

GOLD, FRANKINCENSE, AND MYRRH

Why did the Wise Men bring these gifts to the Christ child?

“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.”

Matthew 2:11



Gold

Gold may have been the first metal that human beings encountered, because it can often be found in its pure natural state (for instance, nuggets in streams) rather than mixed in ore, which requires smelting. People have always valued gold for its luster, beauty, malleability, and resistance to corrosion and tarnish. These attributes also led ancient civilizations throughout the world to associate gold with royalty, immortality, and deity. It was first used in minted currency in the seventh century B.C.



Frankincense

Originating in Arabia and northern Africa, frankincense is a dried resin (from trees of the genus *Boswellia*) used in perfumes and incense for thousands of years. Historically, frankincense was a highly valued commodity. When burned as incense, it was often valued for its aroma as well as for its reputed ability to disinfect and repel insects and other pests.



Myrrh

Myrrh is also a dried resin from Arabia and northern Africa (from thorny shrubs and trees of the genus *Commiphora*) used in perfumes, incense, and medicines for thousands of years. The word comes from an Arabic word meaning “bitter.” It has been valued for its aroma as well as for its use as an antiseptic, analgesic (topical painkiller), and other medicinal qualities.



Myrrh was used in ancient Israelite temple worship as an ingredient in the holy anointing oil for consecrating priests, the tabernacle, and kings (see Exodus 30:23-25). It was used in the purification of Queen Esther (see Esther 2:12), and it was also used in embalming (see John 19:39).

The Wise Men did not come when Jesus was lying in the manger. They may have come anywhere from a couple of weeks to two years later (see Matthew 2:1-18). The word for “wise men” used in the Bible is *magi*, which refers to an ancient group of astronomers and priests belonging to the Zoroastrian religion in Persia. We also don’t know how many Wise Men there were. Because there were three gifts, people have traditionally imagined there were three Wise Men.



BIBLE FACTS

Gold from the Wise Men has frequently been mentioned as possibly being very useful in helping Joseph and Mary pay for their flight to Egypt to escape Herod. (The other gifts could have been sold for a very good price as well.)

Frankincense was used in ancient Israelite temple worship as:

- An ingredient in the perfume of the sanctuary (see Exodus 30:34).
- An accompaniment to the meat offering, which was part of all burnt and peace offerings (see Leviticus 2:1, 16).
- An accompaniment to the shewbread in the outer compartment of the tabernacle (or holy place) and burned as a memorial before the presence of the Lord (see Leviticus 24:7). Burning incense in the temple represented prayer (see Psalm 141:2).

What We Can Learn

The Wise Men’s gifts were:

Useful. Some of the best gifts we can give the Savior are our time and talents, which we can put to use in the service of others. As disciples who want to give good gifts to the Lord, we may sometimes yearn, “More used would I be” (“More Holiness Give Me,” *Hymns*, no. 131).

Precious. In their offering to the Savior, the Wise Men gave Him things that were both rare and valuable. They offered Him the best gifts they knew to give. As we approach the Savior with our offerings—of time, service, and material means—we can remember to always give the best we can give.

Respectful and worshipful. The gifts the Wise Men brought were the kinds of gifts they would have brought to a king. Jesus Christ is indeed our King—and much more. As we contemplate what He has done for us and what He offers us, we are filled with awe, gratitude, and reverence. We should always honor and revere Him for His atoning sacrifice, His grace, His mercy, and His love. We show our love for Him by giving our best gifts—following Him and keeping His commandments (see John 14:15). **NE**



OUR GIFT TO THE SAVIOR

“As the Christmas season envelops us with all its glory, may we, as did the Wise Men, seek a bright, particular star to guide us to our Christmas opportunity in service to our fellowman. May we all make the journey to Bethlehem in spirit, taking with us a tender, caring heart as our gift to the Savior.”

President Thomas S. Monson, “Christmas Is Love,” 2012 First Presidency Christmas Devotional, broadcasts.lds.org.

MINERVA K. TEICHERT (1888-1976), THE THREE WISEMEN 1937, OIL ON CANVAS, 60 X 45 INCHES, BRIGHAM YOUNG UNIVERSITY MUSEUM OF ART, 1943, PHOTOGRAPHS BY ISTOCK/THINKSTOCK; NEIL FLETCHER & MATTHEW WARD/ DORLING KINDERSLEY/GETTY IMAGES