

Message: Hold Nothing Back

There Are No Limits to Love¹

“When Rick Hoyt was born, the umbilical cord coiled around his neck and cut off oxygen to his brain, leaving him a quadriplegic. His parents, Dick and Judy, were told that there was no hope for their child's development. Despite being told Rick would be a vegetable all his life, his parents were determined to raise him as normally as possible. Since Rick was unable to speak, a group of engineers built him a specially designed interactive computer that allowed him to communicate his thoughts by using the slight head movements that he could manage.

At the age of 15, Rick told his father he wanted to participate in a five-mile benefit run for a local lacrosse player who had been paralyzed in an accident. Out of love for his son, Dick, who had never previously done any long-distance running, agreed to push Rick in his wheelchair. They finished next-to-last, but were elated with their achievement.

Overwhelmed by the experience, Rick managed to communicate to his parents that for the first time in his life, competing in that race, he didn't feel disabled. Spurred on by this revelation, father and son, Team Hoyt, began entering more races.

After four years of marathons, they attempted their first triathlon - a combination of 26.2 miles of running, 112 miles of cycling and 2.4 miles of swimming. To date, they have raced in 64 marathons (with a personal best of 2:40:47), 78 half-marathons and 206 triathlons. And they once traveled 3,735 miles across America. Their achievements become more staggering when you consider that when Dick runs, he pushes Rick in his wheelchair. When Dick cycles, Rick is in a specially designed seat attached to the front of his bike. When Dick swims, he pulls Rick in a heavy, stabilized boat attached to his waist.

Watching film footage of Team Hoyt competing together is phenomenally moving. Driven by love for his son and a desire to see him fulfilled, Dick has gone to unimaginable lengths to make Rick feel alive. In every race, it is the father, Dick, who does all the work, giving every ounce of strength for the sake of his son. Rick cannot offer any

¹ <http://www.christianitytoday.com/iyf/faithandlife/devotionals/13.4.html>

physical support - in fact, he only makes more work for his father. But witness Dick's affirmation of his son and watch Rick's face as he crosses the finish line, and you might think that the son had won the race single-handedly.

The story of Dick and Rick Hoyt is a powerful reminder of our God's love for and commitment to us – God the Father, who gave everything that we might know life in all its fullness. Holding nothing back, God delights in us, sings over us, chases after us, cares deeply about us and sent his only Son to die for us.

**What is our only possible response to this extravagant love?
To hold nothing back in return.”**

Matthew 2:1-12, our passage for today, is **two stories in one**, both about holding nothing back. **First is the story of a group of travelers** – magi from the east, who held nothing back in their quest to find and give their respects to a newborn king. This is the traditional story we all know and love. Whether we think of them as “kings,” “wise men,” or magi, this group of travelers were educated, well respected, had access to wealth and were dedicated, traveling for months and asking many people for help along the way, even the cruel King Herod.

The phrase “*magi from the East*,” means the travelers were mostly likely part of a priestly class from Persia. Magi are referenced in Daniel 2:2, “*In the second year of Nebuchadnezzar’s reign, Nebuchadnezzar dreamed such dreams that his spirit was troubled and his sleep left him. So the king commanded that the magicians, the enchanters, the sorcerers, and the Chaldeans be summoned to tell the king his dreams.*” The magi were expert astrologers, magicians and diviners.

God speaks about those practices in Deuteronomy 18:14, “*Although these nations that you are about to dispossess do give heed to soothsayers and diviners, as for you, the LORD your God does not permit you to do so.*” The religious leaders of Israel didn’t care much for the magi and their priestly arts. They did respect the wealth and power they represented – their caravan would have been large, well equipped and well guarded to carry the kingly gifts of gold, frankincense and myrrh. The magi’s visit would have been the talk of Jerusalem!

So what’s going on here? What’s the big deal about a group of foreign visitors? The magi aren’t Jewish, they don’t hang around after the visit and there’s no indication they convert and become followers of Christ. First, it wasn’t unusual for magi to visit foreign lands and to offer respects at the birth or crowning of a king. What’s different here is the fact that Gentiles are making waves in Jerusalem as they have come to celebrate the birth of a king who is not celebrated by his own people. Matthew 2:2 tells us the magi went to King Herod and asked to see “*the king of the Jews.*” That title only appears in the Gospels and it applies only to Jesus. It is not political term, but has strictly messianic implications: the magi are in town to visit the newborn Messiah.

That leads us to the **second part of the story, a narrative showing us God will reveal himself to people wherever people are looking for him.** The use of horoscopes and astrology is not condoned, but Matthew is showing us that God’s grace works in all things to reveal Jesus as the Christ. There are many Christians alive today who were raised according to the Muslim faith. Their lives changed and they became Christian when they had a dream telling them to seek out Christians so they could be led to Christ and God’s Word. God holds nothing back.

God revealed the birth of Jesus to the magi by means of a star, or, more specifically “*luminous body.*” God held nothing back. That star, or angelic presence, led the magi to Jerusalem and then it guided them to a house in Bethlehem, where they met the child Jesus and his parents. God was present and active in the revelation of Jesus to representatives of another nation. God is present and active today in the revelation of Jesus to the world. People do dream of Christ and are led to faith. And we love to share stories about how God does the impossible through the improbable, even through the love of a father for a quadriplegic son.

What’s amazing to me is the fact that the temple priests and scribes knew where to look and yet they ignored what was right in front of them. When Herod asked, they told him: the Messiah would be born in Bethlehem. The king of Israel and the religious leaders should have been the first ones to the door, but they ignored the Word of God. God’s chosen people were blind and deaf to the heavenly message, “Jesus is Lord,” even though God held nothing back.

Where are we today? Are your eyes and ears open to the proclamation and revelation of Jesus as our Savior and Redeemer? Are you like the magi, dedicated and willing to travel to the humble home of our Lord and King, regardless of the time, effort and cost? Or are you comfortable with your faith, your spot in the pew and your spiritual practices, only to find that you are dead inside, missing out on the true meaning of faith and the life you could have in Christ?

God the Creator held nothing back from us when God sent Jesus, the only begotten Son to us. We didn't deserve such a magnificent gift; it was a gift made in love. God the Redeemer held nothing back when Jesus came down from heaven, emptying himself to be born as a baby, weak and vulnerable. God gave a perfect gift to save us all. God the Sustainer held nothing back, revealing the Savior to the magi and to us, foreign visitors from our land. God holds nothing back from us because God loves us and wants only good for us.

How will you respond? Will you trust God wholly and completely with all your life? Or will you hold back, waiting for others to go first, ignoring what is right before you?

The only people who honored the Messiah, the king of kings, were despicable, low class shepherds, Jesus' poor parents and Gentile visitors from a another country. Matthew 2:10-12 tells us the reaction the magi had when they found the child Jesus. They were “*overwhelmed with joy*” when the star stopped. When they saw the child with his mother Mary, they “*knelt and paid him homage.*” And then they “*offered him gifts.*” Finally, they paid attention to their dreams and took care to keep Jesus safe by avoiding evil.

I urge you, hold nothing back from God. Give all of your heart, mind, strength and soul and you cannot be separated from the love of God in Jesus Christ. Go to God with joy, show God respect and honor, give freely and turn away from evil. Give yourself to God and you will know peace, joy and gratitude. There are no limits with God!

Let us pray....

Isaiah 60:1-6 (NRSV)

Arise, shine; for your light has come, and the glory of the LORD has risen upon you. For darkness shall cover the earth, and thick darkness the peoples; but the LORD will arise upon you, and his glory will appear over you. Nations shall come to your light, and kings to the brightness of your dawn. Lift up your eyes and look around; they all gather together, they come to you; your sons shall come from far away, and your daughters shall be carried on their nurses' arms. Then you shall see and be radiant; your heart shall thrill and rejoice, because the abundance of the sea shall be brought to you, the wealth of the nations shall come to you. A multitude of camels shall cover you, the young camels of Midian and Ephah; all those from Sheba shall come. They shall bring gold and frankincense, and shall proclaim the praise of the LORD.

Matthew 2:1-12 (NRSV)

In the time of King Herod, after Jesus was born in Bethlehem of Judea, wise men from the East came to Jerusalem, asking, “Where is the child who has been born king of the Jews? For we observed his star at its rising, and have come to pay him homage.” When King Herod heard this, he was frightened, and all Jerusalem with him; and calling together all the chief priests and scribes of the people, he inquired of them where the Messiah was to be born. They told him, “In Bethlehem of Judea; for so it has been written by the prophet: ‘And you, Bethlehem, in the land of Judah, are by no means least among the rulers of Judah; for from you shall come a ruler who is to shepherd my people Israel.’”

Then Herod secretly called for the wise men and learned from them the exact time when the star had appeared. Then he sent them to Bethlehem, saying, “Go and search diligently for the child; and when you have found him, bring me word so that I may also go and pay him homage.” When they had heard the king, they set out; and there, ahead of them, went the star that they had seen at its rising, until it stopped over the place where the child was. When they saw that the star had stopped, they were overwhelmed with joy. On entering the house, they saw the child with Mary his mother; and they knelt down and paid him homage. Then, opening their treasure chests, they offered him gifts of gold, frankincense, and myrrh. And having been warned in a dream not to return to Herod, they left for their own country by another road.