

'THE WAY IN THE MANGER'
(The Incarnation of The Son of God)
2011 Christmas Series
Matthew 1 & 2

Tube Socks & Toothbrushes

There are some gifts you never forget. Especially when you're an energetic pre-teen boy with visions of fun stuff for Christmas 'dancing in your head'. There was one present that was no surprise to our son Nathan; for several years he knew for sure that the package from grandma had the same thing every year – tube socks and toothbrushes. The only factor that assuaged the disappointment and bewilderment was the hilarity of the tube socks being dependably small enough for a pre-school age child! What was grandma thinking (or was she?)? There were lots of things a 10, 11 and 12 year old boy would love to receive Christmas morning – but tube socks and toothbrushes?!

Maybe that's what some people think when they read the story of the wise men's gifts for Jesus / gold, frankincense and myrrh for the toddler Jesus? Were they really so wise after all? Couldn't they have carried more fun birthday gifts from Persia than these? Don't they have toys or games in Persia? How about one of their magi telescopes? Maybe they could've spared a camel or two for Jesus and His parents? Instead, these wise men gave Him the perfect gifts that God had moved them to bring – gifts fit for the King. Gifts that said 'we love You, Lord Jesus, and worship You'; gifts for something far more important than play time– gifts that enabled the little Lord Jesus to begin fulfilling His purpose from the beginning.

Knowing the rest of the story from *Matthew chapter two*, we learn that the Lord can use anything that we present to Him in meaningful and glorious ways. As inappropriate as those magi gifts seemed at the time, they were essential in financing the family of Jesus' escape from Herod and relocation in Egypt for a time. In the end those Persian presents were as practical as they were symbolic.

Sometimes people don't understand the gifts of God presented to us. Before we are Christians, God sends odd and even painful situations into our life that, in the end, will be understood as wonderful factors of His plan to bring us into a personal relationship with His Son, Jesus Christ. And then after we become Christians, He continually gives us 'gifts from above' (*James 1:17*) to perfect the image of Christ in us (*Romans 8:29*), motivate us into service for Him with our spiritual gifts (*Romans 12:6-8*) or motivate us into position for blessing at the center of His perfect will (*Romans 12:1-2*). Such gifts may seem irrelevant at the time but in the end, will be seen as 'gifts from heaven afar' from our all-wise God (*Romans 8:28*).

Because we don't see an immediate purpose that coincides with what we think we need right now, it is possible to squander gifts from God or misuse them prematurely. Wise men and women of God learn to accept the things that come their way from the almighty, sovereign Hand of God as gifts that require prayer, meditation and consultation rather than impulsive reaction (*1 Thessalonians 5:16-24*). The Christmas story is full of 'gifts from God' that required patient waiting before the Lord's awesome purposes became clear to those involved (Mary's impregnation, the dreams of Joseph, Caesar's registration, the innkeeper's full house, etc.). Things that even seemed like liabilities in the beginning ended up being 'gifts from God' He used to promote faith and perform His plan.

What are some 'tube socks and toothbrush' things that God has sent into your life right now? Perhaps you were hoping for something more fun or exciting or useful. He knows that you are probably disappointed with the apparent consolation prize you've received. But if you are a wise man or woman, you won't disdain the situation; instead you should 'in everything give thanks' (*1 Thessalonians 5:18, Ephesians 5:20, Colossians 3:17*).

The best we can recall, our son Nathan was never rude or angry or emotionally wounded by those odd gifts. He was always polite, said 'thank you' and continued to love his grandma just the same. He simply used the toothbrushes and passed on those little socks to somebody with tiny feet.

Two-year old Jesus didn't play with the gold, frankincense and myrrh but gave it to Joseph, who used his gifts from Jesus to finance the family's trip to Egypt for a few weeks or months and back. If there is something in your possession that you don't fully understand or need, perhaps God has only given it to you to bless you with the privilege of giving it away to further the glorification of His Son in the eyes of others. Maybe the understanding of why He gave it to you will come when you 're-gift' it and use it for higher kingdom purposes.

‘King-Sized Presents for The King’
(Gold, Frankincense & Myrrh – Symbolic Gifts of Grace)

Matthew 2:11-23

“And when they had come into the house, they saw they young Child with Mary His mother, and fell down and worshiped Him. And when they had opened their treasures, they presented gifts to Him, gold, frankincense and myrrh.” 2:11

Gold – Material Generosity

(Advancement of The King & His Kingdom)
financing the mission to Egypt

“...an angel of the Lord appeared to Joseph in a dream, saying, “Arise, take the young Child and His mother, flee to Egypt and stay there until I bring you word; for Herod will seek the young Child to destroy Him.” 2:13

This trip to Egypt is another evidence that the visit of the magi was quite some time after the birth of Jesus. In Luke 2:21-24 when the infant Jesus is dedicated in the temple, Mary was permitted to offer a sacrifice that was allowed only to abjectly poor people (two young birds). If they had been in possession of the treasure gifts from the magi, they would have been required to purchase and offer a lamb (*Leviticus 12*). Obviously, God’s timing for the magi’s gifts was perfectly coordinated with the need to finance the Egyptian journey. Using our gifts generously for the cause of Christ and His kingdom is like refined gold in the sight of the Lord (*Psalms 19:10-11, 1 Peter 1:6-9*).

Frankincense – Devotional Worship

(Advancement of Your Spiritual Life in God’s Son)
developing devotional intimacy

“When he arose, he took the young Child and His mother by night and departed for Egypt, and was there until the death of Herod, that it might be fulfilled which was spoken by the Lord through the prophet, saying, “Out of Egypt I called My Son.” 2:14

We have no details of the trip to Egypt, the weeks or months spent there or the return trip, but it must have been a very special time together as a family in the safety of this historic place. Their prayers and concerns about the dangers in Israel must have strengthened the spiritual bonds between them and with the Lord God. Matthew records that they were also fulfilling ancient prophecies of God about the early life of Christ. Obedience to God’s Word and His will refresh the Lord like exquisite, sweet incense ascending before His throne (*Philippians 4:18, Revelation 5:8-10*).

Myrrh – Sacrificial Service

(Advancement of Your Ministry to God’s Family)
experiencing divine purpose

“...behold, an angel of the Lord appeared in a dream to Joseph in Egypt saying, “Arise, take the young Child and His mother, and go to the land of Israel...Then he arose, took the young Child and His mother, and came into the land of Israel...And being warned by God in a dream, he turned aside into the region of Galilee. And he came and dwelt in a city called Nazareth...” 2:19-23

For more than two year, Joseph put his life ‘on hold’ to put God’s purposes ahead of his own temporal pursuits. His carpenter shop business, his home in Nazareth and his job and house in Bethlehem were secondary to doing the will of God concerning Mary and young Jesus. In essence, it was ‘death’ to self in order to ‘live unto God’ and His higher purposes. Like the embalming spice ‘myrrh’ preserves the body, so sacrificial commitment to God’s will makes our death to self have everlasting value in the sight of God and those under our responsibility and care (*Luke 9:23-25, Romans 6:11, Galatians 2:20, 1 John 3:16*). Putting God’s family and your immediate family ahead of your personal desires and plans is ‘sacrifice’ that gives your life and those you love eternal purpose and meaning.