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**INSTITUTE FOR CREATION RESEARCH**

## **Gold and Frankincense and Myrrh**

by Kathleen Bruce and Henry Morris

### **Institute for Creation Research**

P.O. Box 59029, Dallas, Texas 75229

1806 Royal Lane, Dallas, Texas 75229

Phone: 214/615-8300

Customer Service: 800/628-7640

[www.icr.org](http://www.icr.org)

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## Gold and Frankincense and Myrrh

Kathleen Bruce and Henry Morris

*“Now when Jesus was born in Bethlehem of Judea in the days of Herod the king, behold, there came wise men from the east to Jerusalem, Saying, Where is He that is born King of the Jews? for we have seen His star in the east, and are come to worship Him. . . . And when they were come into the house, they saw the young child with Mary His mother; and fell down, and worshipped Him: and when they had opened their treasures, they presented unto Him gifts; gold, and frankincense, and myrrh” (Matthew 2:1,11).*

One of the most familiar and best-loved stories of the Bible is the account of the wise men coming from a distant country east of Israel to worship the young child Jesus, whom they believed was destined to be King of the Jews, and to give Him three special gifts from their treasures. Those gifts were gold, and frankincense, and myrrh.

The gifts were undoubtedly very special in the minds and purposes of these wise men, and an attempt to understand the exact meaning of the three gifts has captured the

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<sup>1</sup> Dr. Bruce has been a missionary linguist with Wycliffe Bible Translators for many years and is now an Associate Professor at the Graduate School of Applied Linguistics in Dallas, Texas.

<sup>2</sup> Dr. Morris is President Emeritus at the Institute for Creation Research.

attention of many generations of Christians. But in spite of the familiarity of this story, there are several other enigmatic aspects of the record which need to be discussed first.

### The Wise Men

First, just who were the wise men, and where were they from? The original Greek term, as most people know, was *Magi*, and these men were certainly no ordinary travelers or merchants. These particular Magi most probably represented a class of astronomer-priests in Babylon, although Magi seem also to have been present in Persia and other ancient nations. They had possibly been founded first in Media.

It is known that the Babylonian Magi were diligent in astronomy and astrology. It is also noteworthy that the Jewish prophet Daniel, some four centuries earlier, had been made "*chief of the governors over all the wise men of Babylon*" (Daniel 2:48) by King Nebuchadnezzar. These "*wise men*" of Babylon included "*all the magicians and astrologers that were in all his realm*" (Daniel 1:20), which surely included the Magi as well.

Later, when the Persians invaded and conquered Babylon under Darius the Mede, Daniel "*was preferred above the presidents and princes, because an excellent spirit was in him; and the king thought to set him over the whole realm*" (Daniel 6:3). He clearly had great influence in Babylon for a long time. He is said to have "*Prospered in the reign of Darius, and in the reign of Cyrus the Persian*" (Daniel 6:28).

Daniel was not only a very godly man but also very

knowledgeable in such Scriptures as had been written up to that time. He also received many new revelations himself that were later made part of the Old Testament canon. As chief of the wise men (including especially the Magi caste), he undoubtedly taught them much of Hebrew history and prophecy, including the promise of the Messiah, who was destined to rule all nations. Especially significant was his prophecy of the seventy weeks (Daniel 9:24-27), which included the actual time when Messiah would come to present Himself to Israel as their promised Prince.

The Magi no doubt also knew all about Mordecai and Queen Esther who had been able to save the Jews from genocide in a later time when Persia reigned over Babylon. *“Many of the people of the land”* even *“became Jews”* at that time (Esther 8:17).

They also must have learned about the prophecy of Balaam (the prophet out of their own country of Mesopotamia) as recorded in Numbers 24:17. This prophecy included the famous star prophecy: *“There shall come a Star out of Jacob, and a Sceptre shall rise out of Israel.”* The “Sceptre” indicated a ruling King and the “Star” perhaps suggested that He would come from Heaven.

This prophecy was given by Balaam, who was from Pethor, near the upper Euphrates and the ancestral home of Haran (Abraham’s brother), but he may even have been (according to one tradition, at least) the actual founder of the Magi system. He surely knew much about Hebrew history and their place in God’s plan and had possibly been a true prophet of God until he became a greedy soothsayer and was tempted by the king of Moab to oppose the children

of Israel, finally being slain in their war with the Moabites. Balaam had been widely known in the ancient world, even as far away from Pethor as Moab. An ancient plaster inscription found in Jordan begins, “The sayings of Balaam, son of Beor, the man who was a seer of the gods.”

In any case, our main interest here in Balaam is the Star which he prophesied and which eventually led the wise men to Bethlehem. They certainly regarded it as a true fulfillment of divine prophecy of such great importance that they undertook a long and arduous journey just to see and worship the King identified by the star.

But how could a *star* do such a thing? And how could these Magi, living in distant Babylon (or at least somewhere well east of Israel) recognize it as so significant, especially when the Jewish priests and scribes themselves seemed unaware of it?

There have been various theories about the star published by different writers over the centuries, and no one can really be dogmatic: It is generally agreed, however, as emphasized by Josephus and others that many people in many nations were somehow looking for some great event or some great leader to appear about that time, and even that the little nation of Judea would become preeminent among the nations.

Remember also that the Babylonian Magi were probably the best astronomers in the ancient world, as well as considering themselves adept at astrology. Being aware of Balaam’s prophecy and no doubt familiar with Daniel’s prophecy of the seventy weeks, they could very

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<sup>3</sup> *Biblical Archaeology Review* (vol. 29, no. 4) p. 34.

possibly have determined that Messiah's coming was near at hand. Daniel had, in his long tenure up into the time of Cyrus, been "*chief of the governors over all the wise men of Babylon*" (Daniel 2:48). On one occasion he had even saved the lives of all the wise men of Nebuchadnezzar's time from execution by that tyrannical king (see Daniel 2:12,24,30). Thus it seems likely that the Magi of Herod's time would have learned all these things and might even be looking for such a special star to appear as a sign that the Messiah had come.

### **The Star**

As to the nature of the star, a full discussion is beyond the scope of this booklet. A summary of these ideas is available in another ICR booklet,<sup>4</sup> and there have actually been many articles and even entire books published expounding one or another of the theories.

Many modern evangelicals, recognizing that a real star could not actually "lead" the wise men all the way from Babylon to Bethlehem, have supposed that it was some kind of special light moving along in the sky (some have even thought it might have been the glory cloud that led the children of Israel in the wilderness during Moses' time). Angels are occasionally called stars in the Bible, so maybe it was an angel, some have suggested.

But why would this "star" appear to guide eastern Gentile Magi to see Jesus instead of the many Jews who were

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<sup>4</sup> See *When They Saw the Star* by Henry M. Morris (ICR, 2000) 27 pp

waiting for Him at that time, such as Simeon and Anna and “*all them that looked for redemption in Jerusalem*” (Luke 2:38)?

Furthermore, the Magi called it a *star* and, if anyone in the world at that time knew what stars were, these men did. Although planets or comets or even meteorites might possibly be called stars, they hardly fit the actual description of its supposed activity in *leading* the wise men to Jerusalem any more than a distant star could do.

But the account never says that the star actually went before them all the way from Babylon. It says they had “*seen His star in the east*” (Matthew 2:2), and that fact caused them to start their journey. If it was really *His* star, Jesus surely should have been brought to Jerusalem by the time the Magi could get there, they must have assumed, so to Jerusalem they went. The account does not say they actually *saw* the star again until they saw it standing over Bethlehem, just a short distance away from Jerusalem.

We cannot discuss the details here, but one good possibility is that it was a “nova” or “supernova”—a new star that shines brightly for just a year or so and then disappears. A number of Christian astronomers have thought this to be the most likely explanation.

In any case, the purpose of this booklet is not to discuss the nature of the star, but the purpose of the wise men in seeking to find the One whom the star announced.

### **Why the Wise Men Came**

The Bible leaves us in no doubt concerning this matter. In answer to this very question, the Magi came saying:

*“Where is He that is born King of the Jews? for we have seen His star in the east, and are come to worship Him”*  
(Matthew 2:2).

They came to *worship* Him! They quite possibly had even become believers in the true God and His promise of a Savior for all men. Isaiah had predicted, in fact, that *“Gentiles shall come to thy light, and kings to the brightness of thy rising”* (Isaiah 60:3); the coming of the Magi to worship Christ while He was yet a babe in Bethlehem surely was at least a partial fulfillment of this prophecy.

And just *how* did they worship Him? *“When they were come into the house, they saw the young child with Mary His mother, and fell down, and worshipped Him: and when they had opened their treasures, they presented unto Him gifts; gold, and frankincense, and myrrh”* (Matthew 2:11).

This surely tells us that their gifts were gifts of worship. and it is well to consider more carefully just how gold and frankincense and myrrh were special gifts of worship. But first, before they presented Him the gifts, they *“fell down and worshipped Him.”* The worshipping actually preceded the gifts and was indicated particularly by their falling down before Him.

It is significant that “worship” in the Old Testament Hebrew is *shachah*, and is used for the very first time in Genesis where it tells us about three men who appeared before Abraham and *“stood by him: and when he saw them, he ran to meet them from the tent door, and bowed himself toward the ground”* (Genesis 18:2).

Here the same word *shachah* is translated *“bowed himself”* Abraham seems to have sensed that these

sudden visitors were not ordinary men. Two of them were soon revealed to be angels; the third was God Himself, appearing in a theophany. Therefore Abraham in effect worshipped them by bowing himself toward the ground. The second time *shachah* is used is when Abraham was about to sacrifice his son Isaac in obedience to God's command and told the two men accompanying them to wait for them until "*I and the lad will go yonder and worship, and come again to you*" (Genesis 22:5).

Thus Abraham was, in effect, bowing down to the will of God, even if it meant slaying his beloved son. Actually, he believed so strongly in God's promises concerning his son that, even if he had sacrificed his son, "*God was able to raise him . . . from the dead*" (Hebrews 11:19).

Thus, real worship means bowing down to do God's will, not just singing a hymn or hearing a sermon or some other religious act. So, when the wise men *worshipped* Jesus, they were in effect acknowledging Him as God and promising their lives and obedience to Him. The gifts that followed, therefore, were simply expressions of their faith in Him as their promised King and incarnate God.

Likewise, our commitment to the Lord Jesus Christ should be true worship—submission to His will in all things and at all costs. "*For He is thy Lord; and worship thou Him*" (Psalm 45:11).

## **The Troubled King**

One would at first suppose that the Jews would be overjoyed at the news that Messiah, their promised King, had finally come; even though they had altogether

missed the sign of His star. But not so! “*When Herod the king had heard these things, he was troubled, and all Jerusalem with him*” (Matthew 2:3).

Apparently, he was afraid that this newborn King would soon usurp his own throne. Although he was not really of Jewish descent, but Idumean (or Edomite, a descendant of Esau), Herod considered himself to be “King of the Jews” and was not at all pleased with the idea that this young child had been “*born King of the Jews,*” as the wise men assumed.

Neither were the chief priests and scribes pleased. They obviously knew the promise in Micah that the Messiah would be born in Bethlehem (Micah 5:2), since they were ready to send the Magi there, so they must have known that the same prophecy also described Him as one “*whose goings forth have been from of old, from everlasting,*” and that He was destined to be “*ruler in Israel.*” Thus not only would this Messiah, so long anticipated as the one who would deliver them from Roman rule, also be the very Son of God who would bring in perfect righteousness and rule all nations. This prospect made them as uncomfortably troubled as Herod. Although they would presumably like to be delivered from Rome, their present status had many perquisites which they feared a righteous king would remove.

Another reason that Herod and even his Roman overlords were troubled was their fear that the Parthian Empire from which the wise men had come, was about to invade Judea and throw its support to this newborn King. Although Babylon, with its noted astronomers, was still a viable city well into the Christian era, it had been

conquered by the Persians during the time of Daniel. The Persians in turn had been displaced by Greece, especially under Alexander the Great, and Greece had eventually been made a part of the great Roman Empire.

Parthia had once been just a part of the Persian Empire, but had grown so strong as to virtually take over most of Persia, thus becoming the Parthian empire. Rome had frequently battled the Parthians, but never subjugated them, and Parthia was just then a serious threat to Rome on her eastern border, which essentially was the same as Israel's border.

We need also to recognize that, despite tradition and countless Christmas cards, there were almost certainly more than three astrologers who showed up at Jerusalem inquiring about the newborn King. There was very likely a large entourage with a large delegation of Bible-believing Magi and also a protecting body of soldiery, with a sizeable caravan carrying their "treasures," from which they would bring forth their three gifts to the young child.

Such a huge entourage would better explain why "*all Jerusalem*" was "*troubled*" along with Herod. If it had only been three itinerant astrologers, no one would have been troubled, and the three would probably not even have been able to talk to King Herod at all. Although Herod soon sent them on to Bethlehem, with the instruction to report back to him, so that he also could "worship" the child, his intention was to have the young child killed. But when the Lord directed the Magi to return home by a different route, Herod was so angry that he arranged to murder all the young children under two years of age in

and around Bethlehem. He was very disturbed that the men were worshipping the little Son of Mary implying not only that He was the promised King, but even God Himself. Many years later, the chief priests actually did get Jesus executed, based on this very claim to deity, which they labeled blasphemy.

Herod's "slaughter of the innocents," as it has been called, actually was the occasion of the fulfillment of a prophecy by Jeremiah: "*A voice was heard in Ramah, lamentation, and bitter weeping; Rachel weeping for her children refused to be comforted for her children, because they were not*" (Jeremiah 31:15).

Ramah, a town near Bethlehem, was included in the territory suffering Herod's murderous anger. Many centuries previously, Jacob's wife, Rachel, died near there as she gave birth to Benjamin, whose descendants still lived in that region. Thus the grieving mothers had been personified as Rachel in Jeremiah's prophecy, eventually fulfilled as noted in Matthew 2:18.

Another ancient prophecy, quoted in Matthew 2:15 was noted as fulfilling Hosea 11:1, when Joseph, Mary, and Jesus were instructed by God to flee into Egypt to escape Herod's executions until Herod himself would die. The prophecy ("*I . . . called my son out of Egypt*") was originally written mainly as a commentary on Israel's previous exodus from Egypt, but appropriated by Matthew as a prophetic type of the experience of the child Jesus.

The wicked king Herod (also known as Herod the Great) had been "troubled" by the news of Jesus' birth, and he had been a troubler of the godly remnant in Israel,

but he soon died himself (many believe around 4 B.C.), so the holy family could return home and settle in Nazareth.

### **The Gifts of the Magi**

When we read that the wise men came such a long way to “worship” Jesus, and then gave Him gifts of gold and frankincense and myrrh, we cannot help but wonder *why* these particular gifts. They hardly seem appropriate for a little child, or even His parents. The gold possibly helped support the family during their stay in Egypt, but the wise men could not have given it with that in mind.

It does seem very likely that they gave such gifts because of who He was and what He had come to Earth to do. As noted above, they were undoubtedly familiar with the Old Testament, especially its Messianic prophecies, and their worship must have been based on their realization that He was—as Messiah—nothing less than God incarnate as a human being.

As noted above, the great prophet Daniel had once been the chief of the wise men of Babylon and Persia. Almost certainly they had read his inspired writings, those we now possess in the Old Testament book of Daniel, and perhaps other teachings of his that had been handed down.

They would have known, for example, about the seventy-weeks prophecy, and so knew they must have been living in the time when it would soon be fulfilled by Messiah’s coming. They knew that Daniel’s prophecies about the succession of empires (Babylon, Persia, Greece, Rome) had also been fulfilled.

That prophecy, based on Nebuchadnezzar’s dream

image, had climaxed with the prediction that “*in the days of these kings shall the God of heaven set up a kingdom, which shall never be destroyed . . . and it shall stand for ever*” (Daniel 2:44).

Another of Daniel’s prophecies, based on a night vision sent by God, said that he saw that “*one like the Son of man came with the clouds of heaven, and came to the Ancient of days, and they brought him near before Him. And there was given Him dominion, and glory, and a kingdom, that all people, nations, and languages, should serve Him: His dominion is an everlasting dominion, which shall not pass away, and His kingdom that which shall not be destroyed*” (Daniel 7:13-14).

From such prophecies—as well as Balaam’s prophecy and others in the Old Testament they could know that the coming king would actually be the Son of God (note also Psalm 2:7,8,12) and also the Son of man. He would have to be born as a man, yet still retain His deity, and thus be God incarnate—the God/man. No wonder they felt it was appropriate to fall down and worship Him! They surely also knew the prophecy of the woman’s seed defeating Satan (Genesis 3:15) and Isaiah’s great prophecy of the virgin birth and of the divine Son to be known as the “*everlasting Father;*” etc. whose kingdom would be established with justice forever (Isaiah 7:14; 9:6-7).

For such a child as this, no ordinary children’s gifts would do. They must bring gifts suitable for a great King and also appropriate for the worship of God Himself. And so they brought gold and frankincense and myrrh. Nothing could have been more fitting than these, as we shall see.

## Gold

The gift of gold obviously was appropriate for both honoring a king and worshipping God. It is the first metal mentioned in the Bible (Genesis 2:11), where it is also called “good” (Genesis 2:12).

It has always been symbolic of wealth and of royalty. The essential symbol identifying a king was a golden crown on his head, and kings in general wanted gold all around them. David sang concerning his own kingly blessings: “. . . *thou settest a crown of pure gold on his head*” (Psalm 21:3). And King Solomon surrounded himself with so much gold that even silver “*was nothing accounted of in the days of Solomon*” (I Kings 10:21). Solomon had a “*throne of ivory, and overlaid it with the best gold*” (I Kings 10:18).

But the use of gold was also characteristic of pagan kings. Nebuchadnezzar of Babylon once erected a gigantic “*image of gold,*” representing himself and Babylon’s gods (Daniel 3:1), which he required everyone to worship on penalty of death. In general, gold was regarded throughout the ancient world as emblematic of wealth, whether used for good or evil, and royalty, whether displayed by godly kings or pagan kings.

But God is the ultimate Sovereign and His Son is the King of kings who will soon put down all ungodly kings (Revelation 17:14). Therefore gold is most fittingly appropriate as used by God who created it. When God chose Israel as His elect nation out of all nations, He made the founder of that nation, who also is the spiritual “*father of all them that believe*” (Romans 4:11), “*very rich in cattle, in*

*silver, and in gold*” (Genesis 13:2—the second mention of gold in the Bible).

As God was actually structuring that nation in the wilderness under Moses, He told them to build a tabernacle, in which He could “ *dwell among them* ” when on Earth (Exodus 25:8). As He gave the pattern that they were to follow in building the tabernacle and its furnishings, it is noteworthy how often gold was to be used. The word was used well over 100 times as they received and carried out these instructions.  *Everything*  was either made of gold or overlaid with gold.

Probably the most important item was the Ark of the Covenant, a special box-like chest to be placed in the most holy compartment of the tabernacle. It was to be overlaid within and without by pure gold, and also “ *upon it a crown of gold round about* ” (Exodus 25:11). Then there was the “ *mercy seat of pure gold* ” and also “ *two cherubims of gold, . . . in the two ends of the mercy seat* ” (Exodus 25:17-18), placed upon the Ark.

All the furniture and instruments in the tabernacle were to be of gold. In this tent where God would “ *dwell* ” the whole environment surrounding Him would seem to be golden. Even the clothing to be worn by the priests as they ministered in the tabernacle on behalf of the people would be decorated with gold.

The same was true on an even larger scale in the temple, which King Solomon later built in Jerusalem to replace the tabernacle. Again there was gold everywhere. “ *So Solomon overlaid the house within with pure gold: and he made a partition by the chains of gold before the oracle; and he*

*overlaid it with gold. And the whole house he overlaid with gold, until he had finished all the house: also the whole altar that was by the oracle he overlaid with gold” (I Kings 6:21-22).*

But the tabernacle and the temple, as beautiful and meaningful as they were, were only types of God’s future home with all His people. When John (translated by the Spirit into the future) saw the holy city coming down out of heaven, he *“heard a great voice out of heaven saying, Behold, the tabernacle of God is with men, and He will dwell with them”* (Revelation 21:3).

That eternal tabernacle is the holy city itself, and *“the city was pure gold, like unto clear glass. . . . and the street of the city was pure gold, as it were transparent glass. And I saw no temple therein: for the Lord God Almighty and the Lamb are the temple of it”* (Revelation 21:18,21-22).

The heavenly city, New Jerusalem, will be made of gold everywhere. That is to be God’s home and ours as well in the ages to come. We may not comprehend all of this right now, but we shall be with our heavenly Father and the Lamb our Redeemer and that is enough to know until then.

A gift of gold was indeed a wonderfully appropriate gift for the Magi to offer the Lord Jesus as they worshipped Him.

### **Frankincense**

But what about frankincense and myrrh? Both are from gum resins taken from trees that grow in Arabia and along the east coast of Africa. They were both highly valued in Israel and other nations of that time, used especially for medicines, incense, and perfumes.

Interestingly, they are both encountered for the first time in the Bible in God's instructions for the services of the tabernacle in the wilderness (Exodus 30:23,34; two earlier references to myrrh in the King James Version, in Genesis 37:25 and 43:11 are from a different Hebrew word, probably referring to a similar gum, laudanum). By being used in the tabernacle, they are clearly associated with worshiping God. The two also are used together as contributing to the desirability of the Bridegroom in Song of Solomon 3:6; 4:6 and his Bride v.4:14.

As far as frankincense is concerned, it has always been a chief component of most incense, in every nation and every religion. The Bible, of course, condemns its use by His people if applied to some false system of worship.

However, the use of frankincense was commanded in the divinely planned tabernacle, both as a chief ingredient of the incense which was to be kept burning in the tabernacle and also burned in connection with the meal offerings, both maintaining a "sweet savor" before the Lord. The incense ingredients were holy and could not be altered nor could the incense be used for any other purpose. Only the priests could offer the incense on the altar of incense and only the high priest once a year could offer it on the mercy seat beyond the veil.

Because the priests were representing all the people before God, this service and the incense came to signify the offering of their prayers to God. As David prayed: *"Let my prayer be set forth before thee as incense; and the lifting up of my hands as the evening sacrifice"* (Psalm 141:2). As the smoke of the burning offering ascended up from the altar, so they believed their prayers

would go up to God with it, and it would be a sweet savor to Him. Not only had the stench of their sins been forgiven through the bloody sacrifices of the animals, but their purified lives typified by their meal (or grain) offerings indicate their commitment to godliness of life.

The typological meaning of burning incense as prayer rising up to God is seen even in prophecies of the future. In John's vision of a future period of great tribulation on the earth, involving many martyrs for the faith, he saw the elders falling down before the Lamb, "*having every one of them harps, and golden vials full of odors, which are the prayers of saints*" (Revelation 5:8).

The odors were those of the sweet-smelling incense, which were the long-unanswered (but never forgotten) prayers of the saints. Then, later, John saw a special angel standing at the heavenly altar, "*and there was given unto him much incense, that he should offer it with the prayers of all saints upon the golden altar which was before the throne. And the smoke of the incense, which came with the prayers of the saints, ascended up before God out of the angel's hand*" (Revelation 8:3-4)

Now, although the specific relationships of this prophecy apply to future events, this surely gives us a clue as to the real significance of burning incense (especially its chief ingredient, frankincense) rising up to God's throne. Our prayers are like that. We pray, on the basis of the sin-cleansing sacrifice of the Lamb of God, and they rise up to the throne of God via the indwelling Spirit of God.

In the Old Testament figure, of course, the High Priest, had to serve as the intermediary to present the offerings of thanksgiving and prayer requests to God.

But now the relationship is different, though the same in principle.

*“For there is one God, and one mediator between God and men, the man Christ Jesus”* (I Timothy 2:5). *“But this man, because He continueth ever, hath an unchangeable priesthood. Wherefore He is able also to save them to the uttermost that come unto God by Him, seeing He ever liveth to make intercession for them”* (Hebrews 7:24-25).

Now we can see how wonderfully meaningful was this gift of frankincense to the little child in Bethlehem. Not only is He destined to be the great King, but also our eternal High Priest. The incense confesses that He alone can convey our prayers, and indeed our very souls to God. The Magi must have read Psalm 110, for example, with its great confession (which they were thereby making their own): *“The LORD hath sworn, and will not repent, Thou art a priest for ever after the order of Melchizedek”* (Psalm 110:4).

### **Myrrh**

The third gift was myrrh. This aromatic gum resin had a number of uses in the making of perfumes, and medicines, and even for embalming. Its first use in the Bible, however, would suggest that its definitive Biblical use was in the holy anointing oil. The Lord instructed Moses as follows: *“Take thou also unto thee principal spices, of pure myrrh five hundred shekels . . .”* The anointing oil also was to include various amounts of cinnamon, calamus, cassia, and olive oil. *“And thou shalt make it an oil of holy ointment . . . : it shall be an holy anointing oil. And thou shalt anoint the tabernacle of the congregation therewith, and the ark of the testimony, And . . . thou shalt*

*sanctify them, that they may be most holy: whatsoever toucheth them shall be holy. And thou shalt anoint Aaron and his sons, and consecrate them, that they may minister unto me in the priest's office*" (Exodus 30:23,25-26,29,30).

The priests—especially Aaron and his sons, who were to serve as High Priests—were thus to be “anointed” with a divinely-designed oil, the main ingredient of which was myrrh. Although “anointing” people with some kind of oil or ointment was a very common practice everywhere, this “ritualistic” anointing with this special oil was only to be applied to people and things designated by God for distinct purposes—not to anything or anyone else (Exodus 30:31-35).

However, this type of special ritualistic anointing *was* applicable not only to priests but also to kings and prophets. For example, Samuel anointed Saul and later David to be king over Israel (I Samuel 10:1; 16:13). It was Zadok the priest who anointed Solomon (I Kings 1:39) to be king after David. Various later kings are also said to have been anointed.

It does not say definitely that the same anointing oil for the priests was also used for kings. Probably in many cases it was not. In David's case, however, God is quoted as saying: *“I have found David my servant; with my holy oil have I anointed him”* (Psalm 89:20). Furthermore, Solomon was anointed by a high priest who knew that it was the will of God that Solomon be king. He actually took oil out of the tabernacle with which to anoint Solomon (I Kings 1:39), and it would surely have been appropriate to use the holy anointing oil for this purpose. David had been anointed by Samuel, who was a God-

called prophet as well as the last of the judges. Although not a descendant of Aaron, he was a Levite and actually seems to have acted as high priest “in interim,” so to speak, after the sudden deaths of Eli and his two sons. Thus he also would have had access to the holy anointing oil and almost certainly must have used it to anoint David.

Many authorities are convinced that it was Samuel who established what many have called a “school of the prophets,” teaching them how to use the prophetic gift properly. Although this is speculative, since the Bible does not say, it seems reasonable that he would have “anointed” as prophets those who had demonstrated that they really had such a gift and would faithfully proclaim such authoritative words as God revealed to them.

However, the only recorded case of the actual anointing of a prophet is when God told Elijah: “*Elisha the son of Shaphat of Abel-Meholah shalt thou anoint to be prophet in thy room*” (I Kings 19:16). One can only wonder whether Elijah or Elisha or both may have originally been in one of the presumed schools of the prophets established long before by Samuel.

There is at least *that* example, and since it was God’s direct instruction that Elisha be so anointed, it seems reasonable to say that true prophets, as well as priests and kings, had been anointed by someone sent by God with some kind of suitable ‘anointing oil. Whether such oil always included a major component of myrrh would only be a guess, but this was true of the holy anointing oil in the tabernacle. It is at least plausible that this would be true of most or all oils used for anointing.

The word “myrrh” is most used in the Song of Solomon, always as productive of sweet odors on the bodies of those using it. It is used in a striking way in one of the Messianic psalms (Psalm 45), which eulogizes the Messiah in these words, among others: *“Thou lovest righteousness, and hatest wickedness: therefore God, thy God, hath anointed thee with the oil of gladness above thy fellows. All thy garments smell of myrrh, and aloes, and cassia, out of the ivory palaces, whereby they have made thee glad”* (Psalm 45:7-8).

Jesus is pictured in this psalm as about to leave the palaces of heaven for a mission to Earth with a “*tongue*” like the “*pen of a ready writer*” and with grace “*poured into thy lips*” (Psalm 45:1-2). He has beautiful words from God; in fact, He is the Word of God! He has been “anointed.” In fact, His very title, *Messiah*, means “*the Anointed One.*”

He is to be the King of all creation, and also a Priest forever. But He is also the great Prophet of God, speaking the glad words of God’s salvation to a lost world. *“God, who . . . spoke in time past unto the fathers by the prophets, Hath in these last days spoken unto us by His Son”* (Hebrews 1:1-2). *“And the Word was made flesh, and dwelt among us”* (John I:14).

Long ago, the greatest of all human prophets, Moses the man of God, as he was preparing soon to die, had promised the people: *“The LORD thy God will raise up unto thee a Prophet from the midst of thee, of thy brethren, like unto me; unto Him shall ye hearken”* (Deuteronomy 18:15).

It was in the temple that Peter proclaimed the fulfillment of that prophecy in Christ (Acts 3:22). The Lord Jesus Christ is the greatest Prophet, truly

anointed by God—in fact, He *is* “the Anointed One.” In a strange sense, as His garments smelled of myrrh and aloes as He left the ivory palaces, once again He was anointed with myrrh and aloes in the linen clothes wound about Him as He entered the tomb in Joseph’s garden here on Earth (see John 19:39-40).

So the Magi’s gift of myrrh was also appropriate, honoring Him as the Prophet of God, as well as God’s King of all kings and eternal High Priest.

### **Prophet, Priest, and King**

The Magi had surely read Moses’ promise of the coming Prophet, as well as David’s promise of the coming Priest, and Daniel’s promise of the coming King, and when they finally saw Him, they fell down and worshipped Him, presenting Him with the three most fitting gifts of worship which the world contained.

Just as “Messiah” means “the Anointed One” in Hebrew, so “Christ” means “the Anointed One” in Greek. Some day, probably not too far away, we who have anointed Him in our hearts as our Creator and personal Redeemer—our own infallible Prophetic Word, ever-living interceding Priest and infinitely-loving King of kings and Lord of lords—we shall not only see Him face to face but also can meet these wonderful wise men who first recognized Him and gave Him gifts in the little town of Bethlehem many years ago.

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