

Gift-Giving

What did you get for Christmas? This was always a question we asked as kids when we returned to school or saw each other during the holidays. Gifts were fun to receive as we would try to guess what was inside each package. What we didn't realize was that not everyone was on the same level of income, and some gifts were nicer than others. I could not understand why Santa did not bring those items to our house. When I was older, I understood the financial limitations we had in a family with six children.

The subject of gifts has been on my mind lately. This is important with the coming of Epiphany today as we celebrate the gifts brought by the Magi. This part of our Christmas story is only told in Matthew's gospel. However, we saw in Isaiah that the gifts of gold and frankincense were foretold. People joke about what Mary and Joseph will do with these gifts, but we now recognize the symbolism in each one.

Gold is a precious metal and, as such, was a very valuable commodity. Its value could very well have financed Joseph and Mary's

trip to Egypt. The Bible does not reveal any other significance to these three gifts; however, tradition suggests that there is a deeper meaning behind each of them. Gold is a symbol of divinity and is mentioned throughout the Bible. Pagan idols were often made from gold, and the Ark of the Covenant was overlaid with gold (Exodus 25:10-17). The gift of gold to the Christ child was symbolic of His divinity—God in flesh.

Frankincense is a white resin or gum. It is obtained from a tree by making incisions in the bark and allowing the gum to flow out. It is highly fragrant when burned and was therefore used in worship, where it was burned as a pleasant offering to God (Exodus 30:34). Frankincense is a symbol of holiness and righteousness. The gift of frankincense to the Christ child was symbolic of his willingness to become a sacrifice, wholly giving Himself up, analogous to a burnt offering.

Myrrh, a product of Arabia, was obtained from a tree in the same manner as frankincense. It was a spice and was used in embalming. It was also sometimes mingled with wine to form an article of drink. Such a drink was given to Jesus when He was about to be crucified, as a stupefying potion (Mark 15:23). Matthew 27:34 refers to it as “gall.”

Myrrh symbolizes bitterness, suffering, and affliction. The baby Jesus would grow to suffer greatly as a man and would pay the ultimate price when He gave His life on the cross for all who would believe in Him.

We may not have gold, frankincense, and myrrh, but we have other gifts we can offer our church. While it is important that we offer our financial support, I now turn our attention to the gifts we can offer our church community. Maybe you have a background in finance, building and grounds, education, music, or a host of other areas that may need attention at our church. Perhaps you have a talent that has been hiding that could be of good use to our church community.

The Christmas Hymn “In the Bleak Mid-Winter” has a verse that reads

*What can I give Him, poor as I am?
If I were a Shepherd, I would bring a lamb;
If I were a Wise Man I would do my part,
Yet what I can I give Him, Give my heart.*

As we enter 2026, I hope that all of us can take a few moments to ponder, reflect, and pray on what gifts we have to offer our church community. Perhaps you can join us for the lunches on Monday and Thursday? Maybe you’ll be able to share with us sometimes at “The

Chosen” sessions. It may be the gift of simply being present or praying for us from home. Whatever you have to offer, we know it will be from your heart.

Blessings on your New Year! May it be filled with health, happiness, and goodwill.