



SUNDAY 27TH DECEMBER 2020. CHRISTMAS AND NEW YEAR'S MESSAGE

DELIVERED BY

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THEME: THE SIGNIFICANCE OF THE GIFTS OF THE THREE WISE MEN (**THE GOLD, FRANKINCENSE AND MYRRH**)

SCRIPTURES: Mathew2: 1-12 (NIV) “After Jesus was born in Bethlehem in Judea, during the time of King Herod, Magi[a] from the east came to Jerusalem and asked, “Where is the one who has been born king of the Jews? We saw his star when it rose and have come to worship him.” 3 When King Herod heard this he was disturbed, and all Jerusalem with him. 4 When he had called together all the people’s chief priests and teachers of the law, he asked them where the Messiah was to be born. 5 “In Bethlehem in Judea,” they replied, “for this is what the prophet has written: 6 ““But you, Bethlehem, in the land of Judah, are by no means least among the rulers of Judah; for out of you will come a ruler who will shepherd my people Israel.”[b]”

7 Then Herod called the Magi secretly and found out from them the exact time the star had appeared. 8 He sent them to Bethlehem and said, “Go and search carefully for the child. As soon as you find him, report to me, so that I too may go and worship him.” 9 After they had heard the king, they went on their way, and the star they had seen when it rose went ahead of them until it stopped over the place where the child was. 10 When they saw the star, they were overjoyed. 11 On coming to the house, they saw the child with his mother Mary, and they bowed down and worshiped him. Then they opened their treasures and presented him with gifts of gold, frankincense and myrrh. 12 And having been warned in a dream not to go back to Herod, they returned to their country by another route.

INTRODUCTION: The Magi presented to the young Jesus three types of gifts: Gold, frankincense, and myrrh. These were not random gifts that they had lying around, they were each significant at the time, and they have important meanings for us today. The three gifts had a spiritual meaning: gold as a symbol of kingship on earth, frankincense (an incense) as a symbol of deity, and myrrh (an embalming oil) as a symbol of death. This dates back to **Origen in Contra Celsum**: "gold, as to a king; myrrh, as to one who was mortal; and incense, as to a God."

The Word Contra Celsum is a Latin word meaning: Against Celsus (in Greek: Κατὰ Κέλσου Kata Kelsou;), preserved entirely in Greek, is a major apologetics work by the Church Father Origen of Alexandria, written in around 248 AD, countering the writings of Celsus, a pagan philosopher and controversialist who had written a scathing attack on Christianity in his treatise The True Word. Among a variety of other charges, Celsus had denounced many Christian doctrines as irrational and criticized Christians themselves as uneducated, deluded, unpatriotic, close-minded towards reason, and too accepting of sinners. He had accused Jesus of performing his miracles using black magic rather than actual divine powers and of plagiarizing his teachings from Plato. Celsus had warned that Christianity itself was drawing people away from traditional religion and claimed that its growth would lead to a collapse of traditional, conservative values.

Origen wrote *Contra Celsum* at the request of his patron, a wealthy Christian named Ambrose, who insisted that a Christian needed to write a response to Celsus. In the treatise itself, which was aimed at an audience of people who were interested in Christianity but had not yet made the decision to convert,

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So, during the Christmas season, the story of the Magi bringing their gifts to the Christ Child in Matthew 2 can be a helpful reminder of the kinds of “gifts” that God wants from us as well. At some point, after Jesus was born in Bethlehem, several Magi traveled to see him by following a unique star or light in the sky. These Magi (otherwise known as “Wise Men”) were a special class of priests in the Persian Empire that had been around for a long time, at least since Daniel was appointed to be their leader by King Nebuchadnezzar (Daniel 5).

They were religious professors, philosophers, and scholars who were highly educated in many fields, including religion, astronomy, and even astrology (which is why they were paying attention to the stars in the first place). It is very possible that while Daniel was overseeing these Magi, he taught them the prophecies about the coming Messiah (such as in Numbers 24:17 and Micah 5:2). Quite possibly, they had been waiting on Jesus’ birth for a long time. Because of their knowledge and influence, they also served as political advisors and even “king-makers” – which is a very interesting connection considering that the Book of Matthew (that presents Jesus as the rightful king in the line of Judah) is the only gospel account that mentions this story.

But these men did not risk their lives to make this journey (especially considering their interaction with the evil King Herod) in order to make a political move, teach a seminar, or advise a king – they were traveling from the Far East to worship “he who has been born king of the Jews” (Matthew 2:2). When the Magi finally found the house where the Christ Child was staying, they “rejoiced exceedingly with great joy,” fell down on their faces before Jesus and Mary and worshiped him (an appropriate reaction to being in the presence of the King of Kings). Then they opened their treasures and presented to the young Jesus three types of gifts: Gold, frankincense, and myrrh. These were not random gifts that they had lying around, they were each significant at the time, and they have important meanings for us today.

What Was the Significance of Each of the Magi’s Gifts?

- 1. Gold** is a precious metal that has been used for jewelry, ornaments, currency, and idols throughout human history because of its color and shine.
- 2. Frankincense** is an expensive fragrance or perfume made from trees in India and Arabia.
- 3. Myrrh** is a specific kind of costly perfume made from rare thorn bushes in Arabia and Ethiopia that is used as an antiseptic anointing oil and embalming fluid.

While these gifts would have been rare and very costly for the Magi to give to Jesus’ family, they were not unheard of in first-century Palestine.

However, while gold and perfume might make nice “Christmas gifts,” myrrh is an odd (or even inappropriate) gift choice for the family with a newborn baby. As one writer put it, “Embalming liquid never appears to top the lists of baby shower gifts in society today.”

These gifts were diplomatic representations of each of the Magi’s cultures. Based on where they were each from, they “honored the King... in a way that fit their nationality.” In a similar way, because these gifts were expensive, they demonstrated the level of sacrificial love and worship they had for this newborn King. This was not a gesture of selflessness, it was adoration. The Magi were not purchasing anything with their gifts, they were praising God for such a gift.

As we enter 2021, it is therefore time to say: “God the gifts are intensifiers of my desire for Christ himself in much the same way as I do my fasting and prayers”. When you give a gift to Christ like this, it’s a way of saying, “The joy that I pursue, is not the hope of getting rich with things from you or from my congregation. Jesus, I have not come to you for your things, but for yourself. And this desire I now intensify and demonstrate by giving up things of this world, in the hope of enjoying you more, not things. By giving to you what you do not need, and what I might enjoy, I am saying more earnestly and more authentically, ‘You are my treasure, not these things of this world.’”

I believe that some of us have been confused by the atrocities of COVID-19, the lose of our livelihood and so many things. The tradition of celebrating Christmas was thrown out off the window by a man created pandemic which has devastated the entire world but because of Jesus and his glorious mercies upon us, we can continue to worship him and expect nothing in return but eternal life.

**IF YOU NEED PRAYERS TO COMBAT YOUR CONFUSION,
WORRY AND ANXIETY ON WHAT 2021 WILL LOOK LIKE.
OR YOUR HOPE ON ANYTHING IS BEEN SURPRESSED BY
YOUR THOUGHTS, PLEASE COME FORWARD FOR
PRAYERSOR CONTACT US ON**

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**CONTINUE TO MEDITATE ON THESE GIFTS AND GOD
BLESS YOU**