



The Wise Men

9 When they had heard the king, they departed; and, lo, the star, which they saw in the east, went before them, till it came and stood over where the young child was. 10 When they saw the star, they rejoiced with exceeding great joy. 11 And when they were come into the house, they saw the young child with Mary his mother, and fell down, and worshipped him: and when they had opened their treasures, they presented unto him gifts; gold, and frankincense, and myrrh. (Matt 2:9-11)

You will recall from our devotion on the 'First Visitors of Jesus' that the angelic host made proclamation bathed in heavenly light to the poor shepherds *keeping watch over their flocks by night*. These were poor Jewish shepherds. The message went first to the Jew, and then to the Gentile - the Wise Men (Gentiles) from the East were next. *For I am not ashamed of the gospel of Christ: for it is the power of God unto salvation to every one that believeth; to the Jew first, and also to the Greek. (Romans 1:16)* I hope that, among other powerful lessons we glean from our study of God's Word, that we will also note the profound constancy and consistency of the story-line of Christ, and God's Will for man, that runs through every Book of the Bible as a Scarlet Ribbon of love uniting and drawing together all parts of the epic chronicles of the Lord.

The distant Magi - perhaps of far away Persia since Magi is the term for priest of the Zoroastrians - had no privilege of an angelic revelation. They had only the ancient Hebrew text of the Bible upon which to base their faith in a coming King of Kings. They studied all of the ancient prophets of the Old Testament writings and were made aware, by faith and scholarly study, of the Star that would herald His birth. Having experiential background in the study of the heavens, they watched and waited, for they knew the time was ripe for the appearance of that Star based on their studies. This represents an amazing faith that puts to shame that pale and malnourished faith of many modern Christians who have access to all of the revelations recorded in both the Old and New Testament, and yet question the veracity of Scripture in both lifestyle and demeanor.

Overlooking the city of Esfahan, Iran, on the high desert of Persia, is a sharp-peaked mountain which is constantly seen to emit a column of smoke from its summit. I asked the locals there if this was some small volcanic mountain. They laughed and told me, No, it is the fire kept eternally lit by the Magi, or priest of the Zoroastrians. Esfahan was a hub of concentration of the Zoroastrian faith from the time of Cyrus the Great. Many had to flee Persian at the onslaught of Islam in 651 under Caliph Umar and fled to India. Even earlier, Muhammad had sent an emissary to the Persian Sassanid ruler,

Khosrau II, to this effect: *In the name of Allah, the Beneficent, the Merciful. From Muhammad, the Messenger of Allah, to the great Kisra of Iran. Peace be upon him, who seeks truth and expresses belief in Allah and in His Prophet and testifies that there is no god but Allah and that He has no partner, and who believes that Muhammad is His servant and Prophet. Under the Command of Allah, I invite you to Him. He has sent me for the guidance of all people so that I may warn them all of His wrath and may present the unbelievers with an ultimatum. Embrace Islam so that you may remain safe. And if you refuse to accept Islam, you will be responsible for the sins of the Magi.* I only quote the words of evil incarnate for the purpose of showing the title, Magi, of the Zoroastrian priesthood.

So these men, more than 1,150 miles removed from Bethlehem, followed that Star of Bethlehem across unbelievably hazardous and unfriendly terrain to the place where the child was lodged in Bethlehem. It seems likely that Jesus was not more than two years old at the time of their visit since the family was then found to be dwelling in a house *And when they were come into the house, they saw the young child with Mary his mother, and fell down, and worshipped him.* (Matt 2:11b) Jesus must have been less than two years also because of the edict of Herod: *Then Herod, when he saw that he was mocked of the wise men, was exceeding wroth, and sent forth, and slew all the children that were in Bethlehem, and in all the coasts thereof, from two years old and under, according to the time which he had diligently enquired of the wise men.* (Matt 2:16)

The Gifts

And when they were come into the house, they saw the young child with Mary his mother, and fell down, and worshipped him: and when they had opened their treasures, they presented unto him gifts; gold, and frankincense, and myrrh. (Matt 2:11)

There are no passages of Scripture that do not convey great meaning, but the meaning of these gifts are of profound prophetic and practical meaning. It is likely that even the Wise Men knew not the significance of meaning attributable to the gifts.

Gold

Traditionally, gold has set the standard for the monetary coinage of nations and most certainly as the standard of exchange for money. Being used as currency from the beginning of nations, it bears the image of the nation's sovereign most generally. Gold came to represent royalty since all early governments were ruled by kings. The atomic symbol for gold is 'Au.' This is based on the etymology of the ancient word for gold from the Latin - aurum, meaning 'shining dawn.' So the gift of GOLD to baby Jesus symbolizes both His royalty as well as the New Creation that He came to restore from Adam's fall. He is king, indeed, and more precisely, King of kings. *These shall make war with the Lamb, and the Lamb shall overcome them: for he is Lord of lords, and **King of kings:** and they that are with him are called, and chosen, and faithful.* (Rev 17:14 KJV) Kings are to be revered, but not necessarily worshipped unless the King is the LORD of Lords! That brings us to the next prophetic gift.

Frankincense

The book of Isaiah describes in dazzling language the prophecy of the Bride of Christ (the Church). *Arise, shine; for thy light is come, and the glory of the LORD is risen upon thee. For, behold, the darkness shall cover the earth, and gross darkness the people: but the LORD shall arise upon thee, and his glory shall be seen upon thee. And the Gentiles shall come to thy light, and kings to the brightness of thy rising. . . . - the forces of the Gentiles shall come unto thee. The multitude of camels shall cover thee, the dromedaries of Midian and Ephah; all they from Sheba shall come: they shall bring gold and incense; and they shall shew forth the praises of the LORD.* (Isaiah 60:1-3,5-6) What was incense to the Old Testament Church, and what to the New? It symbolizes WORSHIP! The incense rising from the Golden Table of

Incense (in the Tabernacle) that was positioned in the Holy Place just before the Holy of Holies, represented the prayers of the people, uttered by the priest on behalf of Israel, rising up to God. It is natural that the best quality of incense would have been used when available, and that would be FRANKINCENSE! Our Lord Jesus is worthy of worship, and that is the symbolic and prophetic meaning of this gift of Frankincense. He is HOLY!

The sacrifices offered to the Lord must be of sweet smelling savor! We do not serve the Lord in bitterness, but in sweet joy. Frankincense conveyed a sweet aroma in its burning at the altar. *And the LORD said unto Moses, Take unto thee sweet spices, stacte, and onycha, and galbanum; these sweet spices with pure frankincense: of each shall there be a like weight: And thou shalt make it a perfume, a confection after the art of the apothecary, tempered together, pure and holy: And thou shalt beat some of it very small, and put of it before the testimony in the tabernacle of the congregation, where I will meet with thee: it shall be unto you most holy.* (Ex 30:34-36)

One side note of interest concerning frankincense - being tapped from the tree, *Boswellia sacra*, the hardened emissions of resin are called TEARS. Heaven mourned the coming crucifixion of God's Son.

So FRANKINCENSE represents the Holiness of Christ and His Divinity as God the Son. He is worthy of worship because He is HOLY!

Myrrh

Myrrh was cherished for both its medicinal properties and its use in the embalming of the dead. Significant to the dual purpose of myrrh is the prophetic allusions to the coming sacrifice of Christ in our redemption and healing of the nations. *For even hereunto were ye called: because Christ also suffered for us, leaving us an example, that ye should follow his steps: Who did no sin, neither was guile found in his mouth: Who, when he was reviled, reviled not again; when he suffered, he threatened not; but committed himself to him that judgeth righteously: Who his own self bare our sins in his own body on the tree, that we, being dead to sins, should live unto righteousness: by whose stripes ye were healed.* (1 Peter 2:21-24) So myrrh represents both death and life - just as our Lord's redemptive work represents our eternal lives purchased at His atoning death. But even more: we, being dead in trespasses and sin, were made alive that we might die to self and live for Christ!

So the three gifts of the Wise Men have meaning that transcends their individual physical properties in pointing to the baby Jesus as King of Kings and Lord of Lords, whose death would bring life to all who believe and trust in God.