

DOING CHRISTMAS

“Honoring Jesus with Our Gift-Giving”

Matthew 2:1-12

Micah 6:7-8

Acts 20:35

OPEN

1. Share anything from Sunday’s service that has stuck with you or left a lingering impression.
2. What is one of the best presents you have ever received or given? In what ways do you think it made the recipient feel seen and known?

DISCUSS

3. Read aloud the three Scriptures:

Matthew 2:1-12

1 After Jesus was born in Bethlehem in Judea, during the time of King Herod, Magi from the east came to Jerusalem **2** 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.”

3 When King Herod heard this he was disturbed, and all Jerusalem with him. **4** 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. **5** “In Bethlehem in Judea,” they replied, “for this is what the prophet has written:

6 “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.”

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

9 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. **10** When they saw the star, they were overjoyed. **11** 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. **12** And having been warned in a dream not to go back to Herod, they returned to their country by another route.

Micah 6:7-8

7 Will the Lord be pleased with thousands of rams,
with ten thousand rivers of olive oil?

Shall I offer my firstborn for my transgression,
the fruit of my body for the sin of my soul?

8 He has shown you, O mortal, what is good.
And what does the Lord require of you?

To act justly and to love mercy
and to walk humbly with your God.

Acts 20:35

In everything I did, I showed you that by this kind of hard work we must help the weak, remembering the words the Lord Jesus himself said: 'It is more blessed to give than to receive.'

4. What do we see in Acts 20:35 and Micah 6:7-8 that remind us of how Jesus lived, and how He calls us to live?
5. How does this expanded definition of “blessed” or “blessedness” (see *Background*, below) help you understand the phrase “It is more blessed to give than to receive” in a new way?
6. Which expansion or expansions in how we consider gift-giving is the most intuitive for you, or the most natural for you to practice:
 - i. why we give gifts
 - ii. how we give gifts
 - iii. to whom we give gifts
 - iv. what we give as gifts
 - v. depending on Jesus to bless and multiply what we give
7. Which expansion is the most challenging to you? Why do you think that is?
8. What are some practical ways we can each practice more intentional gift-giving this year? Try to be as specific as possible.

REFLECT AND PRAY

9. Take a moment of silent prayer to reflect on the “who” expansion.
 - a) Ask God to show you a person to include in your Christmas giving this year.

- b) Share who came to mind with your group.
- c) If God brought to mind a different or additional expansion during your silent prayer, share with your group what God is leading you to put into practice.

10. Pray together that you might all put into practice whatever expansion we feel God is leading us to live into this Christmas.

HOMEWORK CHALLENGE

Read the Beatitudes (see Matthew 5:1-12) from the perspective of “blessedness” being that which helps us to better participate in the divine nature and the character of God, or to live as He lived. How does that reframe your understanding of the Beatitudes?

BACKGROUND

Some translations render the word “blessed” (from the original Greek “*makarios*”) as “happy” or “fortunate.” But there’s a sense that this is related to circumstances. In other words: You are “happy” or “fortunate” because your circumstances are good. Clearly, this is not the case for those who are persecuted, poor, or mourning.

A better understanding of “blessedness” comes from the idea of participating in the nature or character of God. In this scenario, even *challenging* circumstances might be helping us to experience more of the heart of God, to see life—and live it—from His perspective. This gives the idea “It’s more blessed to give than to receive” new and deeper meaning.