

THE GOLD OF THE WISE MEN

Excerpts from a Christmas Family Sermon by the Rev. Patrick A. Rose

Lessons: Numbers 24:12-19; Matthew 2:1-12; Arcana Coelestia 9293:3

"And when they had come into the house, they saw the young Child with Mary His mother, and fell down and worshiped Him. And when they had opened their treasures, they presented gifts to Him: gold, frankincense, and myrrh." (Matthew 2:11)

Why did the wise men travel so far? It wasn't just because they wanted to see the Lord. They had not come just to *see* the Lord. They had also come to *worship* Him. When they got to Jerusalem and asked people if they knew where the Lord was, they told people that is why they had come. They had come to worship Him. The wise men knew just how important it is to worship the Lord.

Now when you worship the Lord—when you pray to Him—you get down on your knees, don't you? You kneel when you say your prayers. The wise men didn't just kneel, though. They knelt down, and then they actually laid down on the ground before the baby Lord.

And they gave the Lord special presents. They gave Him gold. Gold is a very rare, expensive and beautiful metal. They gave Him frankincense. Frankincense is a precious type of incense—it makes a beautiful smell when it is burned. And they gave Him myrrh, which is a precious ointment with a very special smell.

And the wise men knew that each of these gifts had something to do with the worship of the Lord. They stood for things that must be inside of someone—things that must be in a person's heart and mind—when he comes to worship the Lord.

If somebody wants to worship the Lord then he has to be willing to do what the Lord commands. There is almost no point at all in worshiping the Lord if you aren't interested in obeying His commandments. And that is what the myrrh stood for. Myrrh was a precious ointment that was put on people's bodies, and it stood for the things that you are to do with your body—the things that the Lord wants you to do when you obey His commandments.

And if a person wants to worship the Lord then he also has to be willing to learn from the Lord's Word. One of the reasons you worship the Lord is so that you can listen to His Word, and learn what the Lord has to say to you in His Word. If somebody isn't interested in learning from the Word, then he can't

really worship the Lord. And this is what the frankincense stands for. It stands for loving the truth of the Lord's Word. When you learn from the Word, then your thoughts can go upward toward the Lord and toward heaven, just as the beautiful smoke of incense goes up in the air.

But if someone obeys the Lord's commandments, and if he learns from the Lord's Word, he must do these things because he loves the Lord. If a person is to worship the Lord, then, first of all, he must want to love the Lord in his heart. And this is what gold stands for. Gold is a very precious metal that stands for something in the heart that is also very precious. It stands for love, love of the Lord. And so, if you want to worship the Lord, then you must want to love Him. This is the most important thing of all. And this is why the very first gift that the wise men gave the Lord was gold.

You can't worship the Lord unless you want to love Him, because this is what worship is. Worship is, at heart, a way of showing the Lord that you love Him. That is why the wise men traveled so far. They journeyed all the way from Syria because they loved the Lord. And when they lay down on the ground before the Lord, it was a way of showing the Lord that they loved Him more than anything else. They put themselves on the ground in front of the baby Lord to show Him that they knew He was more important than they were. He was more important than anybody. They loved Him—they loved the baby Lord—more than anything else in the whole world.

Today we also worship the Lord. We celebrate the time when He came down to earth as a little baby—when the Lord came down so that He could be closer to us. The Lord came down to earth because He loves us. And so we need to love the Lord in return. This is why we worship Him. We worship the Lord to show Him that we love Him. We worship the Lord to show Him that we love Him with all our hearts. And giving the Lord your love is the most important gift you can give Him, because love is like spiritual gold.

This is the gift, above all, that you should not forget this Christmas time. People give other people presents as a way of saying that they love one another. And this is good. But more important than all these gifts is the present that you give the Lord, the present that you give Him on *His* birthday. And that gift is to be found in your heart. It is the gift of love. Love the Lord with all your heart. Love Him with all your mind. Love Him with all your body, because He is our God and our Savior.

Amen.