

A Different Kind of Christmas: Living and Giving Like Jesus

Session 3 - "By a Different Road"

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. And having been warned in a dream not to go back to Herod, they returned to their country by another route. - Matthew 2:11-12 (NIV)

- Epiphany is the moment in the liturgical year after Christmastide that celebrates the arrival of the wise men who traveled long distances to greet the Christ child.
- Over the centuries of telling the story of the birth of Christ, a mistake has been made that places the Magi (wise men) at the scene of Christ's birth. However, they really didn't arrive until Jesus was around two years old. According to the information in the Gospel of Matthew, the Magi traveled almost two years to reach the new King. They did not kneel at his manger but met with him in a house.
 - **READ** - Matthew 2:1-12. How does the story of the Magi differ from the what traditionally think of their visit to baby Jesus?
 - **CONSIDER** - Why do you think we have changed the way we view the elements of the Christmas story?
 - **READ** - Matthew 2:16. What can we learn about Herod from his reaction to the news of a new king being born?
 - **CONSIDER** - When the Magi concluded their visit with Jesus, verse 12 says that they left "by another route." How does this affect the outcome of the Christmas story?
- Much of the story of the birth of Christ is about a change in direction, mostly the change in direction of the relationship between God and humanity. Instead of the complex systems of laws that were in place, Jesus came to fulfill the law and simplify the connection with God. It is this new, simplified connection with God through Jesus Christ that informs the changes we make in our individual lives.
- The New Year always presents an opportunity to reflect, refocus, and redirect. Many times these efforts take the form of resolutions to change behaviors, habits, and patterns in hopes to improve our quality of life. One of the key ways to do this is evaluating the way we live and give against the standard that Jesus sets for us.
 - **READ** - Matthew 6:21. If you were to make an honest assessment of way you handle your financial resources, what would you find?
 - **READ & CONSIDER** - Mark 10:17-22. How do overspending, debt, and materialism affect our ability to fully commit to following Jesus? In what ways can working to eliminate these attachments from our lives enhance pursuit of living a Christ centered life?

“Our outward world is a reflection of our inner world; we have to clean up outer space to open up inner space as well as to release underused resources for God’s mission.”

- Our financial world is one area in which we can work to change direction toward a Christ centered perspective. What are some other areas that you are individually willing to work to intentional change for the coming year? Write them in the space below.

Key Insights

1. With the beginning of the New Year, January is the traditional time to commit to taking a different road - to change the direction of our lives.
2. Simplifying our lifestyles reduces stress.
3. God’s redemptive work in the world is multiplied when we give our treasures to Jesus.
4. Changing course - taking a different road - involves repentance.
5. Jesus spoke about money and possessions more than about any other topic - even more than prayer and faith combined.
6. Our outward world is a reflection of our inner world. When we clean up our outer space, we open up inner space and release underused resources for God’s mission.
7. There are opportunities everywhere to be Christ’s light by serving others’ need in practical ways.

Heading into 2016...

- Think of ways you can change your priorities so that this year you will focus on Jesus more and yourself less.
- Take the time to declutter your closets and give underused resources to people who could use them. Tell the people to whom you give these items about the good news of Jesus.
- Make a commitment to demonstrate your faith by participating in practical service this year. Then, take the necessary steps to become involved in the area of service that you have chosen.

Prayer for this week: Lord God, we celebrate you and the birth of your precious son, Jesus. This time of learning and sharing has made us aware of “God with us.” We are grateful for your Word and the opportunity to study about the miracles that you perform. Prepare our hearts to conceive and deliver your miracles, and our feet to act on your vision. Amen.