

# The Gift of Frankincense

The Three Gifts #2 – Pastor Gary Combs – 12/15/24 – John 1:1-18

**INTRO:** Good morning church! Today, we're continuing our series called, "The Three Gifts.". We're talking about the gifts the Magi traveled from the East to bring to Jesus.

**Need:** Are you traveling this Christmas? Perhaps to parents or grandparents house bearing gifts? There's someone there who connects you all together, who acts as the family glue. Or maybe you're like us and everyone's coming to your house. All of our kids and grandkids will be with us on Christmas Eve. They come together to be with us, then they spend Christmas morning with their own little families.

Or maybe you don't have anyone to be with this Christmas... That's why we need Jesus. Jesus is the one who traveled from heaven to connect us to God. Christ is the One who brings us together with the Father.

It was to this Jesus that a caravan of wise men traveled from the East to bring Him gifts...

Matthew 2:11 (ESV) And going into the house they saw the child with Mary his mother, and they fell down and worshiped him. Then, opening their treasures, they offered him gifts, gold and frankincense and myrrh.

**Transition:** The Bible says that the Magi gave Jesus three gifts. These were not ordinary gifts. They seem unusual gifts to bring to a baby shower—gold, frankincense, and myrrh. Gold is a gift fit for a King, but frankincense is a gift fit for the Lord Himself!



**What is Frankincense?** Frankincense is an aromatic resin tapped from the very scraggly but hardy *Boswellia* tree through slashing the bark and allowing the exuded resins to bleed out and harden. These

hardened resins are called tears. These trees are native to modern day Yemen and Somalia. It was used in incense as well as in perfumes. The Western name for the resin comes from "incense of the Franks" since it was introduced to Europe by French Crusaders who carried it back with them from the Middle East.

In Jewish temple worship, frankincense was a valuable and sacred substance with specific ceremonial uses:

**As Part of the Incense Offering:** Frankincense was a primary ingredient in the sacred incense burned on the Altar of Incense in the Holy Place (Exodus 30:34-38). It symbolized the prayers of the people rising to God (*Psalms 141:2*; Revelation 5:8). The sweet-smelling smoke represented the presence and favor of God.

**In the Grain Offering:** Frankincense was also included with the grain offering as part of the sacrificial system (Leviticus 2:1-2). It was burned as a memorial portion, symbolizing the offering of one's life and devotion to God.

**Restricted for Sacred Use:** The use of frankincense was regulated to maintain its sacred purpose. It could not be used for common purposes, emphasizing its holiness (Exodus 30:37-38).

For the Jewish mind, frankincense was an appropriate gift for God or for one of His priests to offer to God.

**BODY:** In John 1:1-18, the apostle John bore witness of Jesus as the Son of God who came into the world that we might believe in Him and become children of God. The Magi's gift of frankincense points to Christ's divinity. We can believe John's witness that Jesus is the Son of God. How can we give Christ the gift of frankincense, believing that He is the Son of God? The text gives **three ways** we can offer Jesus the gift of frankincense.

**Today's text:** John 1:1-18 (ESV) <sup>1</sup> In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. <sup>2</sup> He was in the beginning with God. <sup>3</sup> All things were made through him, and without him was not any thing made that was made. <sup>4</sup> In him was life, and the life was the light of men. <sup>5</sup> The light shines in the darkness, and the darkness has not overcome it. <sup>6</sup> There was a man sent from God, whose name was John. <sup>7</sup> He came as a witness, to bear witness about the light, that all might believe through him. <sup>8</sup> He was not the light, but came to bear witness about the light. <sup>9</sup> The true light, which gives light to everyone, was coming into the world. <sup>10</sup> He was in the world, and the world was made through him, yet the world did not know him. <sup>11</sup> He came to his own, and his own people did not receive him. <sup>12</sup> But to all who did receive him, who believed in his name, he gave the right to become children of God, <sup>13</sup> who were born, not of blood nor of the will of the flesh nor of the will of man, but of God. <sup>14</sup> And the Word became flesh and dwelt among us, and we have seen his glory, glory as of the only Son from the Father, full of grace and truth. <sup>15</sup> (John bore witness about him, and cried out, "This was he of whom I said, 'He who comes after me ranks before me, because he was before me.'") <sup>16</sup> For from his fullness we have all received, grace upon grace. <sup>17</sup> For the law was given through Moses; grace and truth came through Jesus Christ. <sup>18</sup> No one has ever seen God; the only God, who is at the Father's side, he has made him known.

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## WE CAN GIVE JESUS THE GIFT OF FRANKINCENSE...

### 1. By recognizing Him as the divine Word of God.

**EXP:** (1-4) Notice the 1st three words, “In the beginning” (1). John begins his gospel as Moses began the Torah. Then he refers to Jesus as the “Word,” declaring Him as the eternal God, Creator, source of light, life and fullest revelation of God. Christ is Divine. He is the 2nd Person of the Trinity, the Godhead.

“**Word**” (1, 14 - 4x) (λόγος, *logos*) - “Word.” “He” (2) (masculine singular pronoun) was present and active in creation, He was both “with God” and “is (“was”) God.” He is “the only Son from the Father” (14). And finally gives His name, “Jesus Christ” (17). *Logos* was a term used by theologians and philosophers, both Jews and Greeks. In Greek philosophy, the *Logos* was the principle of reason that governed the world, while in Hebrew thought, *the Word* (רַב־דָּבָר, *dābār*) was another expression for God. (*Life Application Bible*).

In John’s gospel, Christ is...

The Eternal Word *In the beginning was the Word*

The Divine Word *the Word was with God, and the Word was God*

The Creative Word *through him all things were made*

“**Life**” (4 - 2x) (ζωή, *zōē*) - life, the absolute fullness of life, real and genuine, active and vigorous. Christ is the Life and He is the source of life.

“**Light**” (4,5,8,9 - 6x) (φῶς, *phōs*) - light. Metaph., “of truth and its knowledge, together with the spiritual purity associated with it.” Notice the connection again to Genesis 1...

Genesis 1:3 (ESV) And God said, “Let there be light,” and there was light.

### **ARG:** John believed in Christ’s divinity. But what did Jesus claim for Himself?

John 14:9 (ESV) Jesus said to him, “Have I been with you so long, and you still do not know me, Philip? Whoever has seen me has seen the Father. How can you say, ‘Show us the Father’?”

**ILL:** Have you heard of the theory in physics called “T.O.E., Theory of Everything?” It is a theoretical framework in physics that aims to unify all fundamental forces and particles in the universe into a single, all-encompassing explanation. However, T.O.E. remains an aspirational goal, it is considered the “holy grail” of physics, offering the promise of unlocking the deepest mysteries of the cosmos. Yet, this is exactly what John sees in Jesus. He is not only the “theory of everything,” Jesus is the reason, the *Logos*, for everything!

**APP:** Have you given Jesus the gift of frankincense, recognizing Him as the eternal, divine, creative Son of God?

### 2. By believing in Him as the only true way to God.

**EXP:** (5-13) Last week in Matthew, we talked about how there is a war for our worship, whether we will worship the worldly king Herod or the True King Jesus. Now in John, we see there is a war for our faith, what will we believe as truth. Because there is a war between light and darkness (5). Christ is our true Mediator.

“**Darkness**” (5) (σκοτία, *skotia*) - darkness, due to want of light. metaph. used of ignorance of divine things, and its associated wickedness. Darkness cannot “overcome” Light.

“**True light**” (9) (ἀληθινός, *alēthinos*) - true, real, genuine, that which has not only the name and resemblance, but the real nature corresponding to the name. Jesus is the true light.

“**Receive**” (11,12) (λαμβάνω, *lambanō*) - receive, to take up, to lay hold of, to make it one’s own.

“**Believe**” (7, 12) (πιστεύω, *pisteuō*) - to believe, to trust, to commit, to think to be true, to be persuaded of, to credit, place confidence into. This is not passive, but an active commitment of faith.

“**Born**” (13) (γεννάω, *gennaō*) - to be born. Points to spiritual rebirth, “born again.”

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**ARG:** Jesus is the only way to the Father. He is the way, the truth, and the life.

John 14:6 (ESV) Jesus said to him, “I am the way, and the truth, and the life. No one comes to the Father except through me.

**ILL:** Tell the story of Nicodemus coming to Jesus at night. Emphasize the following verses as you tell the story:

John 3:3 (ESV) Jesus answered him, “Truly, truly, I say to you, unless one is born again he cannot see the kingdom of God.”

John 3:16-19 (NKJV) For God so loved the world that He gave His only begotten Son, that whoever believes in Him should not perish but have everlasting life. ...He who believes in Him is not condemned; but he who does not believe is condemned already, because he has not believed in the name of the only begotten Son of God. And this is the condemnation, that the light has come into the world, and men loved darkness rather than light, because their deeds were evil.

**APP:** Nicodemus received a challenging word from Jesus, but I think he ultimately believed. For we see him at the cross helping Joseph of Arimathea prepare Jesus’ body for burial (John 19:38-42). Have you given Jesus the gift of frankincense, believing in Him as the only way to God.

## 3. By worshiping Him as the incarnate Son of God.

**EXP:** (14-18) Circle the “Word became flesh” (14). That’s the story of Christmas in 3 words. God incarnate. God in the flesh. That’s Isaiah’s Immanuel prophecy (700 BC) fulfilled, which means “God with us” (Matt. 1:23).

Isaiah 7:14 (ESV) Therefore the Lord himself will give you a sign. Behold, the virgin shall conceive and bear a son, and shall call his name Immanuel.

Then, notice John tells us He is the “only Son from the Father” (14). He is God’s only begotten Son.

“Became” (14) (γίνομαι, *ginomai*) - to become, i.e. to come into existence, begin to be, to be made.

“Flesh” (14) (σάρξ, *sarx*) - flesh, body of a human. Jesus is both fully God and fully man, with two distinct natures united in one person for eternity. He is the God-Man, the incarnate Son of God.

“Glory” (14) (δόξα, *doxa*) - glory, splendor, brightness, honor, majesty. “Grace and truth” on display.

“After me/before me” (15) - John the Baptist was 6 months older than his cousin Jesus in His humanity, but Jesus “ranked before” him as the Son. There never was a time when Christ was not. He is eternal.

“Made him known” (18) (ἐξηγήομαι, *exēgeomai*) - to tell, declare. Want to see God. Look to Jesus!

**ARG:** After Christ’s crucifixion, even the Roman centurion was filled with awe and said...

Matthew 27:54 (ESV) When the centurion and those who were with him, keeping watch over Jesus, saw the earthquake and what took place, they were filled with awe and said, “Truly this was the Son of God!”

**ILL:** “If it is actually true that Jesus is, as I believe Him to be, the Son of God, then we can ask the question, “What is God doing on a cross?” And the answer comes back at the very least. God has not remained distant from our human suffering but has become part of it.” — John Lennox, speaking at Oxford

**APP:** Have you given Jesus the gift of frankincense, recognizing Him as the incarnate Son of God who traveled from heaven to earth to take our sin, separation and death and offers His righteousness, Sonship, and life.

**CONCLUSION:** What gift will you give Jesus? Giving the gift of frankincense is a powerful acknowledgment of Christ’s divine nature and His unique role in mediating and revealing the presence of God to us. Will you give Christ the gift of frankincense this Christmas? Will you... 1) Recognize Him as the divine Word of God? 2) Believe in Him as the true way to God? 3) Worship Him as the incarnate Son of God? Let’s pray.