

Date: 25/12/06

Text: Matthew 2:1-12

Title: The Three Bachelors

Place: Tweed Heads am/pm

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When you think about it, those wise men must have been bachelors, don't you think? Who else would have thought up such useless gifts for a baby - gold, frankincense and myrrh. They must have been bachelors!

For if they were married, their wives would have made sure that they brought gifts that were of a practical nature. They would have sat down and worked out what a young peasant couple in rural Judah would really need. They would have made sure their husbands had taken along some clothes, colour co-ordinated clothes at that. They would have ensured that baby Jesus would have something to play with - maybe some soft toys, or something educational.

They would have known the difficulty that a young woman with a child and no washing machine would have in keeping everything clean. Maybe the wise men should throw in some more swaddling cloths, or some nice warm blankets to keep out the cold, or a sheepskin for Jesus to play on? If there wives had been in charge they would have swept and cleaned the stable before they left.

But they didn't do any of those things, did they? Instead they brought them gold, frankincense and myrrh. Wise men! They don't sound too wise to me!

Surely even they could have realised that gold was the worst possible choice they could have made. Can you imagine, Joseph in his rough, homespun clothing trying to spend the gold? He would be arrested by the authorities straight away, and charged with theft or robbery. People dressed like that don't have gold.

And frankincense and myrrh? What are they any way? How many people here had those things on their shopping list this Christmas? And by the way where do you get good frankincense and myrrh these days? After all isn't frankincense some sort of expensive perfume that comes from bark? And isn't myrrh something that you used to embalm a body? Why would you give these things to a baby boy? These guys must have been bachelors.

So why on earth did the wise men give baby Jesus these sorts of gifts? Well to understand this we need to shift our thoughts away from the gifts themselves to the meaning behind these gifts. Because in all seriousness these Magi, these wise men from the East gave these gifts for a reason. They didn't just casually scoop them up from Crazy Prices on the way to Bethlehem and put them in a brown paper bag.

No, these gifts were expensive gifts. They were precious. And they had probably guarded them closely over the three to six months that it had taken them to get from where they lived, to where the star had stopped. They had gone through almost a thousand kilometres of deserts - the equivalent of between here and Sydney. They had passed countries at war, through places where

thieves and robbers loved nothing better than to swoop on unsuspecting travellers. These guys had risked their lives to bring these gifts. They may even have given up the best part of a year to make this journey. So what was so important about these gifts of gold, frankincense and myrrh?

Well of course, GOLD is the sort of thing you would give to a King, isn't it? If you have seen the insides of any palaces in your travels, you know that gold is the sort of thing Kings love to have around. It's a sign of wealth and power. So when the wise men gave Jesus gold they were declaring he was a king. Yes the King of the Jews. But remember these wise men weren't Jews. Yet Jesus was their King also. So by giving Jesus gold they were declaring their allegiance to King Jesus.

And as I said before FRANKINCENSE was a substance from the bark of a certain tree that when burnt gave off an exquisite aroma. At that time it was mostly used in the temple by the priests. Thus by giving Jesus frankincense they recognised that he was going to be a priest, someone who would stand between man and God.

And MYRRH was the sort of perfume that was used in embalming. In fact when Jesus died on the cross, Nicodemus and Joseph of Arimathea took the body down, placed it in a tomb and wrapped it in sheets of myrrh to preserve the body. Thus the wise men in giving Jesus MYRRH were pointing to his special death, where Jesus would die in our place so that God might forgive our sins.

Now I'm not saying the Wise Men were so wise they knew all these things. But as they saw Jesus, as they came and celebrated that first Christmas their expensive gifts pointed to Jesus being a King, a Priest, and someone who would have a special death. Thus for a normal baby these gifts would indeed be silly - after all no one gave our last child Joshua any gold, frankincense or myrrh. But for Jesus, the Son of God, these gifts were right on the money.

But it does raise an issue for us, doesn't it? If the wise men were wise in giving gold, frankincense and myrrh, and we have come this morning to Church to celebrate Jesus' birth what sorts of gifts should we give him today?

What do you give the Son of God who owns everything, that's even harder than giving to the dad who has everything? What do you present to the one that gave you everything you possess in the first place? What do you give in return to Jesus when by his coming he offers us God's love, God's help, God's presence, God's strength, God's eternity?

Won't everything look just puny in comparison? Won't anything I give God be something he already has? Won't any gift, no matter how precious fade into insignificance when compared with what he offers to us, this Christmas? Yes it will, but that doesn't mean that we just throw up our hands and do nothing.

I read this week the story about of an old professor who visited a past student of his, whose first child had been born recently. He arrived and gave the parents a gift for the baby, a book, all wrapped in fine paper, tied with a bow. Imagine their surprise and bewilderment when, upon unwrapping the gift, they discovered that it was a book, a very old, leather-bound copy of

Shakespeare's plays.

They thought, what a strange gift for a baby! How odd. An old book, written in archaic language, given to a baby who will not be able to read it for many years to come. And then they realised: the gift was not the book; the gift was the giver. The old professor had given himself. He had given the child the thing that was his most precious possession.

Our most precious possession is ourselves. Our hopes, our fears, our future, our life, our worship. When you think about it, the money we put in the plate can never buy off God. An hour a week at Church although good is not much in the wider scheme of things. Helping others or giving important things up for your neighbour is a great thing to do but its not much compared to Jesus who gave his life to us, to save us from our sins.

But.... we can give ourselves back to God. For he might have the whole world in his hands, but he doesn't possess you until you give him your life. He won't force it from you, he has after all given you a free will. But he desires that sort of relationship with you.

Have you given yourself to God this year? Have you done what He wanted you to do or what you wanted to do? Have you spent time each day praying and listening to Him speak to you? Have you ended the day repenting of your sins and asking for the strength for tomorrow? Remember he made you. He gave you this life, this world, your family and friends. And when he sends Jesus into this world, he comes as a priest to bring you back to God. As a King, someone who will rule over your life wisely and he will do that by dying on the cross and providing away for your relationship with God to be restored.

So be wise. Be like the wise men. And by your worship this day and as you give the gift of yourself , make Jesus your king, your priest and the one who died for you.

## Children's Talk

I was thinking a bit about presents this week, and do you know presents are a bit like people - they come in all shapes and sizes don't they?

Some presents are big and others are really small, and others are somewhere in between.

That's a bit like people, isn't it?

Some people are big, just like some presents are big. Steve do you want to come out here and pretend to be a big present?

You have all sorts of presents that are big - a new bike, a computer, a surf board

But some presents aren't big, they really small. A bit like this little baby Samuel. Have you heard the saying the best things come in small packages?

Some presents you get are small - a set of earrings, a pack of Pokemon cards, a Nintendo 64 game, a CD.

And there are plenty of presents that are somewhere in between. A bit like Elizabeth. Not big like Steve or small like Samuel.

But plenty of presents like a Barbie doll, a soccer ball, a joke book are just the right size.

So just like people come in different shapes and sizes, so do presents.

A big person isn't any better than a small person. And a big present isn't any better than a small present. Size isn't important when it comes to presents.

Because the best present we ever got was a tiny one. Do you realise that?

For when God gave us a present, he gave us a tiny baby called Jesus. And it is through Jesus that the best presents come our way. Because through Jesus we can receive

God's Love	Forgiveness	God's Friends	God's Help
God's Strength	Talk to God	Holy Spirit	God's Family
God's Promises	God's Son	God's Daughter	Know God*
Eternal Life	Joy	Heaven	Know about God
Hope	Faith	Comfort	

All these presents you can't see, but God gives them through Jesus.

So this Christmas, make sure you don't miss out on the best gifts, they may be small but they are from God, and they come through knowing Jesus.

Best gifts are the gifts of ourselves. In actual fact, the gold, H

frankincense and myrrh of the wisemen are trivial and quite useless for F

of the God of all creation, and the saviour of all people. He has all 3

the gold and frankincense and myrrh he ever needs.

\*\*\*\*\*eD

But what do you give Jesus? When the Lord of Life reaches down from H heaven and touches the earth, condescends in love to come to us, in the E flesh, as one of us, a baby come to do battle with Herod and all the G kingdoms of this world, to set us free from sin and death, what do you give? What can you give ?

At a congregational meeting, a man rose proclaiming, in a somewhat F bragging way, "Last year I gave a total of \$658 to this church, as my H offering. Well, that was more than most gave last year." Someone in the D rear of the room muttered "Great! God gives you his only Son on the cross and you give God \$658!"

It did seem a little absurd. When one considers the greatness of the G gift we have been given in Chris, - the wonder and majesty of it all - D what can we give in return? My little offering, my tithe, my yearly # pledge seems so puny and pointless.

Even the wisemen with their precious gifts must have realised that their H expensive presents are hardly adequate for the child in the manger, the E God who has become a human and now rests in the stable manger. Maybe that's just the point.

We, like the wisemen, gather before the manger, before the incarnation I of God's awesome love, fall to our knees, and fumble in our purses for a F gift worthy of such a gift. What have we to give? God's gift to us is H just too great, too wondrous for us to find a gift worthy of return. So C all we can do is, like those men from the east, thrust forward our H humble presents: a bag of gold, the fragrant gum resins of frankincense and myrrh

Maybe that's always the way it is with our gifts to God. All our gifts F we offer in worship - our praise, our music and singing, the words of F our liturgy, our bowing, and kneeling, the words we mutter in prayer, G this church, the bricks, the glass, the steel and timber, the offering G envelope you drop in the offering plate - just gold, frankincense, and H myrrh - small gifts in comparison to God's goodness and love toward us. H All we can do is to offer God what we've got at the moment— the gift of F our singing, even when we're not such good musicians, the gift of our ( money, even when we're not millionaires.

After all, God gave us what he had. In this babe at Bethlehem we I Christians are bold to say that we have seen the fullness of God. Having E given us so many gifts down through the ages, God now gives himself. G What can we give in return? What on earth have we to match that? Gold, frankincense, and myrrh?

\*\*\*\*\*a (Moore)I

The important thing is that they bowed down and worshiped Jesus! If they H had just ridden into town with their big stash of gold and perfume, and H just dropped it off at Mary and Joseph's door, who would've cared? I'll C bet they sure wouldn't have gotten written up in the Bible for it!

No--they came to worship.

I guess the same is true for me, too. I can give money to that Lottie F Moon offering, that Christmas offering for foreign missions--but if I C don't bow down and worship Jesus while I do it, it's not much of a G present. I can pat myself on the back for how much hard work I've done D for the poor and needy this Christmas--and all year round, for that C matter--but if I haven't taken time to present myself as a "living H sacrifice, holy and acceptable to God," then I haven't remembered Jesus A at all. I've left him off my Christmas shopping list. But if I do I remember Jesus in this way, it gives a new, more special meaning to all & the Christmas gifts I give to people.

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"What gift did the Magi bring baby Jesus?" she corrected.

"Gold, Frankenstein, and Smurfs!" the same 5-year old replied.

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The gift of gold acknowledged the Kingship of Christ

Gold was a gift that denoted royalty, authority, and power. If you have D ever toured the palace of a King in Europe you will find that these C palaces are often steeped in gold. It is a gift befitting a ruler.

The gift of frankincense acknowledged the Priestly Ministry of Christ  
Frankincense was used in the offerings in the temple. They added a I fragrant aroma to the sacrifices. Frankincense also was added to the oil F that anointed the priests. The incense added a dimension of beauty to I the worship. Women understand this. They know that just the right amount % of perfume can enhance their beauty.

The gift of myrrh acknowledged the Sacrificial nature of Christ

Myrrh is an interesting gift. In the Old Testament we see it used as a I fragrance. In the New Testament we see it used in two different ways. In H Mark 15:23 we see that Jesus was offered wine mixed with myrrh while he @ was on the cross. He refused . . .why? It's because myrrh had a \$ medicinal use as a mild anesthetic.

In John 19:39 we see Nicodemus and Joseph of Arimathea preparing Jesus / for burial using a mixture of aloes and myrrh.

Myrrh points to the sacrificial death of Jesus. Now I don't for a moment H believe that these Magi understood the significance of these gifts. But 7 they were designed by God to carry a symbolic meaning.

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I think people are difficult to find a gift for because of one of these three reasons: G

They are people that don't seem to need anything. •They are people we G don't know really well (like teachers and co-workers) •They are people A you don't really want to buy for to begin with .....

Friend, how do you plan to honor Jesus this Christmas? Is He still on your Christmas list?

-is it because He is so big that you don't know what to give Him? Any H

gift that expresses sincere love is priceless. Tell me, would you trade I that piece of "art" your child made for you in kindergarten for anything H in the world? Of course not, it's precious. Your gift, will be loved by - the Lord if it is given in the right spirit.

-is it because you don't know the Lord? There is no time like the I present to change that. Why not use this Christmas to declare your trust B in the Lord's provision, Jesus, for your salvation. Make this the I Christmas you bow at the manger and honor the one who alone can save you

from sin.

-is it because you don't really want to honor him? If that's the case my I friend, you don't understand Christmas at all. The commercial has pushed F the message from your heart. Jesus has come into the world because He F wanted to relate to you. He wanted to stand in your place and pay the D price for your sin. It's time to drop the resentment. He loves you, don't push Him away.