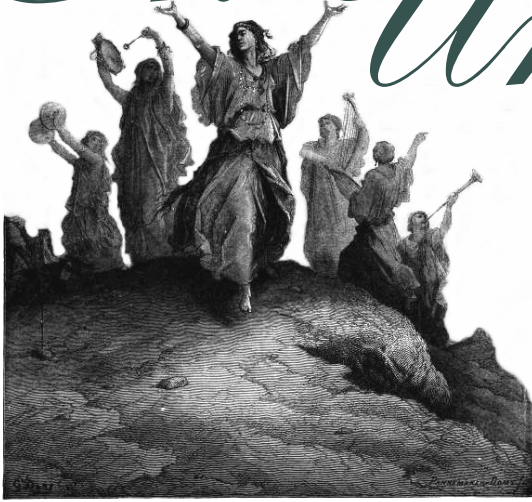


In Unison



The trumpeters and singers joined in unison, as with one voice, to give praise and thanks to the Lord.
2 Chronicles 5:13

Generosity

given a beautiful pattern for our offerings in the story of the wise men who paid homage to Christ in Bethlehem.

I t is possible that the most misunderstood moment in the Sunday morning worship service is the time of the offering.

After the times of direct worship or praise—whether by the spoken word, or the singing of hymns or choruses—the offering is the most important time for the individual or the family group to demonstrate adoration for God. This is the time when we are given the privilege to say, “You, my heavenly Father, have been generous toward me, so out of my bounty I happily, eagerly, give back to you as a sacrifice of praise.”

You see, our worship is not to be just words. The words are only there to describe our actions. Words without action are nothing better than hypocrisy. Our offering is to be one more act of worship directed toward our God. We are

Offering-worship

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 in the east and have come to worship him.”

These distinguished gentlemen traveled no small distance to worship the child. The rigors of this journey were part of their sacrifice for Him.

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 make a careful search for the child. As soon as you find him, report to me, so that I too may go and worship him.” After they had heard the king, they went on their way, and the star they had seen in the east went ahead of them until it stopped over the place where the child was. When they saw the star, they were overjoyed.

Implicit in this story is the impression that they weren’t paying any attention to Herod at all. His words to them sound like a royal command, but as soon as they leave his presence, their focus is back on track. And they are overjoyed that the star has finally come to rest. Now they can worship the *real* King!

On coming to the house, they saw the child with his mother Mary, and they bowed down and worshipped him. Then they opened their treasures and presented him with gifts of gold and of incense and of myrrh.

Matthew 2:1-2,7-11

Here is a perfect picture of real offering-worship. The magi first offer their words of honor and devotion by bowing down and worshipping the Christ child. But then they add to this the more tangible gift of their riches—a human way of saying, “You are worthy!”

“True worship seeks union with its beloved, and an active effort to close the gap between the heart and the God it adores is worship at its best!” A.W. Tozer

*R*isking profound discomfort, let us compare that first Bethlehem scene to a typical, contemporary worship service.

A Rude Interruption

The bulletin informs us that since we just sang hymn #249, it is now time for the offering to be collected. The ushers or deacons troop down to the front of the sanctuary and stand in a line, hands folded over their belts, faces intently serious, while one of them or the pastor offers the prayer (“... bless the gift and the giver.”).

After the “Amen,” an immediate buzz starts up, swelling over the room, as the congregation takes the opening strains of the organ’s offertory as signal to finish the conversations that had been so rudely abbreviated by the earlier Call to Worship.

The plates distributed to them, the men fan out down the aisles, passing the plates back and forth, up and down the pews. In turn, each parishioner turns from speaking with his neighbor to slip a check or bill into the filling plate, continues it down the line, then returns to discussing the topic at hand.

Three or four minutes later the organ crescendos and ritards the ending of the offertory, signaling to the congregation that it is now time to put away those conversations so that the pastor’s sermon can be heard.

An Acceptable Sacrifice

There are, of course, variations on this scene. Some churches experience nothing like this—some are worse. But probably you could pick out more than one component that could be observed in your own church body.

The point is this: Whether you remain seated in the pew, or carry your offering to the altar and fall prostrate in worship before the Lord, the offering is to be an act of personal and corporate worship; whether your offering-worship

is silent or verbal, it is to be a time during which you individually, or collectively as a unified body, offer up a sacrifice of earthly goods to say, “You, O Lord, are worthy!”

Not that I am looking for a gift, but I am looking for what may be credited to your account. I have received full payment and even more; I am amply supplied, now that I have received from Epaphroditus the gifts you sent. They are a fragrant offering, an acceptable sacrifice, pleasing to God. And my God will meet all your needs according to his glorious riches in Christ Jesus. Philippians 4:17-19

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“Unless we feel it is an honour and a joy to give, God does not accept the offering.” Charles Hodge

Scripture

But Samuel replied: "Does the Lord delight in burnt offerings and sacrifices as much as in obeying the voice of the Lord? To obey is better than sacrifice, and to heed is better than the fat of rams." 1 Samuel 15:22

"I hate, I despise your religious feasts; I cannot stand your assemblies. Even though you bring me burnt offerings and grain offerings, I will not accept them. Though you bring choice fellowship offerings, I will have no regard for them. Away with the noise of your songs! I will not listen to the music of your harps. But let justice roll on like a river, righteousness like a never-failing stream!" Amos 5:21-24

With what shall I come before the Lord and bow down before the exalted God? Shall I come before him with burnt offerings, with calves a year old? Will the Lord be pleased with thousands of rams, with ten thousand rivers of oil? Shall I offer my firstborn for my transgression, the fruit of my body for the sin of my soul? He has showed you, O man, 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. Micah 6:6-8

Therefore, I urge you, brothers, in view of God's mercy, to offer your bodies as living sacrifices, holy and pleasing to God—this is your spiritual act of worship. Romans 12:1

"Be careful not to do your 'acts of righteousness' before men, to be seen by them. If you do, you will have no reward from your Father in heaven." "So when you give to the needy, do not announce it with trumpets, as the hypocrites do in the synagogues and on the streets, to be honored by men. I tell you the truth, they have received their reward in full. But when you give to the needy, do not let your left hand know what your right hand is doing, so that your giving may be in secret. Then your Father, who sees what is done in secret, will reward you." Matthew 6:1-4

On the first day of every week, each one of you should set aside a sum of money in keeping with his income, saving it up, so that when I come no collections will have to be made. 1 Cor. 16:2

Now finish the work, so that your eager willingness to do it may be matched by your completion of it, according to your means. For if the willingness is there, the gift is acceptable according to what one has, not according to what he does not have. 2 Cor. 8:11-12

Remember this: Whoever sows sparingly will also reap sparingly, and whoever sows generously will also reap generously. Each man should give what he has decided in his heart to give, not reluctantly or under compulsion, for God loves a cheerful giver. 2 Cor. 9:6-7

Through Jesus, therefore, let us continually offer to God a sacrifice of praise—the fruit of lips that confess his name. Hebrews 13:15



Hymns and Choruses

Master, No Offering (Parker)
Yet may love's incense rise;
Sweeter than sacrifice...

With Thankful Hearts, O Lord, We Come (Mohler)
Accept the offering, Lord, we bring,
And help us loud Thy praises sing.

We Are So Blessed (Gaither)
We are so blessed,
Take what we have to bring;
Take it all, everything,
Lord we love You so much.

God's Ways are Wonderful (Kaiser)
We cannot give without receiving
So much more than we have given.

Doxology (Ken)
Praise God, from whom all blessings flow;
Praise Him all creatures here below;
Praise Him above, ye heavenly host;
Praise Father, Son, and Holy Ghost!

In Unison

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