

(Continued from page 3)

So there may not have been three kings but there were certainly three gifts and wise people will always seek to bring these gifts of living to Jesus.

Myrrh	simple obedience to his way of living
Frankincense	understanding that his way of living is the best way
Gold	loving his way of living

May the Lord Jesus Christ bless you and your family this Christmas as you offer these gifts to him.

.....

And behold, the star that they had seen when it rose went before them until it came to rest over the place where the child was. When they saw the star, they rejoiced exceedingly with great joy.



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.

Gospel of Matthew 2:9-11

“We three kings of orient are ...



Visit: www.spiritualwisdom.org.uk



“We three kings of orient are”

One of our most popular Christmas Carols begins with the words “*We three kings of orient are, bearing gifts we traverse afar ...*” and it used to be so well known that children often made up other rather irreverent words to sing to the same tune. One of the ideas that this carol has reinforced is that there were 3 kings who came to see Jesus when he was born in Bethlehem – not 2 or 4 or some other number but 3 kings. Why has the number 3 become so closely associated with this part of the Christmas Story?

Many people might expect that it is the Bible that describes the journey of 3 kings. But this is not so. In Matthew’s Gospel, the only Gospel covering this story, the number of the people visiting Jesus is not given although 3 gifts are presented to Jesus. And the people involved are not called kings in the original Greek text but ‘magi’, a word describing astrologers, philosophers or wise people.

But as with many stories, legends built up around them as the years went by and certainly as early as 500AD the magi were being referred to as ‘three kings’. Within another 100 years or so they had been given names as well – Caspar, Melchior and Balthasar and when Marco Polo visited Persia in the 1270’s he was even shown the supposed tomb of the three kings. And yet you can also find a ‘Shrine of the Three Kings’ at Cologne Cathedral, which contains, according to tradition, the bones of the three kings. Even now in Spain and throughout the Spanish speaking world the three kings (‘los tres reyes magos’) receive wish letters from children and magically bring them gifts on the night before Epiphany.

But if we go back to Matthew’s Gospel and look again at his account of the birth of Jesus what really stands out is that the wise people who followed a star in order to find Jesus presented him with three gifts, gifts of gold, frankincense and myrrh. These gifts have also been interpreted in many ways over the centuries but most commonly in terms of gold as an image of Jesus as a king, frankincense, an incense used in temple worship, as an image of

(Continued on page 3)

(Continued from page 2)

Jesus as a priest and myrrh, which was used to prepare bodies for burial, as a sign of his death.

What we need to do, I think, is look again at these gifts, not as part of some historical account, but as a picture of the sort of gifts we need to bring to Jesus in our lives if his presence is to grow and develop within us and ultimately transform us.

Let’s look at myrrh first. Myrrh was used to anoint a body prior to burial so it was something that was external and on the surface - so what gift can we bring Jesus that is ‘*on the surface*’? Well the most basic and external thing we can do is to try to follow Jesus’ teachings and apply them in everyday life. This simple obedience to his way doesn’t require deep thought and feeling it just needs us to put what we know into practice.

But what about frankincense? This incense was used in temple worship and of course incense continues to be used in many forms of worship in many religions. When the incense was burnt anyone in the temple would have perception and understanding that God was present - so what gift can we bring Jesus that is ‘*perception and understanding*’. Well although we might have started living the way Jesus intends through simple obedience we can go deeper by thinking about what Jesus teaches and coming to understand the truth that his way of life is the best way.

And then we have gold. Gold has always been much sought after because it’s qualities make it bright, warm, soft and enduring - so what gift we can bring Jesus that is ‘*bright, warm, soft and enduring*’. The simple answer is love. After all, gold rings have been a symbol of enduring love for centuries. So now a new picture emerges of our relationship with Jesus. It is living his way not because we are simply obedient, nor because we have come to see the truth that it is the right way to live, but because we love living that way.

(Continued on page 4)