

## The Wise Men's Three Gifts

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Scripture: Matthew 2:7-11

<sup>7</sup>Then Herod secretly called for the wise men and learned from them the exact time when the star had appeared. <sup>8</sup>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." <sup>9</sup>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. <sup>10</sup>When they saw that the star had stopped, they were overwhelmed with joy. <sup>11</sup>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.

When Jamie was pregnant with Rebekah, almost 13 years ago, our church, friends and family threw us baby showers to help us prepare for the arrival of our firstborn. Yes, more than one baby shower. This thought came back to me when I thought of how little preparation, how quiet the announcement, and what few gifts were given to Jesus.

I couldn't help think of what a typical birth in the days when Jesus was born was like. I'm sure there was a lot of support from Mary's parents, especially her mom. There were her family, friends, and community of faith. But with the census required by Caesar Augustus, not because they wanted to know how many people there were in order to care for them better, but rather because they wanted to make sure everyone in their Roman Empire were paying taxes.

This was the reason Joseph had to go back to his hometown to be counted for the census. There was no way he could just have a letter mailed to confirm it. No one else could go for him. And because he was married to Mary, she had to go to. There were no ifs, ands or buts. The Roman Empire was not merciful to those who did not obey them. Though the Persians invented crucifixions, it was the Romans who developed it into a punishment for the most serious criminals.

So under these circumstances Jesus was born, and Mary and Joseph were alone with no family or friends to stay with or help with the birth of Jesus.

God the Father was watching over them, worked His plan in light of all that going on, including plans by King Herod who wanted to find the child for ill reasons since he felt threatened by the rise of a new king. No doubt Herod had no idea who Jesus was going to be and what kind of king he was.

And besides the shepherds, God sent 3 wise kings to visit Jesus, to worship him, and give him gifts.

We don't know all the details of how these three kings who were given such wisdom by God to figure out how to find the birthplace of Jesus, but also find each other and plan to give gifts.

And when it came to gifts, who knows if they spoke to each other about what they were going to bring or if they chose what was precious in their God-given wisdom. Maybe angels visited them and told them what to give as gifts. Or maybe the Holy Spirit moved them without them really realizing it was God guiding them in selecting the gifts.

It wasn't like a party where everyone is bringing gifts and you realized someone gave the same gift as you or maybe even a lot of people gave similar gifts.

God selected each gift to signify what kind of king Jesus was.

The only obvious gift that was fit for a king was the gift of gold. One thing for sure is that if there was enough gold to pay for needed things for the rest of Jesus' life, Jesus did not use it when he began his ministry and mission.

I know the gold was used to help keep them safe as they went and hid for a long time before returning to Nazareth. The gold help in the raising of Jesus with what was needed, so Mary and Joseph would be able to provide what otherwise they couldn't.

Though we don't really know, we can trust it was enough gold to provide what was needed for Jesus and his family.

We also know that Jesus was and is the King of kings, Lord of Lord, and the God of all! Jesus did not come to become an earthly king like the other kings. Jesus did not come to overthrow the Roman Empire who waged war in order to conquer other people and nations in order to assimilate them to their ways and will, who used the people to build their empire, and who occupied all the lands they could in order to control and use the people and their resources.

Jesus surprised and shocked everyone with how he went about all that he did; from tending to the poor, ill, oppressed, rejected, and those labeled and judged as sinners and living in sin...even though who did the labeling and judging were sinners and living in sin themselves, as Jesus more than once pointed out to them and others.

I read the 2<sup>nd</sup> verse of *We Three Kings* that speaks to this, "Born a king on Bethlehem's plain / Gold I bring to crown Him again / King forever, ceasing never / Over us all to reign."

Jesus was definitely a king that the gift of gold signified, and much, much more, as we know.

Now the wise men who arrived were given such wisdom by God that they knew Jesus was one they would pay homage to, that is to worship him. And only God is to be worshipped. As in the 3<sup>rd</sup> verse of the Christmas hymn, *We Three Kings* says, "Frankincense to offer have I /

Incense owns a Deity nigh / Prayer and praising, all men raising / Worship Him, God most high.”

Frankincense comes from Arabia as well as grown in Palestine. So the wise men knew God had come to be with them, which the name Immanuel means – God with us. So the gift of frankincense was in understanding of who Jesus was. It was also used in light of frankincense being used as a perfume offered to God, it being added to offering so when burned it would offer a fragrant odor. So it represented divinity as well as offerings and prayer.

We know that Jesus was the offering for us, to pay for our sins. The only perfect offering that could do that seemingly impossible act. As I mentioned last week, Jesus was also known as the Lamb of God who would be slain for our sins so that we could be forgiven, saved, and living testimonies of God’s love and salvation through Jesus Christ.

The frankincense represents Jesus’ sacrifice of his own life.

The third gift was myrrh, which would be an odd gift to give if we didn’t understand its significance and meaning.

God lead one of the wise men to give such a gift, maybe in light of knowing Jesus would one day die. Maybe he knew more. Though cannot really know, we can be sure that God guided one of the wise men to give a gift that was used as part of the embalming process after one died. Myrrh is bitter if tasted. That no doubt was foretelling of Jesus’s arrest, mocking, torture, and death. Myrrh was sometimes offered to prisoners being executed on the cross. In fact, in Mark 15:23 we read “And they offered him wine mixed with myrrh; but he did not take it.”

It’s incredibly powerful when we think of how God worked in and through every detail, including the ways we humans can be with the good and godly aspects, as well as the worst and most evil ways that sin had and continues to bring up in us, since the days of Adam and Eve after they first sinned against God.

As I mentioned earlier that myrrh was used for embalming, I want to revisit what happened on the morning Jesus resurrected from the dead. In Mark 16:1 we read, “Now when the Sabbath was past, Mary Magdalene, Mary the mother of James, and Salome bought spices, that they might come and anoint Him.”

We can be certain that among these spices was myrrh. Myrrh reminds us of Jesus’ suffering, His death, and His burial.

I want to take a moment to mention how bitterness and pain of myrrh was not only that which was experienced by Jesus, but also the pain that his mother, his family, his disciples, and all who knew and loved Jesus felt, including those forgiven by him, healed by him, fed by him, taught by him, raised from the dead by him, and certainly those who experienced the love they knew was God’s love.

One thing you may not know about myrrh is that it lasts for a very, very long time. In fact when placed properly in a sealed container, like an alabaster pot, myrrh can hold its properties for several hundred years. In fact, archeologists have found myrrh in Egyptian tombs that were over 4,000 years old.

Its extraordinary lasting power is one way of pointing to the everlasting and eternal power of Jesus Christ. Through the bitterness, suffering and pain, Christ's love and salvation endures forever.

In light of knowing the significance of the wise men's three gifts, and not only have learned or revisited what we've learned about the gifts of gold, frankincense and myrrh, we are to consider how we live and offer Jesus Christ gifts from how we live and how we give that are fit for a king, the King of all Kings, and the Lord of all. We are to consider how we live our lives as a living fragrant offering to God. In Romans 12:1 we are told, "I appeal to you therefore, brothers and sisters, by the mercies of God, to present your bodies as a living sacrifice, holy and acceptable to God, which is your spiritual worship." And we are to also see how we not only love and worship God through times of suffering, pain and even bitterness, but also how we take care of others with the everlasting love of Christ that offers the healing touch that Christ gives through the love that included his own suffering, pain, and death.

We can share such gifts with others as we live and worship God with all we are and all we have because Christ is the savior of the world! Christmas is such a joyous time because of the greatest gift we have in Jesus Christ! Amen.

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This week we pray for the Harvell family on the passing of Charlotte Harvell who went to be with the Lord on Sunday, December 27<sup>th</sup>.