



E-Worship 4:23

An online resource for officers and worship leaders in the 21st century

"A time is coming...when the true worshipers will worship the Father in spirit and in truth, for they are the kind of worshipers the Father seeks." - John 4:23



Three Gifts

"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 and of incense and of myrrh." - Matthew 2:11



Gold is one of the only metals that when heated with fire will not lose anything of its nature, weight, color, or any other property. Biblically gold is both a symbol of kingship and purity, a fitting gift for the baby Messiah. Gold has always been a means of exchange. The Magi would not have realized how valuable this gift would have been at the time of its giving... for within days Mary and Joseph would be fleeing for their lives from Bethlehem to Egypt, and the gold would become monetary provision for them in this desperate time. God knew what they needed even before they needed it.

Frankincense was used extensively by the Jewish priests in temple rituals and sacrifices, and so is traditionally associated with the priesthood. Its source is a sap that comes from the Boswellia tree, prevalent in Somalia and the Arabic peninsula. Harvesters slit the tree and allow the sap to run down and harden in the sun, forming a resin that they could scrape off. In order to release its scent, frankincense had to be either crushed or burned. Its odor was not only sweet, but Mary and Joseph would have immediately associated its aroma with Temple worship and sacrifice. Symbolically it points to Jesus' forthcoming crucifixion, and his subsequent role as our spiritual High Priest, continually interceding on our behalf in the same way that the Temple priests interceded at the altar of incense as they burned the frankincense.

The final gift given by the Magi was myrrh. Myrrh also comes from a tree, the "Balsamodendron myrrha", whose sap hardens into small yellowish or white tear-shaped globules. Another variety of myrrh, also called "ladalzum", comes from the cistus shrub, or "rock rose", producing rose-like flowers and growing in Palestine and along the shores of the Mediterranean. The name "myrrh" is derived from the Hebrew "murr" or "maror", meaning bitter, because although myrrh produces a lovely scent, when tasted, it is very bitter.

Myrrh was used in cosmetics and ointments not only for its scent, but as a natural preservative. Today it can still sometimes be found in toothpaste, mouthwash, and make-up. Up until the 15th century, it was extensively used in embalming, and burned at funerals and burials sites, because its fragrance disguised the odors of the decomposing corpses. Along with its bitter taste, it has brain-numbing qualities when eaten: When combined with wine it became "gall" --- the same that was offered Christ at his crucifixion, to help numb his senses so he wouldn't feel his suffering so much. In Jesus' day, it was highly valuable and could be traded as currency, again a practical help to Mary and Joseph in their flight to Egypt. Symbolically, myrrh is associated with Christ's death, and the bitter cup of sacrifice he chose to drink on our behalf.

It is interesting to think that, like the Magi, when we worship Jesus we can also give him these same three gifts. So what does gold, frankincense and myrrh represent in our own lives?

1) We give him the best of us, the best that we are, and the best that we have. We have so much gold in our lives, don't we? Talents and abilities, our families and homes, our jobs and our health: So much to thank God for, so much to offer him from what he's already given us. When God called the people of Israel to offer sacrifices, he always asked for their best

Continued on page 2...

E-Worship 4:23 is a product of the
Music and Gospel Arts section of Corps Ministries
The Salvation Army Canada and Bermuda Territory
2 Overlea Blvd. Toronto Ontario, M4H 1P4
Phone: 416-422-6108 Fax: 416-422-6109
E-mail: Kim_Garreffa@can.salvationarmy.org





Three Gifts continued from page one...

--- the best crops, the best cow, the unblemished lamb, their most valuable possessions. In giving our best back to God, we recognize that all good gifts come from him, that we have provision and blessing in our lives only because he ordained it so. On our part it is an act of trust and faith that he will continue to pour out blessing on us. It is also a calling for us to live unselfishly, not to hold tightly to our abundant resources, but to generously share our best with others as needed, and thus live out a life of love as God himself demonstrated to us by giving us his best, the life of his only Son.

2) We also give him the worst of ourselves, the sin and junk in our lives that needs crushing, burning, crucifixion, so that He can purify us and produce in us the sweet aroma of Christ. What better frankincense can we offer him but our own bodies as living sacrifices, willingly asking him to destroy in us anything that does not savor of Christ?

3) Finally, we give to him all of our days, our agendas, our cares and worries, fully trusting that his divine purpose will unfold in us according to his perfect will. Just as Christ's crucified body was embalmed by myrrh and placed in a tomb, we allow God to embalm our plans and frustrations, entrusting him to resurrect dreams and answer our prayers in accordance with his sovereign timing and omniscience. In the meantime we preserve our hope in him, and wait patiently in his safe and peaceful haven of grace, undeterred by visible circumstance. We recognize that in Christ, seemingly hopeless situations are only temporary conditions, and that what is good and of God is always preserved, then resurrected and glorified, so that the honor goes to him.

This Christmas, as you give your gifts to God and each other, my prayer is that you'll remember to apply the gifts of the Magi to your own life situation as you sing and pray your worship to Christ our beloved Saviour.

To abandon all, to strip one's self of all, in order to seek and follow Jesus Christ naked to Bethlehem where He was born, naked to the hall where He was scourged, and naked to Calvary where He died on the cross, is so great a mystery that neither the thing nor the knowledge of it, is given to any but through faith in the Son of God.

- John Wesley

Adapting Three Gifts

for your congregation

In a church service or small group setting...

The easiest way to provide "gifts" for your congregation is to supply them with individually foil-wrapped hard candies in a variety of colors (gold and two others). During the sermon the hard candies can be passed around, with instructions to take several candies making sure all three colors are represented. Make sure to tell them not to eat the candy!



Set up a small manger (no baby inside) at the front of the sanctuary close to the mercy seat. Do the sermon in three parts: First explain the significance of the gift of gold. Ask the congregation to think about their blessings, talents, etc... all the "best" in their lives that the gold represents. You may want to provide the congregation with index cards and pens to actually write them down. Then, as the congregation sings an appropriate response hymn, each person can come forward and offer their gifts of "gold" by placing in the manger the gold-wrapped candies as an offering and dedication of their best to God.

Next is a time of confession, as you explain the significance of the frankincense, and allow the congregation to come forward with a different colored candy representing the "worst" in them that needs crucifixion. Even our sins and weaknesses can be offered to God as a gift, with faith that He will purify and transform us, allowing His glory to shine through us (2 Cor. 4:7-11). Ask the congregation to place that candy in the manger, alongside the gold.

The final gift of myrrh is then explained, representing our hopes, our dreams, our plans for the near and distant future, all that which is entombed in our hearts -- our fears, our burdens -- everything we carry inside of us that the world doesn't see -- even lost dreams and dark realities. By giving all of this to God we are trusting Him to preserve hope in us, that the truth of Jeremiah 29:11 and Psalm 27:13-14 are promises we can still claim today. In Psalm 31 David writes "I trust in You, O Lord... my times are in Your hands... The Lord preserves the faithful." (verses 14,15,23). The congregation comes forward one last time, to pray and dedicate their future completely to God, according to His will and perfect timing.

As the congregation leaves, you may allow them to take some candies home with them (not out of the manger), to remind them to continue to pray in this way, as families and individuals throughout the Christmas season.