

CHRISTMAS GIFTS

Matthew 2:11

By Raymond White

Christmas wouldn't be Christmas without gifts. The gifts are really the centerpiece of the Christmas, unwrapping them on Christmas morning, delighting young and old alike.

I remember Christmas at my wife's parent's house, (actually, soon-to-be wife, we were engaged). My (soon-to-be) mother-in-law served breakfast in the kitchen and kept the door to the living room closed. No one was permitted anywhere near the tree and the presents until that door was opened. Through breakfast, the anticipation mounted. Then, when breakfast was finally done, she opened the door and the kids all rushed into the living room filled with Christmas wonder. That was the tradition she kept all the years my wife was growing up.

That's really the point of Christmas: the gifts — the giving freely to others as God gave freely to us.

John 3:16 *For God so loved the world that he gave his only begotten son...*

Matthew 10:8 *...freely ye have received, freely give.*

Ephesians 4:8 *...he led captivity captive, and gave gifts unto men.*

We know very well what God has given to us: peace on earth, reconciliation, and more. But what do we have that we can possibly give to God? After all it is always embarrassing when someone gives you a gift and you fail to reciprocate. So we need to do some last minute shopping.

For starters, let's consider the gifts that were given to the Christ child.

Matthew 2:11 *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.*

This verse speaks volumes. Jesus was not so omniscient that he did not have needs. And when God needs, that's a grand opportunity he's leaving for us.

First, the text says "Mary his mother." The first gift given to Jesus was life. **Luke 2:7** *And she brought forth her firstborn son, and wrapped him in swaddling clothes, and laid him in a manger...* Jesus came to earth to die, but that's for another time, another place. Here we have the opening scene, the moment of the Lord's birth which he shared with Mary and apparently Mary alone. The words say: "*She* wrapped him in swaddling clothes and *she* laid him in a manger." If you had been there as a nurse or a midwife in attendance, you would have been the first to wrap the baby and care for it, wouldn't you? The point of an attending nurse is to care for the mother and the baby, not to say, "here, he's yours, you do it." Why would Mary, a new mother, be doing those things? Because she was alone. Where was Joseph? Maybe out getting the midwife. He probably felt no urgency — first labors are long, twelve hours or more. But sometimes there's a surprise and the baby comes quicker than expected. Mary, it seems, was caught off guard and was alone when she "brought forth her first born son."

Was that a problem? Certainly it was. It's doubly difficult for a young mother to have to go through childbirth alone. But it was sweet too. It's as though Jesus is saying to her, "Mother,

this moment is special for us. Forget the future terrors of Calvary's cross. Tonight, this first night of my life, it's just you and me."

Next, as far as we know, were the shepherds. What gift did they bring?

***Luke 2:17** And when they had seen it, they made known abroad the saying which was told them concerning the child. **:20** And the shepherds returned, glorifying and praising God...*

They gave glory and honor. They told everyone what they had seen and heard. These poor shepherds who had nothing material to give, gave Jesus to Jesus their mouths, their words, they were his first heralds.

Then there were the magi. They had come a long way from Persia. That's were Magi were from, priests and political leaders of the once great Persian empire. And now they had arrived, and their first gift to the Christ child was worship. They "fell down, and worshipped him." That's fitting. Our first gift to God should always be worship.

After their worship, there were the practical things, things of value that this young family needed to survive. You see, there was a contract out on Jesus' life, ***Matthew 2:16** 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 all the coasts thereof from two years old and under...* Jesus' life was in danger and his parents knew it, and the magi knew it. God had warned them in dreams. So Joseph took his little family to Egypt for safety.

But how was Joseph to make a living in Egypt? He had a profession, but how do you set up shop, to get started? Ah. The magi had given them gifts, very practical gifts: "gold, and frankincense, and myrrh" all of value and all liquid, fungible, easily converted to grubstake cash that this new family needed to get started in a new land.

Why gold? The magi had come to honor a king, and gold was the gift you gave a king.

Why frankincense? The magi had come to honor a priest, and frankincense was a gift to God. That's what priests burned in the temple to create a "sweet savour."

Why myrrh? Now there's a strange gift. Myrrh was used for embalming. Why in the world would anyone give that to a newborn baby? The only possible explanation is that they knew his destiny. The magi had come to honor the sacrificial savior of the world.

Now that brings us to, well, us. What can we give to Jesus this Christmas? It's the quintessential Christmas dilemma: what do you give to the man who has everything? Shopping for Jesus is difficult, I understand, but here's an idea, a suggestion for a gift to Jesus.

***Romans 12:1** I beseech you therefore, brethren, by the mercies of God, that ye present your bodies a living sacrifice, holy, acceptable unto God, which is your reasonable service.*

What can you give to Jesus? How about yourself, your bodies, your time, your holiness, and yes, your gold (money spent for others), frankincense (prayer and worship), and myrrh (accepting his gift to you). That's what would be acceptable to God; in short, your "reasonable service." When God opens that present, I expect he will say, "Just what I always wanted."