Well Christmas season is in full swing.

- We have/had a great kids program this morning.
- Decorations are going up around town.
  My wife decorated our house this week. It looks great.
- Another way you can tell it’s Christmas time is the music has changed.
  This year I’m liking the Christmas music.
  We have the satellite radio in the car and I get this great Christmas traditions station that has Dean Martin and Frank Sinatra and Perry Como and all those guys.
  I wouldn’t listen to those guys other times of year.
  But wow does C’mas music from these guys just warm my heart with feelings of my childhood.

- Christmas gatherings have started.
  We had a Christmas Banquet on Friday and had 75 people and had a nice time.
- I went to a few Christmas shows already.
  We had a few people from our church in the WCCC Community Choir and they put on a great show last night.
  My wife went to see the Nut Cracker in Pittsburgh yesterday, too, with a church friend. And I want to thank Joanie and Angel for going with her ... so I didn’t have to.

- Another way you can tell it’s Christmas is the parking lots at the mall are full.
  It’s that time of year that you have to do the stalker thing in the parking lot.
  You know when there are no spots at all left, so you look for people coming out of the mall and you try to get in the row behind then and drive real slow.
  So let me just warn You, if you are one of those people who walk all the way down one row, and then at the last moment you cut across the row and get in a car on the other side, I will wish you a merry Christmas.

And one of the other things that we experience at Christmas time is appropriately called Christmas remorse.

Christmas remorse is that guy going into the Christmas season with the intentions that this year is going to be different.
This year things are gonna be different.
I’m not gonna over eat.
I’m gonna keep my schedule
I’m not gonna go crazy on gifts
I will focus on the right stuff – the real meaning of Christmas, peace, love, relationships.

And then January comes around and a lot of us experience Christmas remorse
We get to January and were more exhausted than ever, again.
Were emotionally numb again.

And even worse than all of that is that sometimes we get to January
and we feel further away from God than we did going into the Christmas season.

Think about that.
Going into the season in which we are celebrating the incarnation of God in our world
and we get into January sometimes feeling more exhausted and further away from God
than we did going into the season.

So here's my goal for this season.
I just want to improve the percentage this year of the number of people in our church,
and the number of people hopefully in our families who when Christmas gets over
they’re just a little bit more joyful
they’re just a little bit more peaceful
they’re just a little bit more understanding of God's incredible love
and his purpose for our lives

Title slide
What I want this Christmas, my Christmas wish,
is that I want for all of us, including Tim Stradling,
to just try and get this Christmas right, to just get this Christmas right.

That's what we’re gonna be talking about over the next several weeks,
We’re talking about getting Christmas right.

And I want to start today by talking about
something that a lot of us are going to spend a lot of time doing in the next few weeks
and that is this whole thing of buying, and purchasing, and giving gifts.

We’re gonna spent a lot of time in the next few weeks dealing with the whole gift thing.
And I wanna remind us why we do this gift giving thing around Christmas

There are some spiritual reasons for that.
Obviously because of the gift that God has given us in his Son. We’re gonna be talking about that today.

But there's another reason we do that. And that's because on the first Christmas the wise man, the Magi, the ones who came from afar to seek this newborn King that they had heard about, they brought gifts.

That was part of their recognition of who He was and part of their worship.

And so I want to start out today by having you turn in a Bibles to Matthew Ch. 2

Matthew 2:1-12

1 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."

2 When King Herod heard this he was disturbed, and all Jerusalem with him. 4 When he had called together all the people's chief priests and teachers of the law, he asked them where the Christ was to be born. 5 "In Bethlehem in Judea," they replied, "for this is what the prophet has written:

6 "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 be the shepherd of my people Israel."

7 Then Herod called the Magi secretly and found out from them the exact time the star had appeared. 8 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."

Now those of us that are familiar with the story know that Herod is lying here. Herod does not want to worship the Christ. He is threatened by the Christ child. Because he thinks what's happening here is another King, a physical king, is coming and so he wants to eradicate that child.

That’s the reason that not long after he orders the execution of all boys under two in and around the city of Bethlehem.

9 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. 10 When they saw the star, they were overjoyed. 11 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 of incense and of myrrh. 12 And having been warned in a dream not to go back to Herod, they returned to their country by another route.
Now there’s a lot of different ways that you can focus in on that text.

**You can talk about the fact that the Magi, the wise men, were spiritual seekers.**
They were not, when they made this journey, followers of Jesus Christ.  
They were coming to find out what this was all about.  
They had heard some intriguing stuff and they wanted to find out who he was.

It was only after they encountered Christ that they became worshipers of Christ and became what could be understood as followers of Christ.

That’s probably interesting to some of us that are here today because some of us here today fall into that category; that's who we are.  
We are spiritual seekers.

There are some here that you have not yet become a follower of Jesus Christ  
You're trying to figure this whole thing out, that's why you're here today.

**Another way you can look at this passage is the whole issue of the dark side of leadership.**
You know there’s a dark side of leadership and we see it in Herod's life.

And it's that thing that when we get a little power and a little control  
we sometimes are willing to do about anything to keep that power, keep that control.

And Herod is certainly an example of that.  
He’s willing to destroy the lives of dozens if not hundreds of young children just to stay in power.

**But I want to go in a different direction than either of these today.**
**I want to talk about the wise men, the Magi, as gift givers.**

Because I think some of us are convinced there's nothing that Scripture really has to say that can give us any guidance on how to navigate through the whole gift giving thing.

We think that’s part of the non-spiritual part of Christmas, so we’re just on our own with that.  
But that's just not true.

As you look at the gifts the Magi give and the implications of some of the details,  
you can really begin to pick out some principles  
that have some very practical things to say about how we do this gift giving.

So, forgive me for the bad pun here, but today let’s call this **How to give Christmas gifts ... wisely.**

The first one is this.

1. **Plan ahead**
You know that the gifts that the Magi brought to Jesus were not afterthoughts.

They didn't get to Bethlehem and all of a sudden say we gotta get this king something. In fact, the trip that these guys took, took weeks and months. And they certainly purchased these gifts of gold, frankincense, & myrrh before they left home.

So months before they got to Jesus, they had been intentional about getting those gifts. That’s planning ahead, right?

**Now, when it comes to buying Christmas gifts a lot of us can’t make the same claim.**

We make the mistake of jumping in the car and going to the mall with no real plan and we walk around the mall with our credit card locked and loaded.

And then, we find something that we think they would like and then we pull the trigger. In some instances, regardless of the price.

And that can often lead to some real gift giving frustration and disappointment, both in terms of the gifts that are given and in terms of how much we pay for the gifts that are given.

Many of those gift giving catastrophes could probably be avoided if we practiced just this principle of planning ahead.

When you think about it, the wise men offered these gifts to Jesus 2000 years ago and we’re still talking about the gifts they gave 2000 years later. Now, that’s some for any intentional gift giving.

My wife still talks about some of the gifts I’ve given her over the years but for a whole different reason than when we talk about the gifts the Magi gave.

They gave some very intentional gifts. And part of the genius behind that is that they really planned ahead.

The second way give Christmas gifts wisely is this:

1. **Make a list.**

Who do you want to give gifts to this Christmas season?

_ I didn’t_ say, who do you have to give gifts to this Christmas season?
  I said, who you want to give gifts to this Christmas season?
A lot of us really miss the joy of giving because basically we don't make a list of who we want to bless during the Christmas season.

Our list is pretty much predetermined.

And its predetermined based on who it is that we know is going to give us a gift.

And so then we need be sure and give them a gift.

So, in fact, when you think about it, during the Christmas season we’re not so much involved with gift giving, as we’re involved with gift swapping.

That's really what most of us do during the Christmas season.

We don't give gifts, we swap gifts.

That was not the case with the wise men who brought their gifts to the Christ child.

They didn’t say, “you know Mary and Joseph always get us something and so I know when we show up we really need to have something.

They didn’t even know Mary and Joseph.

They didn’t even know who the Christ child really was.

This was not gift swapping the first Christmas.

This was gift giving.

They didn’t give because they were obliged to, because they had to, but because they wanted to demonstrate their love.

They wanted to give a blessing to this king.

There was a desire here to offer something from their heart.

To give expression to their love.

So who’s on your list?

I wanna challenge you here today.

Bless some people this year beyond your immediate family whom God has made a blessing in your life.

Think about and pray about giving to some in your life who don’t give to you.

Think about and pray about giving to some people who might not be on anyone’s list.

We know that not everybody sees Jesus the same way that you do.

So let a gift with a card or kind smile be a testimony to your love for Jesus Christ.

And, join us in making a difference like that thru Advent Conspiracy. Please be prepared to give an offering for Advent Conspiracy next week.
The third principle is this
3. Determine how much you’re willing to spend.

The Magi spent a lot of money.
   Frankincense and myrrh were expensive – one was an incense for worship
   the other a fine ointment.

The Magi were probably royalty or connected to royalty.
   They got in to see King Herod.

   They had all the resources they needed
   They didn’t have any financial reason for Christmas remorse.
   They didn’t say “I got gold, when silver would have been okay.”

       But that’s not the case for almost all of us.
       Our financial resources are not unlimited.

Ric Edelman is a respected financial advisor in America
   He has a radio talk show about money and finances.
   Barron’s ranked him the #1 Independent Financial Advisor in the nation in 2010.

I listened to a talk about giving with Ric in it that led to this message.

   He said that the time of year that most people get into financial trouble is during Christmas
   Because most people make a list with names on one side, then they put gifts on the other.
   And then when we see something and we like it, the last thing we look at is the price.
   And we do it over and over for each person on our list.

       Then, January comes and the MasterCard bill comes and we say, oh my.

But we ought to make our list with the names on one side
   and then how much we want to spend on the other side.

   Then, when we do that, we get to the bottom the list and draw the line.
   And we add up the right column with how much we want to spend on each person.

   Then, we ask two questions.
       1. Do we have it?
       2. Do we want to spend that much?

And, here’s the revolutionary idea!
   If, in fact, that number is bigger than you can spend or want to spend, then don’t spend it.
Edelman suggests we
   Take that total,
   Go to the bank,
   Get the cash,
   Spend only that.

If you pay more for aunt Sally, I hate to say it ... but Uncle John just doesn’t get as good a gift.

   **If you do that, you will get into Jan without Christmas remorse.**

Now, if you’re like me and you buy everything online,
   You can’t do the cash thing.
   So, you just have to have a plan your amounts and stick to it.

So, if you are already feeling a little Christmas remorse
   at the thought of how much you spent already,
   there is still time to adjust lists and return an item or two.

Here’s the bottom line ...
   **Do not violate the biblical principles of money management and debt in celebrating the incarnation of the One who gave us those principles.**

How can we give Christmas gifts wisely?
- Plan ahead
- Make a list.
- Determine how much you’re willing to spend.
**4. Personalize your gifts**

   Gold, frankincense and myrrh were fit for king,
       even for the son of God.

   They were a reflection that the Magi understood who they were giving to.

The best gifts are those that reflect that we understand the person we are giving to.

   The best gifts are often not the gifts that cost the most.
   The best gifts are the ones that say, I know you. I know who you are. I know what you like.

   Every time we give a gift it is an opportunity to say I care about YOU.

Guys tend to struggle here more than probably your wife will.
   But it’s worth the effort to understand who you are giving to
   and getting a gift that reflects her.
So here’s something to wrap this all up with a bow.

Last point.

5. These are all true of the gift God gave us at Christmas

To affirm that these are wise principles to follow in Christmas gift giving,
These are all true of the gift God gave us at Christmas

- God planned ahead.

From the very beginning of the world God planned that his Son would be the Lamb of God
That took away the sins of the world.

From the beginning of time God planned to give you the gift of forgiveness thru his Son
And what he did on the cross.

- God made a list.

He put our names on that list.

You are on his list.
He has a gift for you. You are on the list.
The question is not whether you are on his list.
The question is will you accept the gift he has planned to give you.

Imagine going thru all you could to plan a gift for someone ...
and they look you in the eyes and say, thanks but no thanks.

But that’s what billions of people have done with the gift God has prepared for us in his Son.

- God determined how much he would spend.

God determined how much he was willing to spend.
Scripture is abundantly clear how much.

John 3:16 said,
God so loved the world that he gave his one and only son that whoever believed ....

1 Peter 1:18 says,
For you know that it was not with perishable things such as silver or gold that you were
redeemed from the empty way of life handed down to you from your ancestors, but with the
precious blood of Christ, a lamb without blemish or defect.

Beside every single name on his list, God has written the price that he is willing to spend?
And the price is the same for each of us. The cross. The cross.
That’s how much God is willing to pay so we can experience eternal life, the gift of salvation, and the gift of forgiveness.

Every single one us. That’s the price that’s written beside our name. The cross.

- God personalized his gift to us

One of my favorite reflection on Christmas, some of you have heard before.

If our greatest need had been information, God would have sent us an educator.
If our greatest need had been technology, God would have sent us a scientist.
If our greatest need had been money, God would have sent us an economist.
If our greatest need had been pleasure, God would have sent us an entertainer.
But our greatest need was for forgiveness, so God sent a Savior.

The wise men brought gold and frankincense and myrrh because that's a gift that fits a king.
That’s a perfect gift.

But what kind of gift you bring to broken sinful world, who because of their own stupid choices have alienated themselves from the God who created, what's the perfect gift?

A Savior.

If you're going to get this Christmas right, that's where you have to start.
You have to start by confessing with your lips that Jesus really is Lord believing in your heart that God really didn't raise him from the dead.

We start at that point to begin to get Christmas right.

Let’s pray.