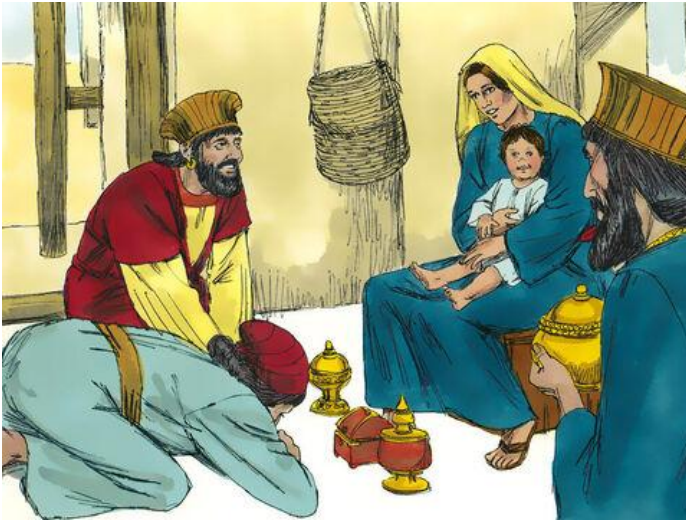


## Worshipping Jesus Matthew 2, 1-12



After Jesus was born in Bethlehem in Judea, during the time of King Herod, Magi<sup>[a]</sup> from the east came to Jerusalem<sup>2</sup> 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.”

<sup>3</sup>When King Herod heard this he was disturbed, and all Jerusalem with him.

<sup>4</sup>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. <sup>5</sup>“In Bethlehem in Judea,” they

replied, “for this is what the prophet has written:

<sup>6</sup>“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 shepherd my people Israel.”<sup>[b]</sup>”

<sup>7</sup>Then Herod called the Magi secretly and found out from them the exact time the star had appeared. <sup>8</sup>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.”

<sup>9</sup>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. <sup>10</sup>When they saw the star, they were overjoyed. <sup>11</sup>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, frankincense and myrrh. <sup>12</sup>And having been warned in a dream not to go back to Herod, they returned to their country by another route.

Christmas and New Year have come and gone. Now the main concern of many people is how to get rid of these gifts: The bald man brings back the miraculous hair gel that unfortunately wasn't a miracle cure after all; the unwanted garden gnome should go back in the shop window where it belongs and the tasteless cuckoo clock that doesn't tell the time correctly must also be returned or thrown straight into the garbage. Some gifts that we received at Christmas are simply useless. Other gifts are extremely valuable. But I cannot recognize their value off hand because I don't know the gift or have not understood it's meaning yet. The gift that God gave us through Jesus is one of those gifts whose value we humans always overlook. No wonder that God sent these special wise men. Their gifts show us what Jesus means to us. Most people in the world know that Jesus was born at Christmas. But they don't always know how valuable He is to us. And that is why they put Jesus in a corner or reject him completely because they have never understood how good and precious he is for us. And that is why the wise men from the East are so special to us. They lead us to the manger and show us the value of Jesus. First of all, it is obvious that these wise men did not belong to the Jewish people. They probably had no direct access to the Old Testament and therefore knew nothing about Jesus. The Bible only says that they were astronomers. And that they saw a sign in the sky. These stargazers were probably Persians,

because there were exactly such astronomers in the Persian Empire. These people saw a sign and set out on their journey. Perhaps they are a little reminiscent of the Persians who come to church today. Because there are many Persians among us who have seen some kind of sign. Some have had a dream, some have had access to Christians or a Bible, and some have completely different reasons for finding their way to the manger. The decisive factor is not actually which sign it is. The crucial thing is that they find Christ. And on Epiphany we hear that God does not just want to save the Jewish people, but all people. The crucial thing with all these people is not how they come, but that they come. The first wise men who found the manger show us all of this. But they show us even more. They not only show us that they found Christ, but also that they understood his value. So they did not just recognize Christ as a nice prophet or king, but showed through their gifts what Jesus's value really was. And when they recognized Jesus' value, they worshiped him. To better understand this worship, I will explain the English term worship, which has a special meaning for the worship of the wise men. In English, the word worship consists of two different terms that have been put together. The first is valuable and the second is regard. Praise and worship can also be translated as knowing it's value or appreciation. And the gifts of the wise men show us exactly that. We want to take a closer look at these gifts that also show us exactly that. They were gold, frankincense and myrrh. These three gifts are intended to explain to us who Jesus is and what he does for us.

First of all, gold: Gold represents the most precious thing that can be produced from the physical world. Gold is also said to be a pure metal, unmixed with any other metals. What these people bring to Jesus is a small hint of the person of Jesus. Through Jesus, God himself gives us the most precious thing that heaven can produce. God gives us his own,... his own son! And this son of God is the only one who is truly God, unmixed and without compromise, and therefore also without sin. The wonderful gift that God gives us is that this son of God now also becomes human, unmixed and without compromise! That is an impossible thing that one can only worship in amazement!

And that is exactly what the Persian sages did by bringing incense with them, which indicates prayer. Frankincense is a scent that is in the air. Frankincense is a sign of prayer. But its meaning can already be read in creation. Back then, the first experience that Adam had during creation was that God blew breath into his nose. So Adam experiences the smell of God in his nose with his first breath. Frankincense means exactly this: the breath of God that connects with man and thus defines man's fate in relation to God. Now we know that people have fallen into sin and therefore have nothing at all to do with God. They are separated from God and therefore we humans are robbed of the most important thing that can exist. That is breath! And the connection with God. Do you want to be able to breathe in God's purest air again?

The third gift that the wise men bring wants to show us how this can be done. This is about Jesus' purest act of redemption. The third gift of the wise men is myrrh: myrrh is a bitter, fragrant perfume. It symbolizes suffering above all else. But myrrh was also used as an embalming agent for corpses. From the story of Jesus' suffering we learn that Jesus was offered myrrh before his crucifixion. Myrrh is therefore a gift from the Magi, which already at the birth of Jesus points to the death and suffering of Jesus. With this, the Magi show us that Jesus came to suffer for us. Jesus is therefore the purest gold that comes from heaven itself and brings us back into personal contact with God. What connects us with Jesus is the breath of God himself, which is breathed into us through the action of the Holy Spirit and through his word. Whatever may happen to us this year. And no matter what great challenges we may face, this precious breath of God must never be lacking in our lives. Therefore, we will not miss any opportunity to hear God's word or to take part in Holy Communion, where we receive Jesus and his body and blood.

The wise men bring three gifts to the baby Jesus. The gifts are for Jesus. But above all, they show what the birth of Jesus means to us humans. Gold, frankincense and myrrh therefore mean:

That God has given us the most precious gift of all through Jesus.

That God has connected himself with us humans through his breath of life, that is, his word that became flesh. And that he still wants to do this today by constantly allowing his word to come to us.

And thirdly, he wants to show us through myrrh that this connection between God and us humans is made possible by the bitter suffering and death of Jesus.

What did Mary and Joseph do with these three strange gifts? All three gifts are not exactly practical gifts that the poor family could use. And they certainly couldn't understand all of that. And yet, over the course of Jesus' life story, they gradually understood more. And they certainly didn't put these three gifts on the shelf like useless gifts or take them back to the shop. Instead, they kept these gifts close to their hearts. And to this day they breathe in the most precious gifts that God gives us through Jesus. We Christians still live by this breath today. That's why Christmas must never stop. I wish you the most precious things: gold, frankincense and myrrh! For 2025 , I wish you to be in Jesus! Amen.