

**GIFTS OF MYRRH**  
**Sermon Series: "The Gifts of the Magi"**  
**December 13, 2015 Third 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. And the attenders of this, some 11,000 people at Christmas, would make their way from room to room, and experience to experience, until they would wind up in a small stable, surrounded by live animals, with a live Mary and Joseph, and a live baby, resting in a tiny manger, an animal feeding trough. Christmas Hand in Hand was designed for disabled people to attend, so it was billed as the sights and the sounds and the smells of Christmas, so everyone could participate in the birth of Jesus. So there was the cookie room, where you could smell cookies baking and help decorate them for homeless people. And there was the train room, where you could hear train whistles and see miniature railroads. And there was the fellowship hall set up to be a pine forest, with the smell of pine trees pumped into the room, and white plastic snowflakes falling from the ceiling. Magical. It was the sights and the sounds and the smells of Christmas all leading to the manger. The Wise Men were seeking the Christ Child. The Wise Men were asking—**Where is He who is born KING?** Then the modern day MAGI would begin their spiritual pilgrimage, from room to room, from experience to experience, in order to find the Christ Child at Christmas...

The Wise Men of old came from the East in search of the Christ Child. Sometimes when I look at the story of the three Wise Men in the Bible I am not sure they were that wise. They brought gifts to give to a King. But who would bring gold and frankincense and myrrh to a baby shower? They were wise in following the star but they stopped off in Herod's palace, their human logic suggesting that a king would be born in a palace, only to alert the paranoid, murderous King Herod of the new birth of a potential rival to his throne. The very next thing that happens after the birth of Jesus is that Herod sends his troops to Bethlehem to murder every child under the age of two. It is why God must intervene and send a dream to the Wise Men to warn them once they have found the Christ Child not to return to Herod but to return home by another way. That's how this Matthew passage ends. Death stalks the Christ Child even at the beginning. From the beginning Jesus is marked for death upon a cross. Yet, there is something about God coming to earth in the form of a baby that is so compelling; there is something about the all-powerful God stooping to reclaim His creation, not in power, but in human weakness, that converts the human heart; there is something about the birth of new life into the world that grants us new hope and possibility and an optimistic attitude about the future that draws us to Bethlehem, that causes our hope to be drawn to the hope of the nations, that has us come to Bethlehem and stand by the manger in wonder, worship and awe. *"I have come that they might have life"*, says Jesus, and *"have it abundantly"*. (John 10:10) I have been born that they might LIVE. I have come to give them life, and new life, and abundant life, and eternal life in me, cries the infant from the manger. Every Mother knows, every Father knows, that the birth of their child is a miracle...and the birth of God into the world in the form of a baby is the greatest miracle of all. So if you found HIM this Christmas, what gift would you give Him??

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. The gift of MYRRH is what they offered third and this is the gift we focus on this week. Now myrrh is an odd gift to offer a newborn baby and it is in the oddity of it

all that we discover its meaning. Myrrh is an expensive embalming ointment, pungent, fragrant, a bit bitter and highly aromatic, rubbed upon the dead in order to hide the smell of decay. Myrrh is a bitter perfume. Myrrh is a gift for dead people, not for newborn babies. When the first disciples headed to the Garden Tomb on that first Easter Sunday in order to prepare the dead body of Jesus for his eternal rest in the stone, cold tomb, the ointment they would have brought was myrrh. Now it becomes clear that these three gifts were not just random gifts, rather that they each one held a profound prophetic significance. Gold was the prophetic sign and symbol that this was no mere weak child, rather this was the child born Lord of Lords and King of Kings, the very Son of God. Frankincense was the prophetic sign and symbol that this newborn was the One who was the fulfillment of every prayer offered by every person on the face of the earth of every time and every age. He, Jesus, and His presence and His new birth into our lives IS the answer to prayer, today, tomorrow and forever. Myrrh was the prophetic sign and symbol that this child was the child who was born to die for our sins. The shadow of Calvary hung over the manger at Bethlehem. The child was born that we might be reborn. The child was born to die that we might live. From His first cry in Bethlehem to His last cry on Calvary He has given us the gift of His undying love. *"I have come to bring you LIFE"* says Jesus. I have come that you might LIVE. I have come that you might LIVE FOREVER. The sights and the sounds and, may I say, the smells of myrrh wafting to heaven. That is the significance of MYRRH given by the Wise Men.

So assuming you find Him this year, how then do you present a GIFT OF MYRRH to the Christ Child this year? George Engle is a dear friend and member of this church who passed away and went home to be with the Lord a couple of years ago right after Christmas. I spoke with his widow, Betty Lou Engle, and she has given me permission to share about this in today's sermon. I always see George with his toolbelt helping around the church, seated with his friend Skip, taking a break in the pews in the Commons area. Or I see him studying scripture and writing notes in his notebook about what he learned from the Bible. When he was in the hospital right before he passed away he was studying his favorite, the Gospel of John. So I am sure he would love the fact that today I am quoting from John 10: 10 –Jesus said, *"I have come to bring them LIFE..."* Now I wish I could call George on my cell phone today and I wish I could speak with my friend. I wish there was an "app" for that. But I know that through faith I shall see Him again. I know I get to speak with him again. I know he has now taken notes from his speaking with the gospel writer John, and I will get to speak with George about what John meant. We give the gift of MYRRH to the Christ Child today –we give the gift of our undying love for the gift of eternal life we have in the birth of this Living Savior, into our world and into our heart this Christmas. We live because He lives. We are reborn because He has been born. (Prayer)

Maybe we need to find Him in the gift of MYRRH and the birth of the Christ Child today. Get over our busyness and our own plan for Christmas and reach out to someone who is hurting because of the loss of a loved one. Someone who is a church member...a family member...a neighbor...a friend. Go give a gift of yourself to someone who might be a little down at Christmas. Don't be too busy to humble yourself and get over yourself to find Jesus this year. 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 found in speaking to someone who has lost a loved one and reminding them of the eternal life born for us in a manger 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!*