

December 16, 2023

Local Church Budget

The Christmas story of Christ's birth in a stable includes visits by local shepherds and Wise Men from far away.

The shepherds, although the low-class people of Bethlehem, played a vital role for God's people. Jerusalem, located only five miles (eight kilometers) from Bethlehem, needed "spotless lambs" for daily sacrifices and many more during festivals like the Passover. These shepherds took care of the little lambs to ensure they would be pristine enough for sacrifice. Maybe that's why the angelic host appeared to the shepherds in Bethlehem, giving them a personalized invitation to visit the spotless Lamb of God who would take away the sins of the world. However, the shepherds had no gift for Baby Jesus. Instead, they joyfully proclaimed His arrival to the world (Luke 2:16–18).

The Wise Men represented the other end of the social and economic spectrum. Even though they were part of the wealthy intelligentsia, they still found themselves drawn to something far greater than themselves. Following the star, they came to Jerusalem (Matt. 2:1) and directly to the temple (*Desire of Ages*, p. 60), asking, "Where is the newborn King of the Jews?" Prejudiced and defensive religious leaders could point the Magi to nearby Bethlehem, but they refused to go there themselves. However, the Wise Men went. In fact, "wise men still seek Him." And they worshiped and gave gifts.

This Sabbath you're invited to worship and to give gifts, just like the Wise Men thousands of years ago.