Wise Gifts For Jesus

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Preacher: Colin Dow

[0:00] In Matthew 2, verse 11, we read these words regarding the wise men who came from the east. And going into the house, they saw the child with Mary his mother and fell down and worshipped him.

Then opening their treasures, they offered him gifts, gold and frankincense and myrrh. Heavenly Father, we bow in your presence.
May your word be our rule, your spirit our teacher and your greater glory, our supreme concern through Jesus Christ our Lord.
What's so special about Christmas? Maybe that's a question that many in our world are asking at this time. For the majority of British people like ourselves, Christmas is special because it means presents for the children, holidays for those of us who work, a turkey roast on Christmas Day, and family time over the festive period.
But is this all that's special about Christmas? Things you can see and touch. Things which come and go.
[1:25] Sure, Christmas is a big deal. But if it's only a secular Christmas, then it's a desperately empty thing. What's so special about Christmas is the one thing so few people think about.

The Christ of Christmas. Underneath the Christmas tree, there may be plenty of presents. But it's easy to forget the greatest gift of them all. The Lord Jesus Christ sent from heaven to be one of us in order that he might save us from our sins and from the misery our sins inflict upon us.
We might be surprised at some of those who knew how special Jesus really was. There was a group of shepherds who, being told by an angel of Jesus' birth, went to investigate and left the stable rejoicing and praising God.
Shepherds were a notoriously fickle and dishonest people in those times. They were not fine society. The other group who knew how special Jesus was were the Magi or the wise men or even royal ambassadors, as we saw last week, who came from an eastern kingdom.
They came from faraway lands bearing gifts for Jesus. They had learned of a birth of a king through their reading of the stars. And led by that bright and shining star to Bethlehem, the Magi worshipped Jesus.
[3:03] And they gave him three gifts. Gold, myrrh, and frankincense. This has led some people to think that there were three wise men.

But we don't know that for certain. The text doesn't tell us. It just tells us they brought three gifts. The important thing, as far as we're concerned this Christmas morning, is that they gave the baby gifts.
Gold, myrrh, and frankincense. Although they may not have known why they were giving the baby these gifts, God had a deeper purpose in them.
Gold, myrrh, and frankincense. Each of these things tell us something about Jesus. About what his life was going to look like.
And about how and why he was going to die. The whole gospel story of Jesus Christ, as the savior of his people, is encapsulated in these three gifts.
[4:07] Gold, myrrh, and frankincense. Jesus came to save us from our sins. To give us eternal life. And we know it because these wise men came with their three gifts.

Of gold, and myrrh, and frankincense. Let's go through each one this morning. And as we do so, we'll begin to see just how, just what's so special about Christmas.
Or rather not what's so special about Christmas. But who is so special about Christmas. It's Jesus Christ who makes Christmas so special.

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First of all then, they brought him gold. Gold. Gold makes us think of royalty. People take tributes of gold to place at the feet of kings.
With such a gift of gold, the wise men are proclaiming this child as king. And they say as much in Matthew 2 and verse 2, where they say to King Herod, where is he who has been born king of the Jews?
[5:19] Jesus, the king. But this baby isn't just king of the Jews. Jesus is king of the whole world. King even of heaven.

Jesus Christ, the son of God. Emmanuel, God with us. King of kings. Lord of lords. And before him all men must bow the knee in reverence.
Hugo Chavez, president of Venezuela in 2012, changed the constitution of his country to allow himself to be re-elected indefinitely.
When he changed it, he said of himself, now, I can rule forever. Really?
When he said that, had he been to a graveyard to see the gravestones of those who thought they were going to live forever? Did he, when he said these words, realize that one day, in the not too distant future, he joined those who sleep in the silence of death.
[6:35] In fact, Hugo Chavez died shortly afterwards. Now, I can rule forever, he said. The great rulers of our day will soon be has-beens, and their thrones will be taken by someone else.

As I often say, the great Scottish author, John Buchan, once asked the question in his famous book, The Courts of the Morning, what is the glory of man when it all ends in six feet of dirt?
By contrast, a greater king than Hugo Chavez is a baby in the arms of his mother, Mary. We think of a baby as cute and cuddly.
But we must never forget this baby is the King of Kings and Lord of Lords. As we go through the Bible from Genesis to Revelation, we get glimpses of the glory of King Jesus.
From Isaiah 6, where we see him seated on the throne, high and lifted up, to Revelation chapter 1, where before his glory, the apostle John falls on his feet as though dead.
[7:52] There is a king like no other and his name is Jesus Christ. Granted, he doesn't look much like a king in the arms of his mother, but a king he is nonetheless.

So how then does the King of Kings become a baby? And then we remember the immortal words of that carol we sang at the beginning of our service, Hark the Herald Angels Sing.
When the writer says words which are some of the most profound in any human authorship, veiled in flesh, the Godhead see.
When we look at that baby, we're looking at the king who is veiling his glory behind human flesh. His glory is still there, but we can't see it because it's hidden behind human flesh.
But we mustn't stop believing that Jesus is the King of Kings and the Lord of Lords, God in the flesh. He who was rich yet for our sakes became so very poor.
[8:59] He has always been king and he will always be king. Not like Chavez, not like other earthly rulers of our day who say in their hearts and might say even out loud, now I can reign forever.

Jesus and Jesus alone is the King of Kings. Gold. The second gift they brought was myrrh.
Myrrh. Now, whereas gold is easy to place, myrrh is perhaps a bit more difficult. Myrrh is a spice. Comes from the East. It's a spice.
We have other references to myrrh in the Gospels. In John 19, verse 39, Nicodemus, who was a Pharisee, Jesus met and became a secret follower of Jesus, brought a mixture of myrrh and aloes, about 75 pounds in weight.
He brought it after the death of Jesus to anoint Jesus' body before placing it in the tomb. Because in those days, a body was wrapped in bandages and between the layers of bandages, myrrh would be placed to soften the smell of decay.
[10:16] Myrrh doesn't have to do with Jesus being a king. It has to do with Jesus dying and being buried.

Even here, at the very beginning of the life of Jesus, the bringing of myrrh by the Magi as a gift is reminding us that this baby has been born to die.
the swaddling clothes in which the baby Jesus was wrapped. He will one day be wrapped in again, but this time for burial with myrrh placed between those layers of bandages in readiness to be placed into his tomb.
You see, the bringing of myrrh is a prophecy of the death of Jesus. The one who was king of kings as we saw in our first point is going to die and be buried.

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I read a story a few weeks ago about a man who attended his own funeral. Such a strange thing to do to attend one's own funeral. Apparently, someone who looked incredibly like him had been involved in a car accident and had died.
[11:33] His mother came into the police station and wrongly identified the body as her son. And so, his funeral was arranged.

But can you imagine the shock and horror when the man whose funeral it was supposed to be turned up at the graveside? It was all one big catastrophic mistake caused by a mother in shock misidentifying her son's body.
But the truth is there is no mistake here. Jesus, the King of kings and the Lord of lords before whom the shepherd and the wise men bowed and before whom the angels sang in the most beautiful harmony, this same Jesus will soon die.
He was beaten and he was flogged. A crown of thorns was driven into his head. He was forced to carry a wooden cross up a hill and then was nailed to it.
Six hours later he died in agony. His body was then pierced with a spear to make sure he was dead and then when he was taken down he was wrapped in bandages laced with myrrh and placed in a tomb.
[12:55] Now, we don't tend to focus on this side of Jesus' life at Christmas time. We only think of the cute little baby and yet without taking into account the cross of Jesus we cannot understand the birth of Jesus.

Without taking into account the cross of Jesus we can't take into account the cradle of Jesus. But even then why did the King of Kings become flesh like us?
why did he grow up and die upon a cross? This is the question which in our last point we'll answer. We've had gold we've had myrrh and then lastly the third gift the Magi brought to Jesus was frankincense. Frankincense.
Frankincense has this really cool name but it's not a spice and it's not a stone it's incense it's what it says in the tin incense it's the kind of incense which is used in temples and in high Anglican Roman Catholic and Orthodox churches even to this day.
[14:13] Frankincense has to do with temples priests sacrifices offerings and this reference to sacrifices and temples is the answer to why God had to come as a human being and die upon a cross why the king of kings had to undergo the humiliation of the cross by the king of frankincense we're being reminded Jesus came as a sacrifice to give himself as the sacrifice for our sins at this time of year we give gifts to each other I've told you what I got this morning but throughout our lives the only thing that we've ever given God is our selfishness our rebellion and our practical atheism we live as though there were no God and get on with what we want to do in life to all intents and purposes we live as the enemies of God

God being holy and pure as we learned last Sunday evening must judge and punish this sin but in his greater love God sent King Jesus to die for us his own son to bear the punishment our sins deserved and to earn the forgiveness of our sins Jesus Christ can wash us from all our sins can make our hearts clean and give us new life with him he came to be the sacrifice for our sins to give his life a ransom for many he gave himself to pay the debt we couldn't pay to die the death we're not willing to die if we trust in him we will be completely forgiven of everything we've ever done wrong we will have the promise of eternal life and so this all leaves us with two ways to live the first way our own way is to ignore all that
Jesus did and to get on with our own lives living as though God did not exist that we're accountable to no one for our actions and that after death well we can just hope for the best after death or we can live God's way we can trust in Jesus Christ we can ask him to take away all our sins and give us eternal life if we trust in Jesus we don't need to uncertainly hope for the best we can have certainty in him what's so special about Christmas isn't a what but a who Jesus Christ why is he so special the answer is because he is the king of kings the answer is because he loved us so much that he died for us on the cross the answer is because he gave himself as a sacrifice for us let's think of it this way when we go home after the service today let's look at our
Christmas trees and remember another kind of tree up in which the king of glory died for us we don't really know at what time of year Jesus was born so these Christmas carols see amid the winter snow and in the bleak midwinter aren't songs we would ever sing in church they belong far more to Victorian romance than to the truths of the Bible and yet that hymn in the bleak midwinter the last verse of that hymn presents one of the most powerful challenges to all of us today Christina

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Rossetti the hymn writer she famously asks the question what can I give him poor as I am what gift can I bring to King Jesus poor as I am and then she responds if I were a shepherd
I'd bring a lamb if I were a wise man I'd do my part yet what can I give him I can give him my heart let's make the greatest gifts we receive this Christmas day the gift of the forgiveness of all our sins and the hope of eternal life through Christ gifts which are free if we'll but pray to him and ask him to be our savior and lord John Calvin the famous French reformer had as his motto in life my heart I offer to you promptly and sincerely anyone willing here to join with Christina Rossetti and John Calvin as they give to
[19:58] Jesus their hearts promptly and sincerely let's do that today and then we'll have a truly happy Christmas let us pray we thank you lord that nothing in your word is irrelevant and that these three gifts of gold and myrrh and frankincense meant something gold that your son is the king of kings and lord of lords myrrh that he was destined to die and to be buried frankincense for the king died to offer himself as the sacrifice for our sins and bring us eternal life we thank you his name is Jesus which means he shall save us from our sins and so we pray that every one of us today oh lord would adopt the same attitude as

Christina Rossetti and as John Calvin the former who said if if I were a shepherd I would bring him a lamb if I were a wise man I do my part yet what can I give him I give him my heart the latter whose life motto was my heart I offer to you promptly and sincerely in Jesus name amen

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