

## Ancient Words—Three Gifts for Christmas

A close comparison of Psalm 72, Isaiah 60, and Matthew 2 may reveal that much more than three single presents were brought to the manger scene when Jesus was born in Bethlehem. True, the small barnyard stall may have accommodated Joseph, Mary and the baby Jesus along with three kings presenting each a present of gold, frankincense, and myrrh while shepherds from the nearby fields looked on. However the “treasures” depicted by Matt 2.11 and a reading from Isaiah 60.9 suggest a very large and grand assembly may have gathered around this meager birthing site with many treasures of wealth and livestock to honor the Creator of all. Isaiah declared in chapter 60 that ships of Tarshish would bring sons from afar with their silver and gold to the honor of the Lord God, the Holy One of Israel. He also writes that herds of camels, flocks of sheep and rams would come from Sheba bearing gold and incense.

The gifts of gold were fit for the King of Kings on Christmas Day in Bethlehem. Splendor and majesty is what the Creator of heaven and earth deserved and so kings from distant shores and lands traveled for many months to deliver the precious metal of gold, in varying forms no doubt, to honor the precious one laying in the wooden feed trough. As the first king knelt in the hay, he presented a small chest filled with gold and silver coins, certainly enough to finance the soon to be announced trip to Egypt, and certainly enough to sustain the needs of the young family for many months in Egypt while waiting for Herod to die, and enough provision left to provide for the long trip back to Nazareth.

(Born a King on Bethlehem’s plain, gold I bring to crown Him again, King forever, ceasing never, over us all to reign.)

The gifts of frankincense for sure offered a sweetness, a pleasant aroma, for an otherwise natural smelling stable. The second king bows and presents the box of fragrant aromatic frankincense. But more than serving to change the unpleasant odor of animal dung for the day, the expensive sweet incense tells of the valuable and sweet change of life that has now come to a dark, ugly and odiferous sin-stained world. This is the Lily of the valley, this is the Rose of Sharon, and he is worthy of henna and nard, saffron and calamus, pinion and cinnamon and the

finest spices from all over the world he created. The life springing forth from this child will bring healing, comfort, peace and assurance, to a broken and pain-filled world with the sweetest words ever spoken and the kindest actions ever seen by man.

(Frankincense to offer have I, incense owns a Diety nigh, prayer and praising, voices raising, worshiping God on high.)

The third king approaches and the excitement takes a pause. Myrrh is very costly and is used for burial of the dead. This is a newborn---what place does myrrh have at a glorious time like this? The sealed box of burial ointment stills the crowd for a moment as the presentation is made. Maybe the baby Jesus in the room is the only one at this point who knows the meaning of this third gift. Suffering, pain and sorrow are all attributed to the gift of myrrh. Death has been final for all of Adam's race with no sure or certain cure. But now the Balm of Gilead has just been revealed! This gift, I assume, is saved by Mary and in 33 years applies the contents to her son's body as he is placed in Joseph's tomb. This Joseph will bring 75 pounds of myrrh and aloes mixed, and buy new linen cloth to accomplish this burial. But I see Mary as well (in the future) bringing her saved gift of myrrh and the saved swaddling cloths from birth to the tomb as well. Tearfully and gently she perhaps assists Joseph and Nicodemus and anoints and wraps the Savior's head which may explain the "folded" linen burial cloth. (Luke 23.50-56, John 19.38-42 and John 20.3-7)

(Myrrh is mine, its bitter perfume, breaths a life of gathering gloom, sorrowing, sighing, bleeding, dying--sealed in the stone cold tomb. Glorious now behold Him arise! King and God and sacrifice! Alleluia! Alleluia! Rings through the earth and skies!)

"We Three Kings" was written by John Henry Hopkins, Jr. in 1857, as rector of Christ Episcopal Church in Williamsport, PA, and became the first popular Christmas Carol written in the United States. The last verse in this Christmas carol proclaims the final eternal victory by Christ, the Lord, expressed by the three gifts from kings 2,015 years ago on the first Christmas Day! Celebrate Christ in

Christmas because he is Jesus--born on Christmas Day as angels spoke in the Ancient Words:

But after he had considered this, an angel of the Lord appeared to him in a dream and said, "Joseph son of David, do not be afraid to take Mary home as your wife, because what is conceived in her is from the Holy Spirit. She will give birth to a son, and you are to give him the name Jesus, because he will save his people from their sins."—Matt 1.20-21

But the angel said to her, "Do not be afraid, Mary; you have found favor with God. You will conceive and give birth to a son, and you are to call him Jesus. He will be great and will be called the Son of the Most High. The Lord God will give him the throne of his father David, and he will reign over Jacob's descendants forever; his kingdom will never end." —Luke 1.30-33

But the angel said to them, "Do not be afraid. I bring you good news that will cause great joy for all the people. Today in the town of David a Savior has been born to you; he is the Messiah, the Lord. This will be a sign to you: You will find a baby wrapped in cloths and lying in a manger."—Luke 2.10-11

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