will be filled to overflowing, and your vats will brim over with new wine."* Honor the Lord with your wealth, worship God with your wealth, and then you will be blessed beyond measure. Honor Him with the firstfruits of your wealth.

Now, some people may say, "What are firstfruits?" This parallels with what is taught in the Old Testament, in the Book of Malachi ch3. God is angry with the Israelites because they are not honouring him with their offering – in fact he says they are robbing him - and then in **verse 10**

**he says:** *Bring the whole tithe into the storehouse, that there may be food in my house. Test me in this,” says the Lord Almighty, “and see if I will not throw open the floodgates of heaven and pour out so much blessing that there will not be room enough to store it.* Jesus affirms this in the New Testament, **Matthew 23:23** *Woe to you, teachers of the law and Pharisees, you hypocrites! You give a tenth of your spices—mint, dill and cumin. But you have neglected the more important matters of the law—justice, mercy and faithfulness. You should have practiced the latter, without neglecting the former.* It’s talked about in Hebrews; that’s what’s known as “the tithe.” The tithe is a Hebrew word, the word maasar, and it simply means “a tenth.”

**Malachi says that we** worship God with a tenth of what He trusts us with. We bring Him the first portion of what He gives to us, as an act of worship. And Malachi says when we do this, God opens up the windows of heaven, and God pours out so many blessings on us that we do not even have room to contain it. We worship the Lord with the first tenth of what He gives us.

Now, in my mind, that sounds crazy, and I understand the thought that says: There’s no way I’m doing that. Ten percent – no way! That’s absolutely crazy. And yet, what have we just read: Trust in the Lord with all your heart . . . lean not on your own understanding; 6 in all your ways [acknowledge] Him.” Honor the Lord with your wealth, with the firstfruits of what He blesses you with.

There’s a saying: We bring our first and our best, and trust God to bless the rest. We bring God our first and our best – the first 10 percent, not the last 10 percent, not what’s left over. The moment we’re blessed with increase, we bring God our first and our best, and we trust God to bless the rest.

People who do this recognize that 90 percent, with God’s blessings, is actually greater than 100 percent without, that when we actually worship God, and trust Him in this way, it does something in us that is supernatural.

What I am saying is that God proves Himself faithful. Malachi is the only place in all of Scripture where God says, “Test Me. If you don’t believe Me, test Me. Test Me. Worship Me in this way, and see what I will do for you.”

But it’s more than just giving wealth, and that is very important. You look at what you do with your money, and it’s an indicator of what’s in your heart, and there is no argument to that, whatsoever, none whatsoever. We honour God with our wealth. But the ultimate thing that we give is way beyond that. We’re to give our lives.

This is what Paul said – Paul who hated Christians but he was transformed. The guy who imprisoned, beat, tortured, and killed Christians was so transformed by God, this is what he wrote. He said, “Therefore I urge you, brothers and sisters, in view of God’s mercy” – listen to that. In view of what God did for him, in view of who God is, and what God did for us, he said, “I urge you to offer your bodies as a living sacrifice” – not just our money, that’s easy. That’s a starting place – but our whole lives – “holy and pleasing to God. This is your true and proper worship.”

We need to learn to trust in the Lord with all our heart, not rely on our own understanding – even if it doesn't make sense to you, acknowledge Him in everything, and He will make our paths straight. I will honour Him with my first and my best, and I will trust Him to bless the rest.

So, as we come to give our offering I'm not asking for more money but what I am asking is that each of us think, "Is what I'm giving today appropriate? What does it say about my relationship with God?" Whether you are putting money in the plate or give by direct debit or standing order please take a moment to reflect. We know that the congregation cannot function without money, but this is not simply about the life of the congregation, it's about you and God. It's about faith and trust, renewal and hope, love and worship. You need to ask if you're robbing God by putting in less than you can afford; or, are you giving grudgingly; or are you giving although it's a real struggle? As the plate is passed round don't just ignore it because you give in another way, or just put your envelope in without thought. Instead ask God to make you generous – in spirit, word and action – and may we all go from here resolved to test him and look for his blessing.