

**GIFTS OF FRANKINCENSE**  
**Sermon Series: "The Gifts of the Magi"**  
**December 6, 2015 Second Sunday of Advent –Matthew 2: 1-12**  
**The Church of the Covenant**

In a former church of mine we hosted the community in a Christmas extravaganza called "Christmas Hand-in-Hand" that sounds a lot like something we formerly hosted here at The Church of the Covenant called "The Joy of Sharing Christmas". For a couple of years I served in the Wise Men's tent which began the whole spiritual quest of finding the Baby Jesus at Christmas. The tent was set up in the church parlor, the whole room was tented, and groups of approximately forty people would enter to discover me sumptuously dressed as the Wise Man. This was casting against type as I am definitely NOT a Wise Man, but perhaps only a "wisenheimer". At one point in the script the Wise Man was to ask the crowd the same question the Wise Men of old asked –"*Where is He who is born King of the Jews?*" (Matthew 2: 2) And then I would point to one part of the group and ask –**Where is He who is born KING?** And then another group –Where is He who is born? And then another –Where is HE? And if you seek HIM, and if you find HIM, then what GIFT would you give HIM? Then the modern day MAGI would begin their spiritual pilgrimage to find the Christ Child at Christmas...

The Wise Men of old came from the East in search of the Christ Child. There are only some things we know about them. While we often assume that there were only three of them it is not clear from the Bible passage. The word Wise Men is plural to be sure. But it never says how many of them there are. It only notes that there were three gifts. There could have been twelve Wise Men bearing only three gifts, for example. Search and see for yourself. Indeed, may I say, that there may be an infinite number of Wise Men and Wise Women who search after the birth of Jesus at Christmas this year. I would hope that you would be one of them. But these were extraordinarily learned people; they were "wise". Their wisdom and their learning was likely astronomy; searching the stars for meaning and wisdom. They observed a new star in the East. A new entity in the heavens often portends a new era here on earth. A new star born in the sky often predicts a new birth of a new and mighty KING here on earth. That was the wisdom they possessed. And so they set off to find the new birth of the new King that they knew had happened because of the new star leading them to Bethlehem. They say, as Wise Men and Wise Women always do –"*We have seen his star in the East and have come to worship HIM.*" (Matthew 2: 2)

And when they found HIM, as it says, "*opening their treasures, they offered him gifts, gold and frankincense and myrrh.*" (Matthew 2: 11) The gift of GOLD is what they offered first. The gift of FRANKINCENSE is what they offered second and is the gift we focus on this week. Frankincense is the dried aromatic wood, like punk or incense, that is lighted to signify the prayers of the people ascending into heaven. Frankincense is lighted and the smoke and fragrance as it ascends upward are symbols and signs of the prayers of the people entering into the throne room of God. So the Wise Men offered the Christ Child costly frankincense signifying Christ's role as mediator and intercessor for us in relation to His Father in heaven. As we pray, Christ prays for us. As we pray "in Jesus' name" His Father in heaven hears our prayer. It is an act of worship. It is an act of prayer. It is an act acknowledging who HE is and that He is the answer to the hope and the desire and the prayers of the nations from the beginning of time. It is the fragrant offering of the Christ Child cast into the heavenlies, into the nighttime sky over Bethlehem. These star struck Wise Men bowed down before the Christ Child. They were struck down in the Spirit at what they had traveled so far to discover. It was not what their wisdom had suggested. They thought they would find a King, instead they found a child. They thought they would find a palace, instead they found little Bethlehem. They thought they would find a throne, instead they found a manger. They thought they would find courtiers and a court, instead they found humble Mary and

gentle Joseph. Their own wisdom only brought them so far. But the Christ Child brought them the rest of the way. So they *“fell down and worshipped Him”* (Matthew 2: 11) To worship is to fall down; to worship is to bow down. To “bow down” literally in the Hebrew and the Greek means “to worship”. So the Wise Men are struck down by what they discover. They are blown away by what they find. They fall down. They bow down. And in their worship they find the Christ Child. And in their worship they present Him with frankincense, a sign of their worship and their prayers ascending to God. Beloved, we cannot find the Christ Child without worshipping Him. We cannot find the Christ without setting aside our own wisdom and being struck dumb and made silent at the manger’s side...It is the significance of the gift of frankincense...

So assuming you find Him this year, how then do you present a GIFT OF FRANKINCENSE to the Christ Child this year? John McCreight is a special and wonderful friend of mine and member of this congregation. John always sang in the choir. Now he is pretty much confined to the Veterans Administration Facility in Aspinwall where I try to visit him on a weekly basis. He suffers with a disease from which there is not likely a cure. We became great friends when we went on the mission trip to our sister church, the Ta’ An Presbyterian Church in Taipei, Taiwan. So with the miracle of the cell phone we reach out to him in love today. His great friend and church member, Dick Phelan, is with him, supporting him today. John, we know you cannot get out to church much anymore. So today we are bringing church to you. Do you have anything to say to your church family who loves you? Let’s have a word of prayer; your whole church family is praying for you today; our prayers for you are ascending like fragrant incense before the throne of God; we want you to know how much we love you, John, and are praying for you...(Prayer).

Maybe we need to worship God and bow down before the Christ Child today. Get over our busyness and our plan for Christmas and reach out to someone like John. Someone who is a church member...a family member...a neighbor...a friend. Go give a gift of yourself to someone who might not have a lot of people in their lives right now. Don’t be too busy to humble yourself and get over yourself to find Jesus this year. In that church up in Michigan, the Christmas Hand in Hand program, when you would finally arrive at the manger, the doorway was too low just to walk in. A child could enter into Jesus’ presence easily. But an adult had to bow down, and stoop down very low, and, may I say humble themselves and set aside their own wisdom, fall down, in order to worship the Christ Child. So I conclude with this -- **Where is HE who is born King of the Jews?** Where is this Christ Child to be born this year? Where is HE who is born? Maybe He is discovered in worship and bowing down. Maybe He is discovered in the humility of prayer. Maybe He is discovered in a VA hospital in Aspinwall, taking time you don’t have to pray for a dear friend at Christmas. Where is HE? Wise Men and Wise Women still find HIM; through The Gifts of the Magi. Amen and Amen.

*By: The Reverend Dr. Stuart D. Broberg, The Church of the Covenant, Washington, PA  
IF THIS HAS BLESSED YOU, PLEASE PASS IT ALONG TO A FRIEND!*