

Empty Handed

Scripture: Matthew 2:1 – 12

January 7th, 2024

Epiphany Sunday

I do not know about you but the characters of the Magi from the East fascinate me! I have always been intrigued by the Magi from the East. Their exotic treasures excite me. The land from which they probably came adds to the interest of the story. The curiosity of the Magi motivates me. I find myself asking myself these questions:

*What were they really searching for?

*Was there an emptiness within the wise men that they hoped this journey would fill?

*They were smart guys, but why did they make this journey?

*Was there some more knowledge they needed?

Over history, we often refer to the Magi as ‘three wise men’.

Many assertions have been made throughout history as to their place of origin. I saw in India while on a mission trip there, a reference to the fact that one of the wise men’s origin was India! There was a plaque in a church just outside of Mengele India which recognized Balthazar as coming from that area. We commonly think that the Magi came from Iraq, Iran, & Saudi Arabia.

There have been many assertions about their names. We commonly call them –

*Gasper, wearing the green cloak and gold crown, he is thought to be the King of Sheba and he brought frankincense;

*Melchior, wearing gold cloak, he is thought to be King of Arabia and he brought gold;

*and Balthasar, who was dark skinned & wearing a purple cloak, he was thought to be the King of Tarse and Egypt and he brought myrrh.

And there has been other assertions about their careers. We have assumed one of them to be an astrologer who knew about reading the stars, another one a physician, and the third one to be a noble man.

But what seems most important is that they came! They made the long trek. They set out on a journey to find the King of the Jews.

It took a lot of preparation for them to go on such a trip. How would they have known what to pack? Even on a journey of this nature, my wife would not know what to pack. How many pairs of underwear do I take? How many shirts and shorts do I take? It would be difficult to pack for a journey like this!

The Magi could not have had any clear idea as to how long they would be gone. They would not have known if this journey would be a couple of days, a couple of weeks, a couple of months, or a couple of years.

As they were following a star, what would they eat? Should they pack a bag lunch, should they pack food for a week, or should they plan to eat on the way.

What would they tell their loved ones they left back home? - Honey and children, I will be home soon, or would they say – Honey and children, I see you whenever.

In addition to packing for themselves, they also packed presents! As we all know so well, they came bearing gifts. And not just any gifts, but precious spices and minerals according to the story. They packed precious gifts of gold, frankincense, and myrrh to be presented to whomever they find on their journey.

Let's be frank, these gifts of gold, frankincense, and myrrh are strange gifts for a child. I bet you that if you give your child a gift of gold or frankincense or myrrh - you may be happy with these gifts - but a child would probably be more excited about what the gift came in!

Nevertheless, these Magi from the distant East did not dare come empty handed! They dare not come empty handed to bow down before the King of the Jews. They came prepared. Their journey was well thought out! Their journey was well organized! And their journey was purposeful!

Aren't we also these Magi? We all come from a far, some not too far as others, but do we come bearing gifts? What gifts do we bring? Do we bow down before our King and honor him accordingly?

Aren't you also a Magi? You come from a far, but do you come bearing gifts? What gifts do you bring? Do you bow down before your King and honor him accordingly?

We must be like the Magi from the distant East and we should not dare come empty handed! We should dare not come empty handed to bow down before our Lord and Savior. We must come prepared. Our journey together must be well thought out! Our journey together must be well organized! And our journey together must be purposeful!

Do we trust that God has already given us all we need to give back to a world in need? To serve our King, God has given us all we need. To glorify His reign, God has given us all we need.

As we pack for the new year of 2024, let us not forget to leave room for our gifts. For when we encounter our King of Kings, we will not want to be caught empty handed!

My friends, this is not a stewardship message for the New Year but if you think it is - let it be so! This is a message for the New Year that you need to come to this fellowship of believers packed with gifts to share. This is a message for the New Year that you need to come both in person and virtually packed with gifts to share.

Do not come empty handed but come with gifts of time and talents to serve the church and God.

This is a message for the New Year that we need to come to our fellowship of believers packed with gifts to share.

Let us pray:

Lord God, may we never show up to worship you empty handed. Let us always come ready to share our time and talents and resources to your service. Reveal to us the many gifts you have granted each and every one of us so that we might use them to serve your world. We do not come empty handed, Lord. AMEN.