

The Magi's Gifts
Matthew 2:1-12
December 27, 2020

Alright, I'm going to do something I've never done before. I want you right now to text me your favorite Christmas gift you received as a child. I'm going to give you a few minutes to get those to me. Your favorite Christmas gift you received as a child. I'm taking a chance here that you all are going to blow up my phone, literally.

As you send those to me, I'll share with you mine. SATURN V ROCKET.

READ MATTHEW 2:1-12

Before we examine the gifts, there is an interesting use of the Greek here, and it is the phrase "opening their treasures."¹ Here "treasures" means "caskets" from the verb *tithēmi*, meaning a receptacle for valuables. In the ancient writers, it meant "treasury" as in the deuterocanonical book 1 Maccabees 3:29. The word means "storehouse" in Matthew 13:52. Then it means the things laid up in store, as a treasure in heaven in Matthew 6:20, and in Christ Colossians 2:3. In their "caskets," the Magi had gold, frankincense, and myrrh, all found at that time in Arabia, though gold was found in Babylon and elsewhere.

The Book of Isaiah, when describing Jerusalem's glorious restoration, tells the people:

*Vast caravans of camels will converge on you, the camels of Midian and Ephah. The people of Sheba will bring gold and frankincense and will come worshiping the LORD.*²

The traditional gifts of the magi – gold, frankincense and myrrh – may have had symbolic as well as practical value. In addition to the honor and status implied by the value of the gifts of the magi, scholars think that these three were chosen for their special spiritual symbolism about Jesus himself, an interpretation found in the carol "We Three Kings."

1. Gold is the gift for a King.

*Born a King on Bethlehem's plain,
Gold I bring to crown Him again,
King forever, ceasing never,
Over us all to reign.*

In Parthia, it was the custom that no one could ever approach the king without a gift. And gold, the king of metals, was the fit gift for a king.

1 Kings 10:14 tells us that each year, King Solomon received about 25 tons of gold.³

So then Jesus was "the Man born to be King." We must always remember that Jesus is King of Kings. Before we must be friends with Christ, we must submit to Christ.

2. Frankincense is the gift for a Priest.

*Frankincense to offer have I,
Incense owns a Deity nigh,
Prayer and praising, all men raising,*

¹ Greek: anoixantes tous thēsauros autōn

² Isaiah 60:6, NLT

³ 1 Kings 10:14 (NLT2)

Worship Him, God most high.

It was in the Temple worship and at the Temple sacrifices that the sweet perfume of frankincense was used. And Frankincense was never used in sin offerings, only for thanksgiving offerings.

Jesus is now our high priest. Hebrews 4 says:

So then, since we have a great High Priest who has entered heaven, Jesus the Son of God, let us hold firmly to what we believe. This High Priest of ours understands our weaknesses, for he faced all of the same testings we do, yet he did not sin. So let us come boldly to the throne of our gracious God. There we will receive his mercy, and we will find grace to help us when we need it most.⁴

The function of a priest was to open the way to God for men. The Latin word for priest is *pontifex*, which means a bridge-builder. The priest is the man who builds a bridge between people and God. That is what Jesus did. He opened the way to God; He made it possible for us to enter into the very presence of God.

3. Myrrh is the gift for One who is to die.

*Myrrh is mine, its bitter perfume,
Breathes of life of gathering gloom,
Sorrowing, sighing, bleeding, dying,
Sealed in the stone-cold tomb.*

Myrrh was used to embalm the bodies of the dead.

Listen to John 19:

Afterward Joseph of Arimathea, who had been a secret disciple of Jesus (because he feared the Jewish leaders), asked Pilate for permission to take down Jesus' body. When Pilate gave permission, Joseph came and took the body away. With him came Nicodemus, the man who had come to Jesus at night. He brought seventy-five pounds of perfumed ointment made from myrrh and aloes. Following Jewish burial custom, they wrapped Jesus' body with the spices in long sheets of linen cloth.⁵

Jesus came into the world to die. Jesus came into the world to live for us, and, in the end, to die for us. He came to give us His life and His death.

There is a fourth gift the Magi gave. That's right: one last gift the Magi gave. Verse 11:

They entered the house and saw the child with his mother, Mary, and they bowed down and worshiped him.⁶

4. They gave Him their worship.

David Dewitt states, "Though there are still many questions about the Magi that may be left unanswered, we can determine that they brought a fourth gift that is often forgotten by many. After they laid their treasures down before Mary and Joseph, they worshipped Jesus. (This is the 4th Gift – the Worship of the King of Kings) These wise men from afar came not just to court favor but to proclaim that they believed Him to be the King of kings. The greatest gift that we can offer to Jesus this Christmas is our praise and worship."

⁴ Hebrews 4:14-16 (NLT2)

⁵ John 19:38-40 (NLT2)

⁶ Matthew 2:11 (NLT2)

Gold for a king, frankincense for a priest, myrrh for one who was to die – these three gifts plus the Magi’s worship, even at the cradle of Christ, foretold that He was to be the true King, the perfect High Priest, and in the end the supreme Savior of humanity.⁷

⁷ Barclay’s Daily Study Bible, Matthew 2:11.