

How to be Generous like the Magi

Living a Generous Life series

by Bill Aumack

Good morning. You guys remember last time I preached about four weeks ago, we talked about the birth of Jesus, right? And we Mary, and how she had to tell Joseph she was pregnant and their trip to Bethlehem and the birth of the baby. And then we looked at those events and what could we learn from Joseph from that? And after the service, I do what I normally do, and I asked my wonderful wife, “how did the sermon go?” Hoping for a little positive feedback. And my wonderful wife answered the way she usually does. “It was good.” Not super helpful for the positive feedback, but, you know, it was good. But then she said, “but”, uh, oh, she usually doesn't say, but. “But when are you going to tell the rest of the story? You stopped in the middle of the story.” And I thought, fair enough. I did stop in the middle of the story. So today we're going to cover the rest of the story and we're going to see what we can learn from the magi about being generous. Okay?

Because we're in part two of our living a generous life, and we're talking about how to be generous like the magi. Last week, Pastor talked about time and how we can be generous with our time. And this week we're going to be looking at the magi.

So let's go ahead and just jump straight in and get going. Let's open our Bibles to Luke chapter two, Luke chapter two. And we're going to pick up the story from where we left off last time. Give me an amen when you get to Luke chapter two, Starting on verse eight. *And there were shepherds living out in the fields nearby, keeping watch over their flocks. At night, an angel of the Lord appeared to them, and the glory of the Lord shone around them. And they were terrified. But the angel said to them, do not be afraid. I bring you good news that will cause great joy for all people. Today in the town of David, a savior has been born to you. He is the Messiah, the Lord. This will be a sign to you. You will find the baby wrapped in clothes and lying in a manger. Suddenly, a great company of the heavenly host appear, the angel praising God and saying, glory to God in the highest, and on earth, peace to them on*

whom his favor rests. And when the angels had left them and gone to heaven, the shepherds said to one another, let's go to Bethlehem and see this thing that has happened, which the Lord told us about. So they hurried off, found Mary and Joseph and the baby who was lying in the manger. When they had seen him, they spread the word concerning what had been told to them about the child. And all who heard it were amazed at what the shepherds said to them. But Mary treasured up these things and pondered them in her heart. The shepherds returned glorifying and praising God for all the things they had heard and seen which were just as they had been told.

We know this story. I'm not gonna spend a lot of time talking about the shepherds today. But two things I wanna point out.

The shepherds are one of the reasons we know that Jesus was not born December 25, okay? Because the shepherds were living in the hills nearby. As you know, wintertime, it's cold. And in Israel, it's cold and rainy. That's the rainy season. Occasionally they get snow, but usually it's cold and rainy. And so the shepherds are close to town so that when the rainstorms come, they can go inside. Right? They're smart like that, okay? In the spring, after the rainy season passes, they head up into the hills, into the mountains. And by the way, you know, we have [big] mountains. They have [smaller] mountains, okay? Much smaller mountains than we're used to here in California, okay? But they head up into their mountains and they look for pastures, and they spend the spring and the summer roaming, finding pastures. And as fall comes, they. They start making their way back down to town. And when the Bible says they were living in the hills nearby, they've made their way back down to town and are living close to town so that they can, when the rains come, duck inside. All right? So Jesus is probably born in the fall, okay?

The second thing I wanna point out about the shepherds is the shepherd's story and the magi story is very similar. I don't know if you've ever noticed that before. They both find out about the baby. The magi find out through studying and the ancient prophecies. The shepherds find out through the angel telling them. They both have some conversation about this. They both go on a journey to go see the baby. Short journey for the shepherds, long journey for the magi. They both fall down and worship the baby. And the Bible tells us that the shepherds went and told everybody they could find about what they had

seen. And it doesn't tell us that about the Magi, but they had to when they got back home. We'll talk more about this more in a minute. They had to have friends that were going, like, so you've been gone a year. Did you find the baby or not? You won't believe what happened to us, right? They had to know, they had to tell some people. So at some level, those stories are very similar.

And one thing you can bet is that none of them forgot this story. Can you imagine them as grandkids, grandparents? And the grandkids gather around Grandpa, tell us the story about the night the baby was born. Grandma goes, oh, no, don't encourage him. Grandpa's like, gather round, kids. You know, the story gets a little bigger and a little more verbose. And, you know, everything's, you know, like fishing stories, and I call it a fish and, you know, yeah, just gets bigger and bigger and bigger. Right?

So after this, the next part of the story is Jesus is 40 days old. He's taken to the temple. That's where Simeon and Anna get to meet them. And they know who this baby is immediately. We're going to leave you to read that yourself.

But let's look down to verse 39, Luke 2, verse 39. And it said, *when Joseph and Mary had done everything required by the law of the Lord, they returned to Galilee on their own, to the town of Nazareth. And the child grew and became strong and. And was filled with wisdom, and the grace of God was on him.*

Hey, what happened to the magi? We had to go back to Matthew to find out what happened with the magi. So back to Matthew. Everybody's turning over to Matthew, chapter two. Remember, we get most of our story from Luke and Matthew. So Matthew chapter two, and we find the story of the magi starting right there in verse one. Give me an Amen when you get there, all right? It says, *after Jesus was born in Bethlehem in Judea, during the time of King Herod, magi from the east came to Jerusalem and asked, where is the one who has been born, King of the Jews? We saw his star when it rose, and we have come to do what? Worship him. When King Herod heard this, he was disturbed and all Jerusalem with him. When he had called together all the people and the chief priests and the teachers of the law, he asked them where the Messiah was to be born. In Bethlehem and Judea, they replied, for this is what the prophet has written. 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. Then Herod called the magi secretly and found out from them the exact time the star had appeared. He sent them to Bethlehem and said, go and search carefully for the child, and as soon as you find him, report to me so that I too may go and worship him. After they heard the king, they went on their way, and the star they had seen when it rose went ahead of them until they stopped over the place where the child was. When they saw the star, they were overjoyed. 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 and frankincense and myrrh. And having been warned in a dream not to go back to Herod, they returned to their country by another route.

The Bible doesn't tell us a lot about the Magi. Precious little. But if we look back in history, there's quite a bit we can figure out.

Well, number one, we don't even know if there was three Magi or not. Early traditions suggest there might have been 12 or 13, some even 14. Okay, we've kind of landed on three because there were three gifts. But you know, maybe they went halves in on the gifts. Who knows? So, you know, there might have been more. More than that.

We don't even really know where they're from. And we're going to talk more about this in a minute. But most likely they were from Babylon, maybe from Persia. Now, if you remember your map and if I can do this backwards, you know, Bethlehem is here and to the east. East for you guys will be this side. Kind of northeast is Babylon, kind of southeast is Persia. They're about the same distance from Bethlehem. Okay, Give or take. And that distance is like 900 miles. Okay, so I want you to think about a camel trip. That's 900 miles. My bum hurts already. And you're going to smell like camel when you get there. Right? Okay, so I believe they kind of came from Babylon. We'll talk more about that because they had probably access to a lot of the Jewish scrolls. Remember, they came and overran Israel in 605 BC and take Daniel and a whole bunch of people back. There was a couple uprisings. They come and do that again, they end up with a bunch of Jews in Babylon that brought their Bibles with them. They had these writings.

Daniel was the chief wiseman. He had writings. And Daniel was crazy respected. We forget this. Daniel served at least four kings. And this is highly unusual. Not impossible, but highly unusual. What happens when a new president gets elected? What does he do with his chief of staff and cabinet? Does he use the one the other guy had? No, he gets a new one. Right. Kings do the same thing. Right? And it might have been a little bit different if daddy was king and he passes away and Junior becomes king. Maybe you keep more of the staff because they were loyal to dad, they'll be loyal to me. But when Persia overruns Babylon and takes over, do they keep all the wise men? No, no, they bring in their own people that they trust and know to do that. But Daniel remains. That says volumes about Daniel. I don't think we talk about that enough. We focus on the prophecies and all the other things. But Daniel is a person who was respected in multiple kingdoms, not just Babylon. Crazy. So they would have had Daniel's writings they could have looked at. We also know that they weren't there the night of Jesus birth. Look at that picture there. You see that? We got Mary and Joseph. We got a shepherd and what do we got? Wise men on a camel. There's no way they were there that night, right? There's no way. By the time they saw what was going on and researched it and looked through the scrolls. Now research for them was hard. Research for us is Google and we get an answer. Research for them was, let's read the Old Testament and see what it says. It took a while, okay? Then they had to convince the king to send them on this trip. Then they had to get together the people to go, right? Let's assume there was 12 of them. Well, now we need tents. We need people to set up the tents. We need food. We need people to cook the food. We need people to take care of the animals. Now we need camels to carry more stuff. We need food for the animals. Now we need more people to wrangle the animals. We need a trailboss, maybe we need some security, couple guards, right? This is not three dudes walking across the desert at night. This is a military procession, right? You ever been on the freeway when somebody important goes by and there's police escort and then there's a black suv and a black suv and a black limo and a black suv and then more police escort, just for one dude. I always want to get in their way with my car. What are you going to do? You can't stop and leave that guy alone. We're doing 45 on the way to the airport. Sorry. Sometimes I get a little obstinate. All right, so this was quite a procession. Imagine when they come rolling into Jerusalem, right? How much of Jerusalem knows they're there? Everybody, right? This is an event. Imagine when they roll into the little itty

bitty town of Bethlehem. They just doubled the population of Bethlehem, right? So this is a big deal. Okay?

Now we know they weren't there the night that it happened, because it's 900 miles and 900 miles at 20 miles a day, which there's no way they could do is a month and a half, right? So it probably took three months, four months of just travel time. That didn't include all the getting ready time. That's just travel time. When Ezra does this trip 600 years earlier as he's traveling to get king permission from the king to start rebuilding Jerusalem, took him four months, okay? So that's a pretty safe thing, four months. So if Jesus is born in the fall, they don't show up. You know, Three Kings Day is January 6th. That's not when they were here. They go through that January all the way through the year. The next fall to the next January is when they show up, show up. It's like a year and a half later. The baby's a year and a half old now. And I've always wondered, why are Mary and Joseph still in Bethlehem? Right? They went down for the census. Surely they filled out the paperwork by now. It's been a year and a half. But I don't know. They stayed for some reason having a good time with family and just chose to stay. I always wonder, like, what's happening to Joseph's workshop back home in Nazareth? Squatters moving in. Who knows what's happening, right?

So they show up a long time later and, you know, how did they convince the king to even go? Why does the King of Babylon care whether there's another king born? I think that the Babylonians and the Persians are watching the Romans going, hey, if there's some messiah coming up that's going to kick those Romans back to Rome, I'm all for it, right? Your enemy's my enemy. And let's send them packing, right? And then there's the wise men's friends and maybe family. Can you imagine them trying to tell their friends, look, we saw a new star. And they're like, yeah, I would have remember that one. Yeah, baby's been born. The Messiah. We're going to see him. You're what? Why? Who cares? And even if he is the Messiah, it's going to be 20 or 30 years before he's old enough to do anything. Go visit him then. See if it works out to be anything. We'll hear some stories, right? There had to be somebody there that was like, you're nuts. Why are you going on this long trip? You know, it's a wild goose chase. Historians tell us that there was a hunger and an expectation for A Messiah during this time. And probably a lot of that came from the fact that the Jewish people had been scattered throughout the

region. And they told stories of the Messiah. They were waiting for the Messiah. The Messiah is going to come. And that story starts getting around. And people were waiting for the Messiah. And it was believed that they would be coming from the holy land of Israel. Okay? And so we see them looking towards this, a star rising meant to the astrologers that that was a king. That's how they understood astronomy. Okay. That the star signified something important was going to happen.

And the Persian and the Babylonian empires were very similar. They were served. You know, the king was served by this kind of priestly class of wise men that told them the truth. They understood the world through the ancient prophecies. God spoke to them in a language they understood. Right? The ancient scrolls is where wisdom is. We don't understand what that is. Let's go look in the books of wisdom. How much better would we be if we did that? I don't understand what's going on. Let me go look in my book of wisdom [places hand on Bible], see what I can figure out. All right, so again, we know that they were there.

Daniel's in Babylon for 70 years and writes a lot of stuff. And they get these books. And so what would they have known or what would they have been capable of knowing about the baby? I don't know exactly what they knew and what they didn't know, but here's a few things they could have known. We're not going to read all these texts, but I put them on your notes so that you can look them up later and see.

Genesis 3:15 = Born of a Woman But they could have known that this Messiah was born of a woman. They're looking for a baby, right? We're not looking for an adult. We're looking for a baby.

Isaiah 40-66 = A Suffering Servant Isaiah 40, 66 just talks about a suffering servant. They know they're looking for somebody who's not royalty. They're not looking for the palace. They go to the king's palace. They don't say, let me see the baby. They say, where is he? Because they know he's not in the palace. They're not looking for king. They're looking for the Messiah.

Numbers 24:17. They know that a star is rising out of Israel. There's the star. That's where Israel is.

2 Chronicles 6-16. They know that he's coming as a king, Daniel. And they certainly had the writings of Daniel, that he was going to be God and man. And

you see that they worshiped Him. They didn't just come and pay respects to a new king. They came and worshiped him. They knew full well who this was. **Isaiah 53:5-10. They know that he came to die.**

And this tells us a lot about the gifts that they bring, because they bring gold, which is a gift for a king. They bring frankincense, which is an incense that was for the divine. You burn the incense so the smell and the smoke goes up to the gods. It was a gift for the divine. And they bring myrrh, which is a funeral gift used as a burial incense. They knew good and well who this baby was, that he was coming to be born. He was God. He was the Messiah, and he was born to die. Amazing insight. Amazing insight.

God wanted them to be part of this, and he spoke to them in the language they understood.

All right, so what do we learn about being generous from the wise men? You probably never thought about this before. This way. **One, they were generous with their time.** Pastor talked about time last week. I'm not going to spend a lot of time talking about time, but it took them probably more than a year to see this, to research, to get everything together to make the trip, see the baby, to make the trip back. They've got more than a year invested in this, and they were generous with their time. You ever worked on anything that took you a year? Like, if we can't get something done in two weeks, like, I'm tired of that. Right.

They were also generous with their resources. Now, I don't know how much the king paid for and how much they paid for. Maybe the king funded the whole trip and paid for the gifts, I don't know. But the wise men were still generous with their resources because they picked very extravagant gifts, very expensive gifts. It's very likely that Mary and Joseph lived off these gifts for a number of years. Okay, so they were very generous with their resources.

And I want you to pause right there. We're going to take a little sidebar, pull out an offering envelope. We like to do this once or twice a year and remind everybody about how giving here works and when you're generous with your resources, where does it go? Because we want to be perfectly transparent about where the money goes. Okay. So if you look at your tithe envelope and if

you do this online, it should look pretty similar to this. You see, the first little thing there is tithe. 10%. The Bible talks about a 10% tithe. When you give tithe in the Adventist church, that money does not stay at the local church. That goes to the conference, Every red cent of it. Okay? So if we all paid tithe, and let's say we were all super generous, we all paid 20% tithe, we're crazy generous. But nobody paid offerings, this church would close because all that money leaves here. Now we see some benefits from that. Like, that pays Pastor Chris's salary. So Pastor Chris is happy when we pay tithe. And the tithe money does the work of the church. So, as you know, we have different levels in the church. We're part of a conference. So the money goes to the conference, they take a fraction of it and send it on up to the union, and they take a fraction and send it on up to the division, and the division takes a fraction and sends it on up the remainder up to the world church. Okay? And this money does the work of the church. This is what pays for missionaries. This is what puts mission fields. This is what plants churches. This is what does evangelistic series. This money does the work of the church. This is the benefit of being part of a denomination. There's no way we could have the impact that as a one church that we have when all the churches put their money together, right? So that's the advantage of that.

Then next you see we have local church funds, conference funds and mission funds. These are the offerings. So local church funds that stays here in the local church. We have church budget. Church budget is what drives everything here. That's what pays for the envelope you're holding in your hand. That's what pays for the electricity and the gardener and the cleaning people and everything that we do here. Now, we do have some other funds that sometimes, like when we were trying to fix the roof, we said, put money in the building fund that helps us fix the roof. And, you know, we all gave sacrificially to that. But if we didn't have enough money in the building fund, we pay for the rest out of church budget. Okay? Church budget is the driving force for us here locally. So if you don't know what to give to, give to church budget, and that makes it down to the other ministries.

And then we see where there's conference and mission funds that you can give to. And our offerings. So four weeks and a month, two of them, the offerings go to us, the local church, and two, the other two are split. They usually go to the one for the conference, and then the other ones are split

between the division and the union. You'll hear that when they go, like today, the offerings for Religious Liberty. That's not a local church, one that's going out to somebody else. So if you want to give to the offering of the day, you always got to mark that on your envelope, either electronically or one you drop in the envelope in the basket at the end. So it goes. I hope that's clear. I ran through that quick. We cover that every year. So we just want to remind everybody we're wrapping up our books for the year and we'll have out a report of how we did last year on budget and what our budget's going to be for next year. But they're not quite, quite ready yet. All right, done with the sidebar. Back to the Magi. All right, shake your heads. We're going back to the Magi.

Okay, last one. **The Magi were generous with their curiosity and their attention.** Their curiosity and their attention, Right. They saw that star and it made them curious what's going on and their attention. We live in a world of short videos, sound bites, doom scrolling, we can't even hold. People don't watch movies anymore, it's too long. But they were curious and it held their attention.

The question I have is, am I paying enough attention to God and his Word? Am I curious enough to read it and see what it says about him? This year we're trying something a little different with our reading plan. We're not just saying, read three chapters a day and try and race through it. Spend time and read it. Be curious, ask questions. I'd rather have you read one book and understand it than say, I read the whole Bible. What's it say? Talked about Jesus, you know, I don't really know. I'd rather. Let's understand it. So let's take the time. Let's be curious and spend some attention. Think about it, have questions, Come and ask somebody questions. Ask pastor, ask myself, ask somebody else. They may not know either. I had people ask me a question. I'm like, that's a good question. Let me go home and think about that. I'll get back to you. Okay? It's great to ask those kinds of questions.

And then our challenge, **if necessary, give something up. So you can spend 10 or 15 or even 30 minutes reading the Bible, stop and be curious. Think about it.** There's no rush. You don't have to be done by a certain date. My yoke is easy and my burden is light. No rush. Read it and let the Holy Spirit help you understand it. Amen.

Let's pray. Heavenly Father, thank you so much for these example of generosity that we see. Help us to be generous and most importantly, Lord, help us to be generous with our time and our curiosity and to think about the things that you have written for us in the Bible. Does it matter to me? Am I following that? Does that conflict or line up with the other things I think and believe? Do I need to change my thoughts or my behavior? Lord, help us to be curious about you. Be with us now. In Jesus name Amen.