

WHAT GIFT SHALL I BRING?

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This is a magical season, when cheerful music is played in malls and stores and even gasoline stations and public sidewalks, blending religious themes and their secularized counterparts to celebrate God's gifts of love, joy, peace, and hope. Evergreen trees with gleaming ornaments and colored lights, holly and mistletoe, parties with family and friends, greeting cards, nativity scenes, and jolly old Saint Nick (Santa Claus) and his elves, and, of course, lots and lots of presents.

But Christmas is really about the birth of Jesus, isn't it? Yet, unlike other birthdays, we spend our time, energy, and money preparing gifts for people whose birthdays are *not* on December 25th. Often, Jesus has to be shoehorned into the celebration where He can, for it does not revolve around Him. Do you ever wish that Jesus could be more of the center of the season than He is?

Today, I want to tell you about how to do just that — bring Jesus to the center of your Christmas experience.

Let's begin with a review of the original story:

Matthew 2:1-12

¹ *Jesus was born in Bethlehem in Judea, during the reign of King Herod. About that time some wise men from eastern lands arrived in Jerusalem, asking,* ² *"Where is the newborn king of the Jews? We saw his star as it rose, and we have come to worship him."*

³ *King Herod was deeply disturbed when he heard this, as was everyone in Jerusalem. ⁴ He called a meeting of the leading priests and teachers of religious law and asked, "Where is the Messiah supposed to be born?"*

⁵ *"In Bethlehem in Judea," they said, "for this is what the prophet wrote:*

⁶ *'And you, O Bethlehem in the land of Judah,
are not least among the ruling cities of Judah,
for a ruler will come from you
who will be the shepherd for my people Israel.'* "

⁷ *Then Herod called for a private meeting with the wise men, and he learned from them the time when the star first appeared. ⁸ Then he told them, "Go to Bethlehem and search carefully for the child. And when you find him, come back and tell me so that I can go and worship him, too!"*

⁹ *After this interview the wise men went their way. And the star they had seen in the east guided them to Bethlehem. It went ahead of them and stopped over the place where the child was. ¹⁰ When they saw the star, they were filled with joy! ¹¹ They entered the house and saw the child with his mother, Mary, and they bowed down and worshiped him. Then they opened their treasure chests and gave him gifts of gold, frankincense, and myrrh.*

¹² *When it was time to leave, they returned to their own country by another route, for God had warned them in a dream not to return to Herod.*

Happy Birthday, Jesus

If this Thursday is really a birthday party for Jesus in each of our homes (because He dwells with each of us), how could you turn the focus to Him for part of the time?

Could you:

- Read the Christmas story (from Matthew 2 or Luke 2)?
- Sing songs about Jesus' birth?
- Take time to thank God together for Jesus?
- Do something else...?

Have you thought about giving a gift to Jesus this year?

On the day of His birth, wise men from the East sought Him out so they could present gifts to Him in worship. They say, "Wise men still seek Him." Are you wise, like that?

What gift could you offer Jesus as your act of worship?

The wise men gave us three examples. Let's translate those to our day and culture and see what they might suggest.

Matthew 2:11 *Then they opened their treasure chests and gave him gifts of gold, frankincense, and myrrh.*

Treasure of Gold

A children's story about the journey of the wise men proposed that gold was the appropriate gift for a king. The Bible agrees with that, and describes gold as the highest value gift (1 Kings 9, 10), consecrated metal for worship (Exodus), and an enduring substance (Job 23:10), but... it is of *less value* than the words of God (Psalm 19:10), than knowledge of God (Proverbs 8:10), than the name of Jesus (Acts 3:6), or than faith in His name (1 Peter 1:7)

The Book of Job (22) says:

²³ *If you return to the Almighty, you will be built up;
You will remove iniquity far from your tents.*

²⁴ *Then you will lay your gold in the dust,
And the gold of Ophir among the stones of the brooks.*

²⁵ ***Yes, the Almighty will be your gold
And your precious silver;***

²⁶ *For then you will have your delight in the Almighty,
And lift up your face to God.*

This passage of wisdom recommends an exchange: your gold — the wealth this world offers — for the true and lasting wealth of personal relationship with God. Many people today still do not understand that Jesus came to establish, not a religion (with its structure and ceremonies), but a relationship with the living God and with His people.

While you cannot pay for this relationship — all the gold in all the earth is less than its value — you must exchange your love affair with money for the love of Christ.

Jesus said, "*No one can serve two masters; for either he will hate the one and love the other, or else he will be loyal to the one and despise the other. You cannot serve God and money.*" (Matthew 6:24)

If your money does not *support and serve* your love for God it will distract you from loving God. So, this Christmas, give Jesus your wealth.

I am not suggesting that you sell everything you have and give it to the church. I am asking you to *dedicate* all that you have to Jesus Christ and give away only what He asks of you, with the confidence that He will supply all that you need for the rest of your life.

To be spiritually wise, give God your gold, your wealth — a gift fit for a King.

Treasure of Frankincense

The second gift of the wise men was frankincense, which a children's story suggested was a gift fit for a priest. The Bible agrees with that, referring to frankincense as a fragrance of holy oil (Exodus 30:34), the aroma of a holy grain offering, presented as a memorial of God's goodness (Leviticus 2), and a scent of love (Song of Solomon).

Referring to the Bread of the Presence, which was set on the table in the Holy Place of the Tabernacle of Worship, Moses wrote:

Leviticus 24:6 **You shall set them in two rows, six in a row, on the pure gold table before the Lord. ⁷ And you shall put pure frankincense on each row, that it may be on the bread for a memorial, an offering made by fire to the Lord.**

Remembering the Lord with worship is a great gift!

Sadly, it is not a gift that is given as often as you might think. Much of what pretends to be worship is mindless ritual — performing the actions and mouthing the words with little conscious thought of God at all.

Through the prophet Isaiah, God said:

Isaiah 43:20 **The beast of the field will honor Me, the jackals and the ostriches, because I give waters in the wilderness and rivers in the desert, to give drink to My people, My chosen. ²¹ This people I have formed for Myself; they shall declare My praise.**

²² **But you have not called upon Me, O Jacob; and you have been weary of Me, O Israel.**

He was lamenting the fact that dumb beasts honored their Maker, while those for whom God made the good things of the earth — the very ones He formed to worship Him — ignored Him. They were too tired to spend time in worship.

Does that describe you? Are you too exhausted from work and shopping and other activities to spend time in worship? Just how much time do you spend each week in active worship of the Lord?

To be spiritually wise, give God your frankincense, your worship — a gift fit for a Savior.

Treasure of Myrrh

The third gift of the wise men was myrrh. This, a children's story suggested was a fitting gift for a great general, a warrior, who was willing to give his life for his soldiers. The Bible refers to myrrh as another perfume for lovers (Song of Solomon), an anesthetic for the hurting (Mark 15:23), and a balm for the dead (John 19:39).

The Bible describes God as a righteous Ruler, who loves justice and joy, and smells of myrrh.

Psalms 45:6 Your throne, O God, endures forever and ever. You rule with a scepter of justice. ⁷ You love justice and hate evil. Therefore God, your God, has anointed you, pouring out the oil of joy on you more than on anyone else. ⁸ **Myrrh, aloes, and cassia perfume your robes.**

Myrrh was twice offered to Jesus. Once, to assuage His pain as He died on the cross, but He refused it. Unlike so many, who resist the least discomfort, He chose to taste every bit of the pain, knowing that it purchased our pardon.

The second time, myrrh was carried to His tomb to perfume His body for burial, but they could find no body to anoint.

About Jesus' sacrifice, Paul wrote:

Philippians 2:7 *When he appeared in human form, ⁸ he humbled himself in obedience to God and died a criminal's death on a cross.*

⁹ Therefore, God elevated him to the place of highest honor and gave him the name above all other names, ¹⁰ that at the name of Jesus every knee should bow, in heaven and on earth and under the earth, ¹¹ and every tongue confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father.

Because He loved what was right and sacrificed Himself in love for all people, God gave Jesus a name of honor and an anointing of joy far above every other person. Myrrh is the fragrance of His robes.

For you and I, the gift of myrrh represents the gift of personal sacrifice — the highest use of our mortality. The ultimate witness, the greatest gift that could be required of us would be to die for Jesus' sake. Practically speaking, few of us are likely to be asked to make that sacrifice, but that does not mean we should stand idle.

The sacrifice I am urging is your personal witness of Christ — sharing your faith with others, so they may come to faith in Him also. Telling others this good news is an offering that honors Jesus. By doing so, you further the reason for which He came; you make His efforts worthwhile.

Christmas time is such an amazing opportunity to do so, when hearts are most open and minds are most curious about the real Reason for the Season. Don't depend on trite clichés or hokey gimmicks, but offer the fragrance of your own experience of faith, tested and genuine.

To be spiritually wise, give God your myrrh, your witness — a gift fit for the Lord of Heaven's Armies.

Conclusion

If we follow the wise men's examples, we will make a personal effort to honor Jesus Christ this Christmas. They spent months preparing to worship Him. Today, we could make the same trip in hours.

So, to make this Christmas special and spiritually memorable, take some time to consider what you will give Jesus for *His* birthday.

The wise men gave Him gold, frankincense, and myrrh.

Paul made this suggestion:

AMP Romans 12:1 I appeal to you therefore, brethren, and beg of you in view of [all] the mercies of God, to make a decisive dedication of your bodies [presenting all your members and faculties] as a living sacrifice, holy (devoted, consecrated) and well pleasing to God, which is your reasonable (rational, intelligent) service and spiritual worship.

We can give Him our wealth, our worship, and our witness. These are reasonable gifts for Him who is our King, Savior, and Lord. Don't you agree?