

GROWTHguide

"Gift"

December 31, 2017



THIS WEEK'S SCRIPTURES

Matthew 2:1-12, Matthew 28:16-20,
Micah 5:2,4, Acts 10:1-22, Romans 12:1-2,
Luke 1:26-38, Matthew 1:18-25, 1 Corinthians 12

DAY 1

Read [Matthew 2:1-12](#)

Happy New Year!! Exchanging gifts is big part of our Christmas celebrations, yet gifts seem to be a very materialistic and worldly way to honor Christ's birth. We focus on buying, wrapping, and exchanging gifts with other people - even those for whom Christmas Day holds no faith related meaning.

- **Why do you think we have included gifts along with angels, mangers, Bethlehem and stars as one of our symbols of Christmas during this year's Advent and Christmas messages?**
- **What are some of the other ways that the world corrupts very special Holy celebrations? What do you do to ensure that you and your family maintain a "reason for the season" focus on Advent, Christmas, Lent and Easter and on the giving and receiving of gifts?**
- **Reflect on the story of the Magi and identify the gifts they gave Jesus in addition to the gold, frankincense and myrrh.**

DAY 2

Read [Matthew 28:16-20](#), [Micah 5:2, 4](#), and [Acts 10:1-22](#)

Jesus was heralded as the Messiah and the fulfillment of divine prophecy. Why do you think God chose to use pagan priests or Magi to draw attention to the fulfillment of Micah's prophecy? The three Magi were early truth-seekers and we would do well to remember that people come to Christ from many faith traditions or belief systems.

- **What do the Magi teach us about how we should regard non-believers who question us about our Lord? What is your attitude toward those who are not Christian "insiders?" Does your attitude need to change?**
- **How will you allow yourself to be used to share the Good News of Jesus Christ in the year ahead?**
- **The Magi traveled almost 1000 miles to find the infant Jesus. How "far" will you go to seek him out during 2018? What spiritual discipline will you undertake to keep Christ at the center of your life...a serious New Year's resolution might help!**

DAY 3 - Worship

Read [Romans 12:1-2](#)

The Bible teaches us that authentic worship is much more than a once-a-week attendance at Sunday morning services. Allen P. Ross, in his book *Recalling the Hope of Glory*, reminds us that "this God we say we know is the sovereign Creator and Lord of the whole universe, the eternal and ever-living God, all wise, all powerful, and ever present. Our attention to the Lord must not be an ordinary part of life; our worship of him should be the most momentous, urgent, and glorious activity of our lives." The unfortunate truth is that many Christians view worship as

one of several attractive Sunday morning options. Worship should be a priority for us because God's Word, presence and equipping come to us through times of worship. Worship is something we do in community but it is also something we should make time for in private moments with God each and every day.

- **The Magi traveled hundreds of miles, sacrificed months of their lives, and offered precious gifts to the Lord as a form of authentic worship. How does your worship compare in terms of commitment and perseverance?**
- **How might you volunteer to help make the worship experience for our visitors more welcoming and meaningful?**
- **Ask the Holy Spirit to help you glorify God by offering of yourself as a "holy and living sacrifice" in your daily life. Search for ways to worship God through consistent acts of service to others.**

DAY 4

[Read Luke 1:26-38](#), [Matthew 1:18-25](#) and reread [Matthew 2:1-12](#)

The Christmas story is filled with examples of people who chose to be obedient to God's call and guidance. Mary risked life and family relationships. Joseph risked his reputation and occupation. The Magi risked the wrath of a ruthless human ruler. God used their obedient responses to fulfill his divine plan.

- **How obedient have you been in your responses to divine nudges this year?**
- **Spend some time reflecting on how you have responded to God's guidance and commands. Rejoice for those instances when obedience**

prevailed and identify the reasons for your less obedient responses.

- **Pray for the Holy Spirit to strengthen you against fear, selfishness or the other things that move us to disregard and disobey God's direction.**

DAY 5

Read [1 Corinthians 12](#)

We all have the capacity to worship, to obey and to be generous with our time talent and resources. The Apostle Paul reminds us that each of us is uniquely gifted to serve God in our own special way and that when we use our individual gifts in unity, we can accomplish much more than any one of us can do alone. The year ahead will give all of us opportunities to use our gifts of teaching, giving, hospitality, administration, wisdom, helping, encouraging and all the rest to further God's purpose for St. Paul as we open a second site and welcome new neighbors.

Let's make this year's New Year's Resolutions count! Let's resolve together to be the people God calls us to be, and for St. Paul to continue to be a community of faith where we Glorify God through our worship, Grow in our Faith through the practice of spiritual disciplines, and Give in Love by using the gifts God gives each of us to fulfill God's divine purpose.

DAY 6

Spend some time in prayer and then some time in silence. Ask God to speak into your heart about the year just ended and about what lies ahead for you, your family and your church.



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