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*And opening their treasure bags they gave him gifts of gold, frankincense and myrrh. (Matthew 2. 11)*

Gift giving is a tradition in almost all countries and cultures. Gifts value and honour the recipient and, in some cultures, bring honour also to the giver. In the weeks leading up to Christmas the streets of towns and cities of England are full of enticement to buy gifts to give at this great feast of the birth of our Lord Jesus Christ.

Gifts are central to the nativity story. We read in St Matthew's Gospel of the Magi bringing gifts of gold, frankincense and myrrh. Traditionally we understand these gifts as telling us something of the nature of Christ: gold indicating his kingship, incense his place as our great High Priest; and myrrh foreshadowing his death.

These gifts were valuable. There was nothing everyday, ordinary or inexpensive about gold, frankincense or myrrh. In this very human offering of gifts the Magi respond to the inestimable gift of God in the person of Jesus Christ. One can never truly express the magnitude of one's love for another in a gift, however valuable. The Magi's gifts, generous though they were, were cheap in comparison to the grace of God brought to us in Jesus Christ.

These gifts were brought to the Christ-child by gentiles. Christ's God's gift to the whole world. When the Magi come into the presence of Jesus they bring the whole world with them and to the whole world, through them, God displays his glory and calls forth a single song of thanksgiving.

A gift given with the expectation of something in return is not a gift. The giver of a true gift opens themselves to the possibility of that gift being rejected. The response to being given a true gift is not to attempt to better the giver by giving back a bigger or more expensive gift but, first and foremost, to give thanks.

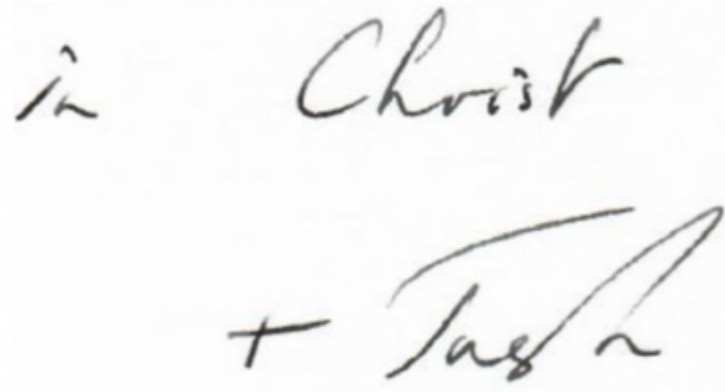
When the Word was made flesh and dwelt among us (John 1: 14) Jesus Christ emptied himself and took the form of a servant, becoming obedient to death on the Cross (Philippians 2: 7). Through Christ God reconciles the world to himself (2 Corinthians 5: 19). This gift to the world cannot be equalled or bettered by any gift that the world can give back to God.

For God's generosity and his love we give thanks and, as our response to such a costly and precious gift, we offer our love and service to him.

We live in difficult and uncertain times. The world cries out for good news. As Christians we have good news – the good news revealed to the Magi and to people everywhere – that God gave to us the gift of his Son Jesus Christ. May our thanks to God be expressed in our love and forgiveness for one another, His children, when we fail each other, as we so often do.

May it be expressed in our united commitment to making His gift known to the world. In places like the United Kingdom the country thinks itself rich but is poor (Revelation 3:17). In places of poverty the world needs to hear afresh of the generosity of Christ. In places of persecution, war and unrest, it needs to hear that this gift is described as the Prince of Peace.

e hope, peace and joy that Christ came to give.



in Christ  
+ Jesus

The Most Reverend and Right Honourable Justin Welby

Archbishop of Canterbury

3 min read

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