

Three Gifts

Matthew 2:9-12 HCSB After hearing the king, they went on their way. And there it was--the star they had seen in the east! It led them until it came and stopped above the place where the child was. (10) When they saw the star, they were overjoyed beyond measure. (11) Entering the house, they saw the child with Mary His mother, and falling to their knees, they worshiped Him. Then they opened their treasures and presented Him with gifts: gold, frankincense, and myrrh. (12) And being warned in a dream not to go back to Herod, they returned to their own country by another route.

1. The gifts were prophesied. (Isaiah 60:1-6; Psalm 72:9-15; 1 Kings 10:1-3, 10)

I'm sure that as he wrote these words, the Apostle Matthew, a devout Jew with an encompassing knowledge of the Tanach', was thinking of the prophecy in Isaiah that reads:

- **Isaiah 60:1-6 HCSB** Arise, shine, for your light has come, and the glory of the LORD shines over you. (2) For look, darkness covers the earth, and total darkness the peoples; but the LORD will shine over you, and His glory will appear over you. (3) Nations will come to your light, and kings to the brightness of your radiance. (4) Raise your eyes and look around: they all gather and come to you; your sons will come from far away, and your daughters will be carried on the hip. (5) Then you will see and be radiant, and your heart will tremble and rejoice, because the riches of the sea will become yours, and the wealth of the nations will come to you. (6) Caravans of camels will cover your land--young camels of Midian and Ephah--all of them will come from Sheba. They will carry gold and frankincense and proclaim the praises of the LORD.

Or, perhaps David's Messianic prophecy came to mind:

- **Psalms 72:9-15 HCSB** May desert tribes kneel before him and his enemies lick the dust. (10) May the kings of Tarshish and the coasts and islands bring tribute, the kings of Sheba and Seba offer gifts. (11) And let all kings bow down to him, all nations serve him. (12) For he will rescue the poor who cry out and the afflicted who have no helper. (13) He will have pity on the poor and helpless and save the lives of the poor. (14) He will redeem them from oppression and violence, for their lives are precious in his sight. (15) May he live long! May gold from Sheba be given to him. May prayer be offered for him continually, and may he be blessed all day long.

We are all familiar with the song that goes "We three kings of Orient are..." This is based on the statements we find in verses 1 and 2 of Matthew 2 that they were "wise men from the east" and that they had seen a "star in the east".



However, the Scriptures (to my mind at least) seem to clearly indicate not Iraq or Iran but Sheba. Sheba can be found in south-eastern Arabia. This is the same place that the Queen came from in order to question Solomon back in...

- **1 Kings 10:1-3 HCSB** The queen of Sheba heard about Solomon's fame connected with the name of the LORD and came to test him with difficult questions. (2) She came to Jerusalem with a very large retinue, with camels bearing spices, gold in great abundance, and precious stones. She came to Solomon and spoke to him about everything that was on her mind. (3) So Solomon answered all her questions; nothing was too difficult for the king to explain to her.

A few verse later we see,

- **1 Kings 10:10 HCSB** Then she gave the king four and a half tons of gold, a great quantity of spices, and precious stones. Never again did such a quantity of spices arrive as those the queen of Sheba gave to King Solomon.

2. What the gifts meant about the Lord.

As we can see, there was clearly a strong association between Sheba and huge amounts of gold and incense. These verses also demonstrate that there had been at that time a long-standing custom of bringing gifts when approaching a superior. The gifts the wise men brought were expensive and represent a worthy tribute, but there's more to them than meets the eye.

a. Gold – kingly wealth and power (2 Samuel 12:29-30)

Gold is one of the rarest and most expensive metals. It represented the wealth and power of a king.

- **2 Samuel 12:29-30 HCSB** So David assembled all the troops and went to Rabbah; he fought against it and captured it. (30) He took the crown from the head of their king, and it was *placed* on David's head. The crown weighed 75 pounds of gold, and it had a precious stone *in it*. In addition, David took away a large quantity of plunder from the city.

b. Frankincense – deity (Exodus 30:34-38; Leviticus 2:1-2; John 1:14; 1 Timothy 3:16)

Frankincense was used in the temple worship of the Lord.

- **Exodus 30:34-38 HCSB** The LORD said to Moses: "Take fragrant spices: stacte, onycha, and galbanum; the spices and pure frankincense are to be in equal measures. (35) Prepare expertly blended incense from these; it is to be seasoned with salt, pure and holy. (36) Grind some of it into a fine powder and put some in front of the testimony in the tent of meeting, where I will meet with you. It must be especially holy to you. (37) As for the incense you are making, you must not make *any* for yourselves using its formula. It is to be regarded by you as sacred to the LORD. (38) Anyone who makes something like it to smell its fragrance must be cut off from his people."
- **Leviticus 2:1-2 HCSB** "When anyone presents a grain offering as a gift to the LORD, his gift must consist of fine flour. He is to pour olive oil on it, put frankincense on it, (2) and bring it to Aaron's sons the priests. The priest will take a handful of fine flour and oil from it, along with all its frankincense, and will burn this memorial portion of it on the altar, a fire offering of a pleasing aroma to the LORD.

It represented the infant's deity. He is truly God born in a human body.

- **John 1:14 HCSB** The Word became flesh and took up residence among us. We observed His glory, the glory as the One and Only Son from the Father, full of grace and truth.
- **1 Timothy 3:16 HCSB** And most certainly, the mystery of godliness is great: He was manifested in the flesh, justified in the Spirit, seen by angels, preached among the Gentiles, believed on in the world, taken up in glory.

c. Myrrh – humanity (John 19:38-40)

Then there is myrrh, -a kind of perfume made from the leaves of a rose. It was used in beauty treatments, but when mixed with vinegar, it became an anesthetic. After a person died, myrrh was used to anoint the body and prepare it for burial. We see that in:

- **John 19:38-40 HCSB** After this, Joseph of Arimathea, who was a disciple of Jesus-- but secretly because of his fear of the Jews--asked Pilate that he might remove Jesus' body. Pilate gave him permission, so he came and took His body away. (39) Nicodemus (who had previously come to Him at night) also came, bringing a mixture of about 75 pounds of myrrh and aloes. (40) Then they took Jesus' body and

wrapped it in linen cloths with the aromatic spices, according to the burial custom of the Jews.

The gift of myrrh then, pictured His coming suffering and death.

- Gold pointed to his majesty . . . for he is king.
- Frankincense pointed to his deity . . . for he is God.
- Myrrh pointed to his humanity . . . for he was destined to suffer and die.

Adonists believe that these three elements are critical to our understanding of the Lord Jesus. We believe that He is the God/Man; not a man possessed by God but fully God and fully man. For those of you who are seriously into theology, the technical term would be “hypostatic union.” And in contrast to cultural Christianity, we further believe that this God/Man is not merely our Savior but is to be acknowledged as our King. We believe that Jesus of Nazareth is Yahweh Melek, God our King, in the flesh.

3. What the gifts mean for us.

But now let's turn for a few moments and examine the three gifts, not as ancient gifts given by men long dead, but as potential gifts we could bring the Lord.

a. Gold – our livelihood (Matthew 23:23; Mark 12:42-44; Matthew 19:23)

Gold can represent our gifts of substance. Some people would foolishly argue against the necessity of giving a tithe of our income to the Lord citing:

- **Matthew 23:23 HCSB** "Woe to you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites! You pay a tenth of mint, dill, and cumin, yet you have neglected the more important matters of the law--justice, mercy, and faith. These things should have been done without neglecting the others.

But the Lord was not merely cancelling the giving of tithes as we see in:

- **Mark 12:42-44 HCSB** And a poor widow came and dropped in two tiny coins worth very little. (43) Summoning His disciples, He said to them, "I assure you: This poor widow has put in more than all those giving to the temple treasury. (44) For they all gave out of their surplus, but she out of her poverty has put in everything she possessed--all she had to live on."

This blessed lady gave not only the tithe, but “all she had to live on.” So it is not that tithing is an antiquated Old Covenant practice no longer required of the modern, enlightened saint. It is that our tithing must be accompanied by humble hearts and a willingness to come alongside the Lord in His overarching desire to bring justice to this wicked world! If anything, the tithe is no longer required because everything we have should be dedicated to and given over the Lord's use in any way He sees fit. Much of it He graciously allows for the use of our family, because He taught that the one who does not provide for his own is worse than an infidel.

But let us not presume upon His graciousness and follow our nation into its materialistic bingeing lifestyle. Listen to the Lord's warning:

- **Matthew 19:23 HCSB** Then Jesus said to His disciples, "I assure you: It will be hard for a rich person to enter the kingdom of heaven!"

Livelihood can often usurp the place of life unless that livelihood is rigorously dedicated to the Lord. This brings us to the second gift.

c. Frankincense – our passionate hearts; kavanah (Revelation 8:3-4; Colossians 3:16)

Frankincense, because of its nature as a fragrance, can represent our treasures of thought and influence.

- **Revelation 8:3-4 HCSB** Another angel, with a gold incense burner, came and stood at the altar. He was given a large amount of incense to offer with the prayers of all the saints on the gold altar in front of the throne. (4) The smoke of the incense, with the prayers of the saints, went up in the presence of God from the angel's hand.

As commanded in Leviticus 2 that the grain offering should be accompanied by frankincense, so we see here that our prayers are offered with the smoke of incense in heaven. Our good works, or our gifts of livelihood, are meaningless if they are not accompanied by a heart-felt love of God and a humble acknowledgment of our continuing dependence on Him.

In Hebrew, the word for this attitude is “kavanah”, which is intense mental concentration or emotional devotion in the utterance of a prayer or during the performance of a mitzvah. It is a state of mind requisite for prayer or meditation as we see in

- **Colossians 3:16 HCSB** Let the message about the Messiah dwell richly among you, teaching and admonishing one another in all wisdom, and singing psalms, hymns, and spiritual songs, with gratitude in your hearts to God.

It is not enough to bring gifts of praise to the Lord if they are not accompanied by heartfelt gratitude.

So the gold teaches us to bring gifts of livelihood, tithes and offerings. The frankincense teaches us to bring the gifts of our minds and hearts, grateful and humble attitudes. Finally, we come to the third gift.

d. Myrrh – suffering (James 1:2-4; Matthew 16:21; Acts 9:16; Philippians 1:29; 1 Peter 2:19-21)

Myrrh, because of its use in embalming, should stand in this instance for our sorrow and suffering.

- **James 1:2-4 HCSB** Consider it a great joy, my brothers, whenever you experience various trials, (3) knowing that the testing of your faith produces endurance. (4) But endurance must do its complete work, so that you may be mature and complete, lacking nothing.

This bitter gift is the most difficult to give to the Messiah. If we are honest, we will acknowledge that as often as not we prefer not to give this one. But may I remind you that this gift was not withheld by the Master from us?

- **Matthew 16:21 HCSB** From then on Jesus began to point out to His disciples that He must go to Jerusalem and suffer many things from the elders, chief priests, and scribes, be killed, and be raised the third day.

And the Apostle Paul also gave this unpopular gift to the Lord. Hashem said of the Apostle:

- **Acts 9:16 HCSB** *I will certainly show him how much he must suffer for My name!"*

But the reason why sorrow hardens one man and melts another is just that the one man keeps his sorrow selfishly and the other offers it in oblation. There is a type of joy which only the disappointed can know, the joy of agreeing with God silently even when we don't understand.

- **Philippians 1:29 HCSB** For it has been given to you on Christ's behalf not only to believe in Him, but also to suffer for Him,
- **1 Peter 2:19-21 HCSB** For it *brings* favor if, because of conscience toward God, someone endures grief from suffering unjustly. (20) For what credit is there if you endure when you sin and are beaten? But when you do good and suffer, if you endure, it brings favor with God. (21) For you were called to this, because Christ also suffered for you, leaving you an example, so that you should follow in His steps.

Three gifts: gold, frankincense and myrrh. When offered to the Messiah, they stood for kingship, deity and humanity. For us, they represent the gifts of livelihood, of heartfelt passion and a willingness to suffer for His name's sake. As it says in:

- **Matthew 5:10-12 HCSB** *Blessed are those who are persecuted for righteousness, because the kingdom of heaven is theirs. (11) "Blessed are you when they insult you and persecute you and falsely say every kind of evil against you because of Me. (12)*

Be glad and rejoice, because your reward is great in heaven. For that is how they persecuted the prophets who were before you.

Conclusion: (Romans 5:1-5)

But before you lose heart and doubt your willingness to give (particularly the gift of suffering) to the Lord, let me remind me of other gifts the Lord has given to US!

- **Romans 5:1-5 HCSB** Therefore, since we have been declared righteous by faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ. (2) Also through Him, we have obtained access by faith into this grace in which we stand, and we rejoice in the hope of the glory of God. (3) And not only that, but we also rejoice in our afflictions, because we know that affliction produces endurance, (4) endurance produces proven character, and proven character produces hope. (5) This hope does not disappoint, because God's love has been poured out in our hearts through the Holy Spirit who was given to us.

The Giver of Good gifts (as He is described in James) has come bearing seven gifts for us:

1. Declaration of righteousness
2. Peace with God
3. Access to grace
4. Power in afflictions
5. Undisappointed Hope
6. Outpouring of God's love
7. Holy Spirit

Surely the royal God/Man is worthy of our best regardless! But this King comes bearing gifts for us! How can we begrudge Him anything?