



"We saw his star and have come to worship him."

A SEASON FOR GIVING

This year I witnessed the "Midnight Madness" of "Black Friday." I saw shopping center parking lots filled to capacity; populated with multiple RVs—all hoping for those spectacular deals on big screens, i-pads, other gadgets, or clothing. The sidewalks in front of the "big box" stores were littered with families bivouacked in high tech tents awaiting the opening of the doors. At one store, the line of prospective customers waiting for permission to enter ran for more than a quarter mile, while guards at the doors rationed entrance based on the capacity of the fire code. Inside, those who had secured the best bargains, cued in lines two and three abreast that literally circled the store twice in each direction blocking access to the frenzied new arrivals. The next day the news carried reports of one impatient shopper who pepper-sprayed others in the hope of moving up in the line. Police reported shootings in other locations and a least one child injured, trampled by the mob. And this is the season to be jolly; of peace and goodwill toward men!

What was the purpose? Purchase Christmas gifts at bargain prices! That seems to make sense in an economy where so many are wondering if they will have the necessary resources to celebrate this year, doesn't it? But then I ask, "Is this really what it's all about?" Where did we ever get the idea that Christmas centered on the exchange of gifts, purchased at whatever price. I know we are told that gift-giving is a tradition rooted in the gifts presented to the Baby in the manger on that first Bethlehem Christmas. But let's look at that a little more carefully.

The Wisemen arrived in Jerusalem and proceeded to the logical place to begin their search—the palace of Herod, the current holder of the title, "King of the Jews." Their question filled this cruel monarch with consternation and hidden rage. Herod had already dispatched two possible inheritors of his throne. He is now presented with the assertion that a person has been born not to become king, but already king. His hurried consultation with opposing parties of Jewish experts revealed the possibility that the true inheritor of David's throne had been born in Bethlehem. Herod sent the visitors on their way with a feigned intention to make his own worship pilgrimage at a later time, if only the Magi would give him the exact location of the infant king. Interestingly, none of the faithful religious leaders whose knowledge of the scriptures had uncovered the probable birthplace of their long-awaited deliverer thought it advisable to go to Bethlehem to give him welcome.

Following the star to the stable, the Kings from the East discovered the child in the arms of his mother and father. They bowed before him and presented him with gifts. Within their cultural setting, this act of obeisance demonstrates the true meaning of worship—they placed themselves in obedience to Jesus as their sovereign, sealing their pledge of obedience with costly gifts normally offered to royalty.

Thus I wish to suggest that Jesus is really the center of our celebration, and that the gifts he prefers are indeed costly—a broken spirit; a broken and contrite heart—and our submission to his Lordship. Not just on this day, but in a lifestyle of worship lived out before many witnesses who surround us in our everyday world. May we also worship Him on this and every day!

We wish you a merry
Christmas season and pray
for his anointing and blessing
on your life and ministry
throughout the New Year!

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