

Christmas Gift by Charles Stanley

Bible Study

The Gifts of Christmas

A few years after Jesus was born, the wise men arrived to worship Him. They were priests and astrologers from the Middle East who had probably learned of the Jewish Messiah through the writings of Daniel. These men brought gold, frankincense, and myrrh to give to the young child. Not only were these appropriate gifts for a king, but each also carried special prophetic significance.

Begin by reading Matthew 2:1-12.

1. Gold was the most precious metal known to the Israelites. Symbolically, it represented purity and great worth. Almost everything in the temple was made of gold or plated with this metal (see Exodus 25).

- The ancient peoples gave gold as a way to honor kings or other rulers. How much of this treasure did the Queen of Sheba give Solomon (1 Kings 10:10)?

The magi's gift of gold honors Jesus as a king. They came to acknowledge the One whose sovereignty began before His birth (Matt. 2:2).

- What characterizes Jesus' kingdom (John 18:36)?
- The Lord acknowledged to Pilate that He was king of the Jews (Luke 23:3). What indicates that the governor may have believed Him (John 19:19-22)?
- Revelation 17:14 calls Jesus the "Lord of lords and King of kings." Explain the significance of those titles.
- The Lord walked the earth as a humble servant. To the disappointment of some of His followers, Christ didn't take His kingdom by force or allow others to make Him an earthly ruler. In contrast, what will characterize His return (Rev. 19:11-16)?
- As king, Jesus has supreme power over everything. Do you allow Him to be the ruler of your life? What hinders your submission to Him?
- The king of the universe has all things under His control (Col. 1:16-18). How does this make you feel about the stresses in your life that seem unmanageable?

2. Frankincense, according to Merriam-Webster, is "a fragrant gum resin from trees of a genus (*Boswellia* of the family Burseraceae) of Somalia and southern coastal Arabia that is an important incense resin and has been used in religious rites, perfumery, and embalming." When exposed to air, the sap hardens into a solid that burns easily. Frankincense was a key ingredient of the incense used in Hebrew worship.

First John 5:13 says, "These things I have written to you who believe in the name of the Son of God, so that you may *know* that you have eternal life" (emphasis added).

- List two ways incense was used in the temple.
 - Exodus 30:33-36
 - Leviticus 2:1-3

- What did burning incense symbolize (Rev. 5:8)?

The gift of frankincense, because of its role in temple worship, prophesied of Jesus' role as our high priest. In the heavenly temple, Christ presented His crucified body to the Father as the perfect sacrifice, doing away with the need for animal sacrifices (Heb. 9:11-12).

- Jewish priests acted as mediators between God and man. Why can we now approach the Lord without an intermediary (1 Tim. 2:5)?
- Read Hebrews 7:22-28, and give two reasons why Jesus is a better high priest than the leaders of old.
- Do you feel confident in approaching God without an earthly mediator? Why or why not?
- How can knowing that Christ is your mediator transform your relationship with the Father?

3. Myrrh, like frankincense, is the dried sap of certain trees. Transportation costs made both substances very expensive. Merriam-Webster says myrrh is "a yellowish-brown to reddish-brown aromatic gum resin with a bitter slightly pungent taste obtained from a tree (especially *Commiphora abyssinica* of the family Burseraceae) of eastern Africa and Arabia."

Myrrh was an ingredient in perfumes and incense in ancient times. It was valued for its antiseptic and anti-inflammatory qualities. In fact, to this day, myrrh is found in salve, mouthwash, and toothpaste.

To mask the odor of decay, the Hebrews sprinkled myrrh on burial cloths which were wrapped around the deceased. Prophetically, myrrh speaks of the sacrifice Jesus would make to cleanse the world of sin. It foretells His role as Savior (Matt. 2:2).

- In Bethany, a woman anointed the Lord with pure nard, an ointment in which myrrh was a primary ingredient. When Judas rebuked her for wasting the expensive perfume, how did Jesus defend her action (Mark 14:3-8)?
- Who was responsible for providing the myrrh to be used in Christ's burial (John 19:39-40)?
- The world sees Jesus' death on the cross as defeat. What was His perspective on the crucifixion (John 10:17-18)?
- Read 1 Thessalonians 5:8-10. What do we have as a result of Christ's death and resurrection?
- What should our response be to this great gift (v. 8)?

Conclusion: The magi's gifts of gold, frankincense, and myrrh prophesied that Christ would be our king, high priest, and Savior. In your time with God, thank Him for the perfect gift of His Son. As king, Jesus rules over the universe and one day will return to reign on earth. As high priest, He intercedes for us so that we can approach God with confidence. And as Savior, He sacrificed His life so that salvation is available to the whole world