

Christmas Treasures

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[0 : 0 0] goes without saying that Christmas without Christmas presents wouldn't be Christmas. You know, to see the expression on your child's face when they open their presents on a Christmas morning is pretty priceless. Perhaps Jasper is just a bit too young to appreciate it, but as he grows, Isaac and Kirsten are in for many precious Christmas days with him.

Ask a child what's so precious about Christmas and they will say to you, presents. They're not thinking about turkeys, they're thinking about toys.

You know, perhaps they're onto something. Maybe the adults among us are thinking deeply about the wrong things at Christmas. We're busy thinking about decorations and dinners rather than the most important thing of all, the greatest gift any of us could ever need or want, the gift God has given us of His one and only Son, Jesus Christ.

If we want to make this a truly special Christmas, we need to think more about this greatest of gifts and what it means for us, child or adult. Now, tradition tells us that there were three wise men who visited Jesus and brought their gifts to Him. But the Bible does not say that there were three wise men, only that there were three gifts. They weren't from Israel, as we know it today, but from the east, modern-day Iraq, Iran, perhaps even further east. They were called the magi, the wise men, the word from which we get our word magician. They were familiar with the stars, and they started their journey to Bethlehem when they saw a rather unique star in the sky moving in that direction. They took gifts with them because, as astrologers, they interpreted the star as meaning a significant person was to be born. And it's these three gifts I want us to briefly focus our attention upon this morning because they tell us who Jesus is, why He came, and what kind of gift He is to us. Gold, frankincense, and myrrh. When they arrived at where Jesus was, they presented Him with these gifts. They didn't realize that the Jesus to whom they were giving gifts was God's ultimate gift to humanity. The wise men, however, however many of them there were, brought three gifts. They brought gold for a king, they brought myrrh for a sufferer, and they brought frankincense for a sacrifice. Gold for a king, myrrh for a sufferer, and frankincense for the sacrifice. Jesus would later say, unless you have the faith of a child, you will never enter the kingdom of heaven. This Christmas, why don't we become more like children and make God's present to us the most important thing of all, Jesus, God's Son.

So, first of all then, they brought gold for a king, gold for a king, because gold makes us think of royalty. People take tributes of gold to place at the feet of kings. With the gift of gold, gold, these magi are proclaiming the child as king. They say as much in Matthew 2 verse 2 when they say to King Herod, where is he who has been born king of the Jews? For we saw his star when it rose, and we have come to worship him. Jesus is a king, and the wise men knew it. Isn't it ironic that as foreigners like these wise men knew that Jesus was the king? Jesus' own people, the Jews, did not know it. But this baby is not merely king of the Jews. He is king of the whole world and king of heaven itself. He is Jesus, the King, the Son of God, Emmanuel, God with us, the King of kings, the Lord of lords. And before him, all men must bow their knees in reverence.

[4 : 2 9] Taking the Bible seriously, we place Jesus at the center of everything, the center of heaven and earth, center of the universe, the center of the past, the present, and the future. Jesus Christ, King of all.

In 2007, President Hugo Chavez changed the constitution of Venezuela to allow himself to be re-elected indefinitely. When he changed that constitution, he famously said, now I can rule forever. Really? Had he been to a graveyard to see the gravestones of those who thought they were going to live forever? Did he not realize that as a mortal man, he would one day in the not-too-distant future join with those who sleep in the silence of death?

In 2013, six years after he said those words, Hugo Chavez became the ex-president of Venezuela when he died at the age of 59. So much for his now-I-can-rule-forever boast.

The great rulers of our day will soon be has-beens, and their thrones will be taken by someone else. The great Scottish author John Buchan once asked, What is the glory of man when it all ends in six feet of dirt?

What is the glory of man when it all ends in six feet of dirt? The kings of the world, reigning today in earthly glory, whoever they are, will one day lie in earthly dust. Their reigns consigned to the history books.

[6 : 14] No one is alive today who remembers the reign of our most famous British monarch, Queen Victoria. By contrast, the King of Glory is a baby in the arms of his mother Mary. And we think of that baby as all cute and all cuddly, but we must never forget he's the King of Kings. As we go through the Bible from Genesis to Revelation, we gain glimpses of the glory of King Jesus. From Isaiah 6, where we see Him high and lifted up on a heavenly throne, to Revelation chapter 1, where the apostle John falls at his feet as though dead. This Jesus is a King like no other. Of course, he doesn't look much like a king in the arms of his mother, but he is a king. So, how then does a king become a baby?

And let me remember the immortal words of that carol we sung when we came in, Hark! The Herald Angels Sing, where the writer says, Veiled in flesh, the Godhead see. Hail the incarnate deity! When we see the baby Jesus, we're looking at the King who is hiding His infinite glory behind flesh. His glory is still there, but we can't see it because it's hidden behind the human frame of a baby. But this must not stop us believing that Jesus Christ is the King of Kings and the Lord of Lords. He's God in the flesh. He who was rich yet for our sakes became poor. He has always been King and He will always be King, not like Hugo Chavez or like any of the earthly rulers of our day.

He is the King of Kings. But what a King He is! The old Scottish paraphrase of Psalm 23 puts it so well, The King of love my shepherd is, whose goodness faileth never. I nothing lack if I am His, and He is mine forever. For those of us who are believing Christians here today, we could never, never have wished for a wiser, more powerful, and more loving King than the Lord Jesus, who is with us in all the twists and turns of our complicated lives. He's with us in the glories, and He's with us in the griefs. He's with us in the sorrows, and He's with us in the joys.

Kings and palaces, they sit far away from the common man and woman, but not our King, not the Lord Jesus. He is with us, leading us both through the green pastures, and He's with us as we pass through the valleys of the shadow of death. The Christmas treasure we're all being offered is to have this Lord Jesus as our King today, to live under His loving, wise, and powerful Lordship, to have the King of love as our shepherd. We don't offer Him gold like these wise men did.

[9 : 35] We're going to offer them ourselves, the mess we've made of our lives, the sin of our hearts, everything about us. And you know He'll take us as we are this morning, and He'll love us freely.

Impatient children in Christmas morning grab their presents and tear the wrapping paper off, like impatient children on Christmas morning. Grasp His offer today, and you shall have Christ as your King. Gold for a King. Myrrh for a sufferer. Myrrh for a sufferer. What does gold is easy to place, although we don't have much of it, any of us? Myrrh is perhaps a bit more difficult. Myrrh is a spice. We do have other references to myrrh in the Gospels. In John 19, 39, Nicodemus, who was a Pharisee Jesus met and who became a follower of Jesus, brought a mixture of myrrh and aloes. And he brought it after the death of Jesus to anoint Jesus' body before it was placed in the tomb. In those days, a body was wrapped in bandages, and between the layers of the bandages, myrrh, a spice, was placed to soften the smell of decay. So, myrrh doesn't have to do with Jesus being a King. It has to do with Jesus suffering, dying, being buried. Even here, at the very beginning of Jesus' life, the bringing of myrrh by the Magi is a gift reminding us that one day this baby will suffer, die, and be buried.

The swaddling clothes in which Jesus was wrapped, He will one day be wrapped in again, this time for burial, and myrrh will be placed between the layers of bandages in readiness to be placed into a tomb.

The manger into which Jesus was laid shall be replaced by a tomb into which His lifeless body shall be placed. And Mary, the loving mother of this newborn child, will have a sword struck through her heart as she sees her boy dying on a cross. You see, the bringing of myrrh, it's a prophecy of the death of Jesus. The one who was King of Kings is going to die and be buried.

[12 : 11] I read a story a few weeks ago about a man who attended his own funeral. Strange thing to do. Apparently, someone who looked just like him had been involved in a car accident and had died.

And his mother came into the police station and had wrongly identified the body as being that of her son. The funeral was arranged. Can you imagine the shock and horror when the man whose funeral it was supposed to be turned up at the graveside? It was one catastrophic mistake caused by a distressed mother misidentifying her son's body. But the truth is, there will never be a mistake here. Jesus, the King of Kings, before whom the shepherds and the wise men bowed, before whom the angels sang in beautiful harmony and fell down in worship. This very same Jesus will die. And what a death it was. He was beaten and flogged. He was tortured, had a crown of thorns driven into his head. He was forced to carry a wooden cross up a hill, and then he 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 hurriedly wrapped in bandages, laced with myrrh, and then placed in another man's tomb.

Well, we don't focus on this side of Jesus' life at Christmas. We only think of the cute little baby. And yet, without taking into account the cross of Jesus, how can we understand the birth of Jesus?

[13 : 51] But it's also confusing. The Jesus born in that stable will grow up to be one of the, will grow up to be the most loving and righteous men who has ever lived. He will touch the untouchable.

He will forgive the unforgivable. He will show compassion to those who had only ever been hated. And he'll love those whom society considered outcasts and beyond the pale. He will make the lame walk. He will make the deaf hear. He will give sight to the blind and restore the sanity of the demented. One Bible scholar calls him, David Parker reminds me often, Jesus who was for the other.

Jesus who was for the other. He never once did anything selfish or self-centered. There was no deceit upon his lips, and he never once failed the law of God. He loved the Lord as God with all his heart, soul, strength, and mind, and he loved his neighbor as himself. He committed no crime for which he was worthy of condemnation. No one was able to accuse him of the slightest wrongdoing, but above it all, he was a man of grace and compassion and love. You know, with the holiday time coming up quite soon, let's again read the gospel accounts of Jesus' life in Matthew, Mark, Luke, and John. They describe a man like no other. If you do not have a Bible, we have plenty of Bibles here to give away.

The stories of his suffering are but words on a page, but they're hard words to read because it's all so unjust. Why did the King of Kings become flesh like us? Why did He grow up?

Why did He die on a cross? And these are questions which we do not yet in our sermon today have the answer to. So, we have gold for a king, myrrh for a sufferer, and then thirdly, we have frankincense for a sacrifice. Frankincense for a sacrifice. Frankincense, what a great name.

[16 : 08] If anyone here is pregnant, don't think about calling your child frankincense. It's not either male or female name. It's a wonderful word, though. Frankincense isn't a spice, and it's not a stone.

It is what it says on the tin. It's incense. It's the kind of incense which priests may still use today and is used in high Anglican, Roman Catholic, and Orthodox churches. Frankincense has to do with priests and offerings and sacrifices. I don't think I've ever smelt frankincense because people tell me it's got an unforgettable aroma. And this reference to sacrifices and temples is the ultimate answer to the questions posed by the offerings of frankincense, by the wise men to the baby Jesus. They answer the question of why it is God had to come as a baby and die on a cross. Why a king had to go through the humiliation of the cross. By the giving of frankincense, we are being reminded that Jesus came to offer Himself as a sacrifice, as a sacrifice.

Many years after Jesus was born, John the Baptist, Jesus' first cousin, as Barbara read to you, would point to Him and cry out, Behold, the Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world. Jesus came to be the Lamb of God who would take away the sin of the world by His once for all sacrifice of Himself on the cross. As I'm sure you know, in the Old Testament, Jewish priests would sacrifice lambs and bulls in the temple in Jerusalem to take away the sins of the people.

[18 : 01] God is holy and pure, and we are not. We're selfish creatures. We live as though there were no God, and we do not live as though He were our King. We do what we want to do, even if that hurts others.

600 years before Jesus was born, the prophet Isaiah said, All of us, like sheep, have gone astray, each turned to his own way.

We have strayed from God. We have gone our own way instead. At this time of year, we give gifts to each other. But throughout our lives, the only gifts that we've ever given to God are our selfishness, our rebellion, our ignorance, our lovelessness, and our practical atheism.

We live as though there were no God. To all intents and purposes, we live as His enemies. God, being holy and pure, must judge and punish this sin.

But in His great love, God sent His Son to die for us. God sent King Jesus to bear the punishment of our sins and to win forgiveness for us.

[19 : 18] God can wash us clean of all our sins and give us new life with Him. Jesus came to be the sacrifice for our sins, to give His life as a ransom for many.

He gave Himself to pay the debt that we couldn't pay, to die the death that we're not ready to die, so that we can have eternal life with Him. Jesus suffered so much because He was suffering for us.

He was enduring the penalty we deserved. The Lamb of God given on the cross as the sacrifice for our sins. Though He had committed no sin, He became like He died for sinners like us.

Jesus is the greatest gift at Christmas because from cradle to cross and beyond, He offers us all that He suffered and died to give us.

forgiveness, hope, love, acceptance, security, eternal life.

[20 : 32] Which one of us doesn't want that? To unwrap God's ultimate gift is to have faith in Jesus. Children on Christmas morning don't ask for permission to open their presents.

They just go at it until they know what's underneath that wrapping paper. You know, we can do the same today. We can go at it, at the gift God has given us, by trusting that what Jesus did, He did for us.

To become a Christian is to pledge loyalty to Jesus as our King. And His first royal command to us is, believe and trust in Me.

Turn away from all that you know to be wrong in your life and devote yourself to Me. This, having faith in Him, is the child in us unwrapping God's ultimate Christmas gift.

Wise men from the East, they brought three gifts. Now, we don't bring God any gifts today except our demerits, but we eagerly accept God's gift to us.

[21 : 55] Receive Jesus today, even as a child receives the presents, his parents, her parents, place under the Christmas tree.

Let us pray. We thank You, Lord, for the logic of the gospel, a logic we cannot understand unless we terminate at the cross.

We dare not try to understand the birth of Jesus without the death of Jesus, and we cannot contemplate the death of Jesus without taking into account the birth of Jesus.

Lord, like eager and impatient children longing to open their Christmas presents, we ask that You would give us eagerness and impatience today to receive Jesus as our King, to devote our loyalty and our service to Him and to say of Jesus, He will be my King my whole life through.

We ask these things in Jesus' name. Amen. Let me remind you that we have tea, coffee, and cake. Cake after the service.

[23 : 09] Please stay behind for that and to celebrate Jasper's baptism and his granda's 80th birthday. Let's close now as we sing Christ, our hope in life and death.

This is a great way if you're not yet a Christian to commit yourself to Jesus by placing your hope in Jesus alone. Amen. Amen.