

**Intro:** Holiday Schedule. Isaiah 53. **Pray.**

We are wrapping up our advent series this morning exploring together the deeper meaning behind the gifts given by the Wise Men/Magi to Jesus in Matthew 2 – the gifts of Gold, Frankincense, and Myrrh.

As a recap, the magi follow this star that is an indicator that the Messiah has been born all the way to Bethlehem. There they find Mary, Joseph and baby Jesus and lay before them these 3 gifts.

Now in this series we've been looking at each gift and showing how they're actually prophetic gifts. As we've said each week, this isn't something that we're making up. We're not trying to stretch the Scriptures so that we can have a fun Christmas series. Church leaders have believed this for hundreds/thousands of years. Loved this quote from last week from Origen:

"They came, accordingly, to Judea...bringing gifts... gold, as to a king; myrrh, as to one who was mortal; and incense, as to a God; and they brought these offerings after they had learned the place of His birth."

**Gold**- Jesus, this baby lying in the manger, is King. Not just a king. But the King. The King of Kings. He will defeat the enemy, shepherd His people and make all things right in the world.

**Frankincense**- Jesus is God with us. Who's lowered Himself to putting on flesh yet is perfect and holy.

This week we're talking about the gift of **Myrrh**.

Myrrh is very similar to Frankincense for a few reasons. Just like frankincense:

- It is a resin extract from a specific type of tree found in the Arabian Peninsula—the Commiphora tree.
- It was fragrant, rare and very expensive.
- It played a role in Old Testament worship.

Myrrh had two predominant purposes, it was used first as an oil of consecration. It was used to anoint priests before they entered into their priestly sacrificial responsibilities, to set them apart for God. So there's some really obvious nods to Jesus being the great high priest, which we read about all throughout the book of Hebrews.

**But there's a 2nd, more prominent use that I want to hone in on today.**

Myrrh was used for preparation for burial. Just like today, there were extensive practices around burials and funerals.

At the time to prepare for burial, a body would be washed and then anointed with different spices, myrrh being a key part of the anointing process. Then, the body was wrapped in a shroud, the face covered with a special cloth, and the hands and feet tied with strips of cloth.

We even see this in account of Jesus' death:

*John 19. 9 Nicodemus also, who earlier had come to Jesus by night, came bringing a mixture of myrrh and aloes, about seventy-five pounds in weight. 40 So they took the body of Jesus and bound it in linen cloths with the spices, as is the burial custom of the Jews.*

So what does myrrh point us to? **Myrrh points us to a burial. A funeral. Death.**

Which lets me pause right there. Not on the registry. What a weird gift to bring to a baby. But even weirder to bring to *this* baby. I mean think about the trajectory of these gifts:

- Gold. This baby is the king. He's going to make all things right. His kingdom will have no end.
- Frankincense. This baby is God with us! He's here. We wonder at God's grace and kindness to dwell among us.
- Myrrh. This baby is going to die. Wait what? That makes no sense.

Now we know that Matthew is doing something here. He's drawing connections. The mention of these gifts is meant to point us forward to something. And to point us back.

But Matthew had his work cut out for him on this one. This is a classic case of subverted expectations. God, the King, who's going to die?

Interestingly though, Matthew has already laid some groundwork for what He's trying to point us to by the time he even mentions the gifts. Look back to what the angel tells Joseph in chapter 1 v 21. We read it last week too, but I just want to highlight one thing:

**21 She will bear a son, and you shall call his name Jesus, for he will save his people from their sins."**

Whenever you're reading your Bible and see something like 'their name is x, and then an explanation.' It's almost always the author saying what the name means.

So in Hebrew, Jesus' name was more like our modern 'Joshua'. Yeshua is the Hebrew. And what that name literally means 'God saves'. And in this case, the angel is saying He, God with us, will save his people from their sins.

Which would've started to ring some bells for Matthew's readers. Because all throughout the OT we get a clear picture that this is exactly what the world needs. A savior!

All the way back to Genesis 3 and forward, we see that the world is broken, the nation of Israel is broken and people individually are broken. The reason is simple: sin. And God has promised to do something about it, from Genesis 3 on, to send a savior. That would rule and restore.

As the story of God's people unfolds, He starts sending prophets. To address what's coming for His people, but also to point towards the savior.

**And nowhere do we get a clearer picture of who savior is supposed to be than in the book of Isaiah.**

Isaiah is a fascinating book of prophecy. If you find yourself reading the book of Isaiah you'll notice that there's a tonal shift about half way through the book. For the first 39 chapters, Isaiah warns of coming judgment, consequences of God's people's sin and rebellion against God. Yet, in the midst of the judgment coming, there are glimmers of hope, as we talked about last week, of a coming savior. But it isn't until chapter 40 and beyond, that this vision of redemption and restoration of Israel is really explored.

Now what that restoration is supposed to look like is that God's people will actually fulfill God's original purpose for His chosen nation. God gave them a mission: That the world would be blessed through them. That they would be witnesses to who God is and the world would also follow God because of the nation of Israel. And Isaiah is saying that's what is going to happen.

But even as Isaiah writes of this restoration, the focus shifts. Off of God's people and onto who we see described as 'the Servant'. God's chosen one that will fulfill what God's people have failed to do. The servant will Himself restore God's kingdom and also be a light to the nations.

The servant will be empowered by God Himself to bring good news and bring God's kingdom to all the earth. But then we get to Isaiah 53, and we see what the servant has to do in order to accomplish His task. And it's shocking:

*Who has believed what he has heard from us? And to whom has the arm of the Lord been revealed? For he grew up before him like a young plant, and like a root out of dry ground; he had no form or majesty that we should look at him, and no beauty that we should desire him. He was despised and rejected by men; a man of sorrows, and acquainted with grief; and as one from whom men hide their faces he was despised, and we esteemed him not.*

The servant, the chosen One of God—who we know will also be king, will be God among the people. Will be rejected. Will have no form or majesty or beauty that He would be physically appealing to people. He will be despised. Grieved. Not esteemed. This is the one who will restore Israel. How?

*But he was wounded for our transgressions; he was crushed for our iniquities; upon him was the chastisement that brought us peace, and with his stripes we are healed. All we like sheep have gone astray; we have turned--every one--to his own way; and the Lord has laid on him the iniquity of us all. He was oppressed, and he was afflicted, yet he opened not his mouth; like a lamb that is led to the slaughter, and like a sheep that before its shearers is silent, so he opened not his mouth. By oppression and judgment he was taken away; and as for his generation, who considered that he was cut off out of the land of the living, stricken for the transgression of my people? And they made his grave with the*

*wicked and with a rich man in his death, although he had done no violence, and there was no deceit in his mouth.*

The servant that God has raised up to restore Israel and be a light to the nations is crushed. But with a purpose.

He is wounded for a people's transgressions. Crushed for a people's iniquity. Chastised to bring peace. Struck down to bring healing. He will be punished for sins He did not commit. He will die. And be buried.

Somehow, in order to be the savior the people need, He must suffer and die.

Lets see why:

*Yet it was the will of the Lord to crush him; he has put him to grief; when his soul makes an offering for guilt, he shall see his offspring; he shall prolong his days; the will of the Lord shall prosper in his hand. Out of the anguish of his soul he shall see and be satisfied; by his knowledge shall the righteous one, my servant, make many to be accounted righteous, and he shall bear their iniquities. Therefore I will divide him a portion with the many, and he shall divide the spoil with the strong, because he poured out his soul to death and was numbered with the transgressors; yet he bore the sin of many, and makes intercession for the transgressors.*

In sum. The servant, God's chosen one. Will suffer. Will be rejected. Hated. And will be wounded for the people. Like sheep the people had gone astray but the servant Himself will become like a sheep, led away to slaughter. Killed because of the transgressions and iniquity of the people. He will die. He will be buried.

Because, this is the will of God. For a savior to come. For the servant to be made a guilt offering. He bears the sin of the many. Making transgressors right with God. He will bear their iniquities and make many be accounted as righteous.

**The promised Servant of God, who will save the people from their sins, will accomplish His mission through a horrific death.**

This is what the gift of myrrh, laid down before the baby Jesus is pointing us to. Jesus is the suffering servant.

**Jesus came to die.**

I know we're in church and you've probably heard this 1000 times. But I'd be remiss not to tell you why this is the best news the world has ever heard:

**This same savior that Isaiah and Matthew said the people needed. We need Him too.**

The problem Isaiah tells his ancient readers of is the same problem we have today. Sin. that all of us have gone astray from the ways of God. We've all, like sheep, wandered away. We've each chosen our own ways above Gods.

You know, sometimes the imagery of being sheep carries this nice message when we see it in the Bible. Like the Lord is my shepherd. He's leading me like sheep. Yay. Well here's the thing. When the bible calls us sheep it's not like a gold star. It's sort of an insult. Because sheep are really dumb.

I was listening to a podcast and they were talking about a few years ago in Turkey, 1500 sheep just wandered off a cliff. Why? They asked the shepherds. Well sheep follow the herd so once that first sheep went off, 1499 other sheep were like 'sure!'. 450 sheep died. What happened to the other 1000? Well the pile of sheep got so high it just turned into a pillow for the others. They just landed on the other sheep. Sheep are not smart.

That's what Isaiah is saying about us. We've foolishly wandered away from God. Arrogantly and absent-mindedly chose our own ways over Gods.

The Bible is clear that we as people are not good or neutral. We can't just try our best and say that we're good people overall. No. According to the Scriptures we are sinful. Born into sin and choose to live in sin. And although we may not feel like our shortcomings and sins are all that bad, they are in fact an atrocity to God.

**The fact is, that man is a reeking mass of corruption. His whole soul is by nature so debased and so depraved, that no description which can be given of him even by inspired tongues can fully tell how base and vile a thing he is. -Spurgeon**

And just like a sheep, we can't save ourselves. We have wandered. We don't know the way back. We cannot do anything to fix the problem. We can't clear our own record.

For hundreds of years, God gave His people a way to temporarily deal with their sin and guilt. The sacrificial system. Priests would purify themselves and offer animal sacrifices, without blemish or spot, in the temple to atone, or make right, the sins of the people. They'd do this every day, over and over. In order to make yourself right with God, a sacrifice had to be made. As Hebrews 9:22 puts it:

**22 Indeed, under the law almost everything is purified with blood, and without the shedding of blood there is no forgiveness of sins.**

Blood must be shed in order to receive forgiveness. The sacrificial system checked the box. But the problem is the sacrifice of animals to appease God doesn't fix the problem. Because the people remained unchanged.

They and we needed a better sacrifice. Christ. The true sacrifice without spot or blemish. He was oppressed, crushed, afflicted.

He suffers and is punished in our place. But even more, He doesn't just take our punishment, He gives us His record. He lives the perfect, sinless life devoted and consecrated to God.

And He gives all those who believe in Him that perfect record. Theologians call this the 'Great Exchange'. Our sin. For Christ's righteousness. The writer of Hebrews just a few verses before what we just read sums it up perfectly:

**12 He entered once for all into the holy places, not by means of the blood of goats and calves but by means of his own blood, thus securing an eternal redemption. 13 For if the blood of goats and bulls, and the sprinkling of defiled persons with the ashes of a heifer, sanctify[] for the purification of the flesh, 14 how much more will the blood of Christ, who through the eternal Spirit offered himself without blemish to God, purify our conscience from dead works to serve the living God.**

He takes care of our sin. Once and for all.

Not by the means of animals. But by His perfect, precious blood. And see what it says there, His sacrifice can actually change us.

Because Jesus didn't stay dead. He rose by the power of the Spirit and that same spirit now lives in you. Changing you.

God comes to earth, to be amongst His people, to establish His kingdom forever, and ultimately to accomplish it by wiping out the sins of His people through His death.

**Myrrh points us back to the promised savior who is coming to save the people and forward to the cross where he accomplishes His long awaited mission.**

### **Christmas Application**

So I don't know what's on your mind most in these coming days. As we're 8 days out from Christmas. Maybe like me:

- Family? All the travel you're going to have to do?
- The gifts! All the things you're going to get or have to buy.
- On that note. Anxiety? Debt? Being around people that are stressful?
- The music, the weather, the decorating?
- That the year is ending? Get ready for 2024!

Isn't it hard to actually be rooted in what advent is about? To feel the month or so passing by and be like wait, it's Dec 26th, what happened? Did I think about God? Did I think about Jesus at all? I swear I did that advent devo for 10 min every morning, but what happened?

It all just gets crowded out. So in the midst of all that comes this month in the coming days I just want to rest in the reality of the good news of advent.

**You need a savior.** That's what advent is about. God come to meet our greatest need.

Let this advent be good news to your soul. You needed a savior. You need Him now. You can't be too busy for the savior. Your life can't ever crowd out how much you need a pardon from God. You have no righteousness of your own.

**And advent is the good news that the boy came to die.** We have good news to celebrate because Jesus came into the world to save it. To die and be raised again. According to the will of God. To save us.

Jesus came as the once and future king.

Jesus came as God with us now and forever.

Why did Jesus come? He came to die.

But not just to die. To be raised. To defeat satan sin and death.

Over the manger on that night, the cross and empty tomb loom large. Jesus came in weakness, died in weakness and was raised in power to the promised Servant of God who would save the people from their sins.

**Christmas is good news because of the cross and resurrection.**

And that is what these 3 gifts ultimately point to. The sacrificial death of God Himself. The only gift we truly need today and every day.

**Pray.**

That's what we've seen the last two weeks: how Matthew has used these gifts to point us back towards these beautiful, hope filled prophecies about this coming savior. But myrrh? I don't see what's going on here. One of these things is not like the other.

And that is just what Matthew is trying to press in on. This savior is not what the people would have expected. And what He came to do is not what they expected either.