



Bible Topics

The True Story of Christmas Nativity and Epiphany

Matthew 2:2 "Where is He who has been born King of the Jews? For we saw His star in the east and have come to worship Him."

Course Text: Matthew 2:1-23 & Luke 2:1-52

Introduction: What do the scriptures tell us about Christmas?

- | <u>Lesson</u> | <u>Topic</u> |
|-----------------|---|
| Lesson 1 | - Shepherds |
| Lesson 2 | - Gold |
| Lesson 3 | - Frankincense |
| Lesson 4 | - Myrrh |
| Lesson 5 | - God's Christmas present to you |

Suggested methodology for each lesson:

1. Fellowship (Save most of this for the end of class)
2. Take prayer requests (Try to keep it from becoming a competition to see who has the most or the worst)
3. Pray (The idea is to leave our troubles with God so we can give Him our full attention.)
4. Read the lesson's scripture aloud from the Bible (or a few verses at a time as you answer the questions.)
5. Answer and *briefly* discuss the "fill in the blank" questions. (Let those who prefer to listen, listen. My answers on the next page are just one opinion; you may have a better answer if it is Scripture based.)
6. On the final "Think & Pray" question everyone should take a few minutes to pray over it and jot down their own thoughts before the discussion. **This will give the Holy Spirit a time to speak .**
7. Discuss your Think & Pray answers. (Never force anyone to share theirs. As with the other questions, my answer is just one more opinion; you may have a better answer.)
8. Close in prayer (It is good to call on others to pray, but try to get their permission first.)
9. Fellowship (Leave this as open ended as possible for the time and place you meet.)



Depending on the number of people, each lesson is expected to take about one hour. Steps 4 thru 7 are about half of that. If you take longer, let each lesson take more than one meeting. If you take less time, extra questions are provided for discussion called "For Further Thought"

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----- ANSWERS -----

Lesson 1 – Shepherds (Luke 2:1-20)

- [1A] On what day of the year was Jesus born? Unknown. Scripture does not supply us with a date. Not until the 4th century A. D. did the celebration date settle on the 25th. Other dates were accepted before then and it is still a matter for debate.
- [1B] Joseph’s family was from what town? Bethlehem. See Luke 2:3-4.
- [1C] How does the Bible say Mary and Joseph traveled to Bethlehem? Unknown The Bible doesn’t say how they traveled.
- [1D] Who told Mary and Joseph to go to Bethlehem? Caesar Augustus. See Luke 2:1,4. "a decree from Caesar Augustus"
- [1E] What did the innkeeper tell Mary and Joseph, according to the Bible? Unknown An inn-keeper is not mentioned in the Bible Christmas story. See Luke 2:7.
- [1F] Which animals does the Bible say were present at Jesus’ birth? Unknown The Bible doesn’t specify any animals.
- [1G] How many angels did the shepherds meet? One angel first spoke and was later joined by a host. See Luke 2:8-14.
- [1H] What “sign” were the shepherds told to look for? A "babe wrapped in swaddling clothes, lying in a manger." See Luke 2:12.
- [1I] What is a manger? A manger is a feeding trough for animals.
- [1J] What did the angels sing to the shepherds? The angels did not sing, they spoke. See Luke 2:13-14.

[1K] **Shepherds Test Results:** If you got them all right you are unusual. Most of these details don't matter very much in the grand scheme of things but it should give us pause for reflection and thought that we don't know the Bible truth accurately. The point is that if it is about something that matters you need to keep yourself constantly refreshed with the details of what the Bible actually says. Another point is we need to maintain some humility. We are human and what we think we know may not always be exactly right.

For further thought:

- (1L) What is the triangular shape of the Christmas tree symbolic of?
- (1m) What does the X in Xmas stand for?
- (1n) Explain why holly is used as a Christmas symbol.

My further thoughts:

- (1L) What is the triangular shape of the Christmas tree symbolic of? The triangular shape of the Christmas tree is symbolic of the Trinity.
- (1m) What does the X in Xmas stand for? X in Xmas stands for the cross where Christ died for our sins.
- (1n) Explain why holly is used as a Christmas symbol. Red is for the blood of Christ which makes us pure. Green is for the eternal life Christ gave to us by his death on the cross. The sharp pointy edges of the holly leaf remind us of the crown of thorns that Jesus wore upon his brow.

Christmas Gold - Service, Treasure, Attributes, Resources

Lesson 2 – GOLD (Matthew 2:1-20)

We three kings of orient are,
bearing gifts we traverse afar
Field and fountain, moor and mountain,
following yonder star.

O star of wonder, star of night,
star with royal beauty bright.
Westward leading, still proceeding,
Guide us to thy perfect light.

[Melchior]
Born a King on Bethlehem's plain,
Gold I bring to crown Him again
King for ever, ceasing never
over us all to reign.

O star of wonder, star of night,
star with royal beauty bright.
Westward leading, still proceeding,
Guide us to thy perfect light.

Try to answer these questions before reading the Scripture passage from Matthew:

[2A] Who saw the “star in the east?” _____

[2B] How many wise men or magi came to see Jesus? _____

[2C] Where did the wise men find Jesus? _____

[2D] Now check your answers by reading Matthew 2:1-20. How did you do?

Read these scriptures and answer the associated questions:

[2E] Hebrews 1:8 How long will the throne of the Son last? _____

[2F] Revelation 19:16 Jesus is the King of who? _____

[2G] John 3:16 Those who believe on Jesus have what? _____

[2H] John 8:12 Those who follow Jesus will have what? _____

[2I] John 14:6 Who is Jesus? _____

[2J] Matthew 13:46 What did he sell to buy the pearl of great value? _____

[2K] Romans 12:1 What are we urged to offer God as a sacrifice? _____

[2L] Matthew 2:11 Why did Matthew mention the gift of gold?

Think & Pray _____



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----- ANSWERS -----

Lesson 2 – GOLD (Matthew 2:1-20)

- [2A] Who saw the “star in the east?” The wise men or magi did. They were not called kings in the Bible. See Matthew 2:1-2.
- [2B] How many wise men or magi came to see Jesus? Unknown The three gifts gave rise to the understanding that there were three gift-givers, but the tradition of three “kings” with the names Caspar, Melchior, and Balthazar, comes only from tradition. At one time, “tradition” said there were fourteen.
- [2C] Where did the wise men find Jesus? The wise men visited Jesus in a house. Most scholars think it was many months after His birth before they arrived. See Matthew 2:11.
- [2D] Matthew 2:1-20 Most people do a little better here than on Luke from the previous lesson.
- [2E] Hebrews 1:8 How long will the throne of the Son last? Forever and ever
- [2F] Revelation 19:16 Jesus is the King of who? Kings
- [2G] John 3:16 Those who believe on Jesus have what? Eternal life
- [2H] John 8:12 Those who follow Jesus will have what? The Light of Life (See also John 12:46)
- [2I] John 14:6 Who is Jesus? The way, the truth and the life
- [2J] Matthew 13:46 What did he sell to buy the pearl of great value? Everything
- [2K] Romans 12:1 What are we urged to offer God as a sacrifice? Our bodies

[2L] **Gold** – Matthew did not say. It might have been to bring attention to His royalty. He was the heir of the throne of David. He is the King of Kings. I like the way the song puts it “Born a King on Bethlehem’s plain, Gold I bring to crown him again.” We often speak of the wise men as kings when actually they were philosophers and magicians. But the idea that Jesus is the King of kings is expressed in their arrival. The gold is a symbol of Jesus' Kingship.

Of course Jesus had no need of a Gold crown to demonstrate to the world his kingship. Partially because his Kingdom was not of this world. He was not a Monarch like Caesar or Cleopatra who ruled for a short time over a limited territory. Jesus was there at creation and was King of the entire universe. And as the King of Kings he would wear a crown on earth - a crown of thorns.

It might also have been to draw attention to his great worth. He is worth much more than gold. He lights our way, He gives us eternal life and He is the Truth in Human form. Certainly He is my King and I owe him my allegiance and property. I can remember this with the acronym STAR. I owe him my Service, Treasure, Attributes and Resources. The first gift: gold, draws our attention to these truths.

For further thought:

Do a word study of some of the over 400 references to gold in the Bible.

Gold illustrates saints after affliction or tests of faith Job 23:10, Pet1:7	Used to adorn priestly garments Exd 28:4-6; Psa 45:9,13	1 Kings 6:20-35, 10:2-25
Compared with grace Rev 3:18	Gold belongs to God Joe 3:5; Hag 2:8	1 Chronicles 28:14-18, 29:2-7
Compared with good works Cor 3:12	Given as present 1Ki 15:19; Mat 2:11	2 Chronicles 3:4-10, 4:7-22, 9:1-24
Gold overlaid the temple 1Ki 6:21,22,30		Ezra 1:4-11, 7:15-18, 8:25-33
And the tabernacle Exd 36:34,38	A few of the other gold or golden scriptures:	Nehemiah 3:8, 31-32, 7:70-72
Overlaid cherubims in temple 2Ch 3:10	Genesis 2:11-12, 24:22, 35, 53	Job 28:1, 6, 15-19
Overlaid the ark, etc Exd 25:11-13	Exodus Chapters 25, 26, 28, 37 and 39	Psalm 119:72, 119:127
Used for sacred utensils	Numbers Chapter 7, and 31:50-54	Daniel 2:32-45, 3:1-18, 5:2-29
Exd 25:29,38; 2Ch 4:19-22	1 Samuel 6:4-18	1 Peter 1:7, 1:18, 3:3-5
		Rev 21:21 (mentioned 20 times in Revelation)

Christmas Frankincense - Supplications, Tribute, Adoration, Reverence

Lesson 3 – FRANKINCENSE (Matthew 2:1-20)

[Casper]

Frankincense to offer have I,
incense owns a Deity nigh
Prayer and praising, all men raising,
Worship Him, God most high.

O star of wonder, star of night,
star with royal beauty bright.
Westward leading, still proceeding,
Guide us to thy perfect light.

Frankincense is a vegetable resin, bitter and glittering, obtained by incisions in the bark of the *arbor thuris*, "the incense tree," and especially imported through Arabia; it was used for fumigation at sacrifices or for perfume. Frankincense is mentioned 17 times in the Bible usually in connection with worship but sometimes as a perfume.

Read these scriptures and answer the associated questions:

[3A] John 1:1 Who is Jesus? _____

[3B] John 20:26-29 What did Thomas call Jesus? _____

[3C] Matthew 14:33 What did the men in the boat do to Jesus? _____

[3D] Deuteronomy 6:13 Who alone is worthy of our worship? _____

[3E] Hebrews 7:24-25 How long will the priesthood of Jesus last? _____

[3F] Psalm 51:17 What is an acceptable sacrifice to God? _____

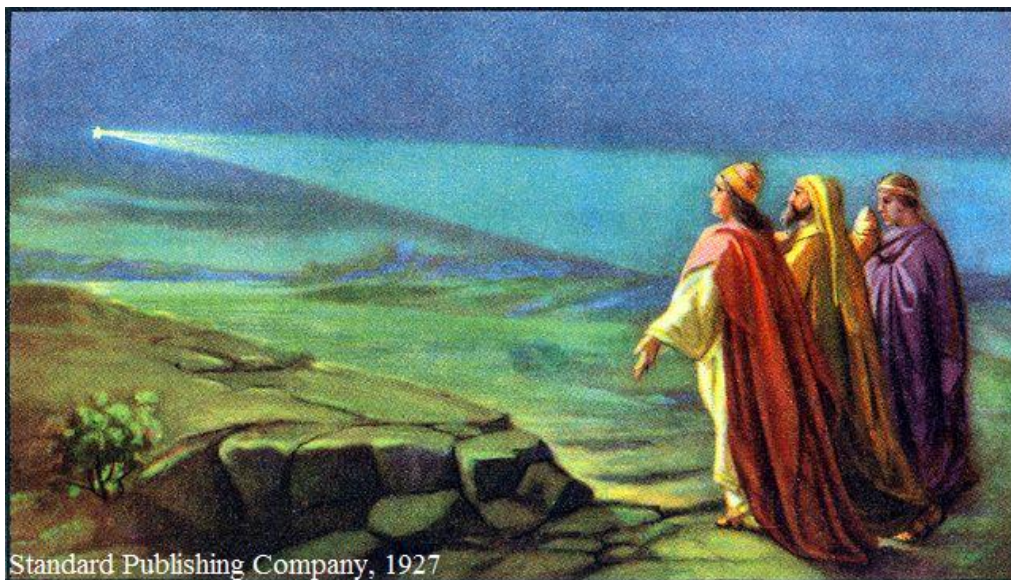
[3G] Exodus 30:34 Frankincense was a key ingredient of what? _____

[3H] Leviticus 2:1-2 What was burned with the grain offering? _____

[3I] Leviticus 24:7 What was sprinkled on each row of the holy show bread? _____

[3J] Matthew 2:11 Why did Matthew mention the gift of frankincense?

Think & Pray _____



----- ANSWERS -----

Lesson 3 – FRANKINCENSE (Matthew 2:1-20)

- [3A] John 1:1 Who is Jesus? God (Word = Jesus in John 1:14-18)
- [3B] John 20:26-29 What did Thomas call Jesus? My Lord and my God. (And Jesus did not correct him)
- [3C] Matthew 14:33 What did the men in the boat do to Jesus? Worshiped Him
- [3D] Deuteronomy 6:13 Who alone is worthy of our worship? The Lord our God
- [3E] Hebrews 7:24-25 How long will the priesthood of Jesus last? Forever
- [3F] Psalm 51:17 What is an acceptable sacrifice to God? A broken and contrite heart
- [3G] Exodus 30:34 Frankincense was a key ingredient of what? The incense used in the temple worship
- [3H] Leviticus 2:1-2 What was burned with the grain offering? Oil and frankincense
- [3I] Leviticus 24:7 What was sprinkled on each row of the holy show bread? Frankincense

[3J] **Frankincense** – The Bible does not explain it. Frankincense was used in worship. It was made from the sap of the frankincense tree. As we saw in some of the Old Testament references, in Judaism it was used in a number of different ways to worship God.

Perhaps this gift demonstrates Jesus' priestly roll. But it also suggests that Jesus will be more than any earthly priest. Like earthly priests he would go before God interceding on behalf of the faithful. He would also offer a sacrifice for the sins of the world.

Some would also suggest that this gift reveals that Jesus himself is worthy of worship. The Gold shows that he is a King but the Frankincense reveals that he is God in the flesh. Not only will this child lead people to worship God. He himself will also be worshipped. We should give him all our prayers and praise. We should give him the Christmas STAR of worship - **S**upplications, **T**ribute, **A**doration, **R**everence

For further thought - Analyze some of these verses:

<p>Frankincense is mentioned 17 times in the Bible.</p> <p>Used in worship Exodus 30:34 Leviticus 2:1-16, 6:15, 24:7 1 Chronicles 9:29 Nehemiah 13:5, 9</p> <p>Excluded from certain kinds of sacrifices Leviticus 5:11 Numbers 5:15</p> <p>Perfume Song of Solomon 3:6, 4:6 and 4:14</p> <p>Gift of the Magi Matthew 2:11</p> <p>Commodity of Babylon Revelation 18:13</p>	<p>Verses of general interest around this topic:</p> <p>Exodus 29:18-25, Numbers 24:17, I Kings 10:1-13, 25; II Kings 5:5, 2 Chronicles 9:13-31, Psalm 72:10-15, Psalm 76:11, Isaiah 60:1-6, Ezekiel 20:41, Matthew 12:42, Matthew 6:27-34, Luke 10:41, Luke 12:11, Luke 12:22, Ephesians 5:2, Philippians 4:4-8, Matthew 26:38, John 16:20-22, Acts 8:23, II Corinthians 2:14, 6:10, 7:9-11, Ephesians 4:31, Colossians 3:19, I Thessalonians 4:13, I Timothy 6:10, Hebrews 12:15, I Peter 5:6-8, James 3:14, Revelation 21:4, Revelation 22:16</p>
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Christmas Myrrh - Sorrows, Troubles, Anxieties, Regrets

Lesson 4 – MYRRH (Matthew 2:1-20)

[Balthazar]

Myrrh is mine, its bitter perfume breathes
a life of gathering gloom.

Sorrowing, sighing, bleeding, dying,
sealed in the stone cold tomb.

O star of wonder, star of night,
star with royal beauty bright.

Westward leading, still proceeding,
Guide us to thy perfect light.,
Worship Him, God most high.

Myrrh is a resin produced by a small, tough, scraggly tree called the din-din tree which grows in semi-desert regions of North Africa and the Red Sea. Myrrh is an Arabic word for “bitter,” and it is considered a wound healer because of its strong antiseptic and anti-inflammatory properties. Calling it “mo yao,” the Chinese used it for centuries using it to treat wounds, bruises and bleeding and to relieve painful swelling. (Smyrna is Greek word for Myrrh.)

Read these scriptures and answer the associated questions:

[4A] Genesis 37:25 Myrrh was one of the products carried by who? _____

[4B] Exodus 30:22-30 What was anointed using the oil that included myrrh? _____

[4C] Mark 15:23 What was mixed with the wine they offered Him? _____

[4D] John 19:39-40 What did Nicodemus do with the myrrh? _____

[4E] Romans 5:8 What were we when Jesus died for us? _____

[4F] 1 Peter 2:24 By what were we healed? _____

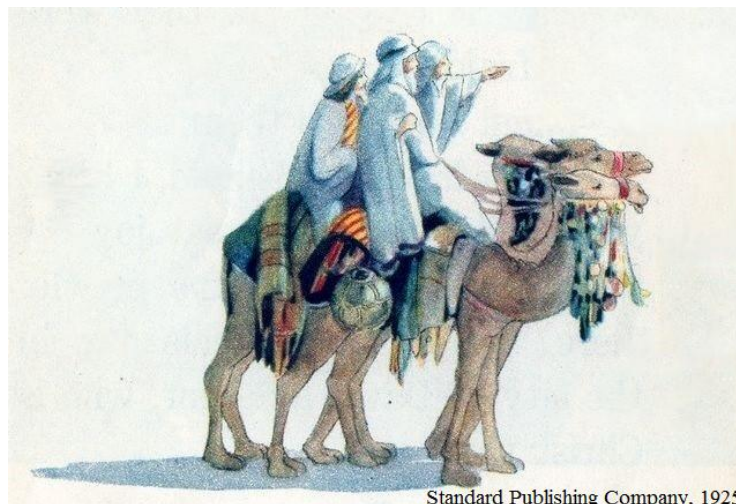
[4G] 1 Peter 5:7 Why can we trust Jesus with our worries? _____

[4H] Psalm 55:22 What will the Lord do if we give Him our burdens? _____

[4I] Matthew 6:30 What can we count on God to do? _____

[4J] Matthew 2:11 Why did Matthew mention the gift of myrrh?

Think & Pray _____



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----- ANSWERS -----

Lesson 4 – MYRRH (Matthew 2:1-20)

- [4A] Genesis 37:25 Myrrh was one of the products carried by who? A caravan of Ishmaelites
- [4B] Exodus 30:22-30 What was anointed using the oil that included myrrh? The tent, the ark, the table and what was on it, the lampstand, the altars, the laver and its stand, Aaron and his sons.
- [4C] Mark 15:23 What was mixed with the wine they offered Him? Myrrh
- [4D] John 19:39-40 What did Nicodemus do with the myrrh? Put it on the body of Jesus
- [4E] Romans 5:8 What were we when Jesus died for us? Sinners
- [4F] 1 Peter 2:24 By what were we healed? His wounds
- [4G] 1 Peter 5:7 Why can we trust Jesus with our worries? He cares about us
- [4H] Psalm 55:22 What will the Lord do if we give Him our burdens? Sustain us
- [4I] Matthew 6:30 What can we count on God to do? Care for us

[4J] **Myrrh** - The Bible does not say why. Myrrh is an aromatic gum resin which oozes from gashes cut in the bark of a small desert tree known as the dindin tree. The gashes remind us of His wounds suffered for us. Myrrh is used in embalming. Some see this as the strangest and most shocking of all the gifts, but it was not an unusual gift for an infant, especially from older relatives. It would be saved for their funeral. It was sort of like grandparents buying life insurance for a grandchild when it was born. It also reminds us of the death He died for us.

Of course like Gold and Frankincense, Myrrh was a valuable commodity. But it was used for anointing the dead and other things as well. But the gift was prophetic just like the others. Jesus was the King of kings as the Gold suggested and he was the great high priest and God incarnate as the Frankincense proclaimed. But Jesus had also come to die.

“Nails, spear shall pierce him through the lamb of God for me for you.” Jesus’ death as the lamb of God slain for the sins of the world is a truth behind the gift of Myrrh. That was God’s goal in sending Jesus: that by sending His Son to live a perfect sinless life He would have the only worthy sacrifice to pay for the sins of the world.

He gave all for us. We should give all for Him. That doesn't mean just the good stuff. It is just as prideful to hold onto your troubles as it is to hold on to your treasure. It is just as wrong to hold onto your worry and woe as to withhold your wealth or your worship. We should give him the Christmas STAR - Sorrows, Troubles, Anxieties, Regrets.

For further thought: Study the other mentions of Myrrh found in the Bible

Myrrh mentioned 16 times in the Bible.	Used as a perfume
Joseph in Egypt - Gen 37:25; 43:11	Est 2:12; Psa 45:8; Pro 7:17; Sgs 3:6; 5:5, 13
Compared with a lover - Sgs 1:13	Brought by the magi as a present to Jesus Mat 2:11
A product of the land of Canaan - Sgs 4:6,14; 5:1	Offered to Jesus on the cross - Mar 15:23
One of the compounds in the sacred anointing oil Exd 30:23	Used for embalming Jesus - John 19:39

Christmas Gifts – Salvation, Time, Aptitude, Rapture

We have Christmas presents from God. He has given us **Salvation** through Jesus Christ our Lord. He has given us **Time** to spend on earth serving Him. He has given us all our **Aptitudes**, gifts and talents. And He has promised to take us home to heaven with Him either in the **Rapture** or at our death. What can we possibly give to Him?

Lesson 5 – Gifts & Giving (2 Corinthians 8:1-9:15)

Glorious now behold Him arise,
King and God and Sacrifice!
Alleluia, alleluia,
heaven to earth replies.

O star of wonder, star of night,
star with royal beauty bright.
Westward leading, still proceeding,
Guide us to thy perfect light.,
Worship Him, God most high.

Read these scriptures and answer the associated questions:

[5A] Acts 20:35 What is better than getting gifts? _____

[5B] Malachi 3:10-11 God offers to let Himself be tested. What is the test? _____

[5C] 2 Corinthians 8:1-6 How much did they give? _____

[5D] 2 Corinthians 8:14-15 Who did not lack? _____

[5E] 2 Corinthians 8:16 Where did Titus get his earnestness (or care, concern or enthusiasm)? _____

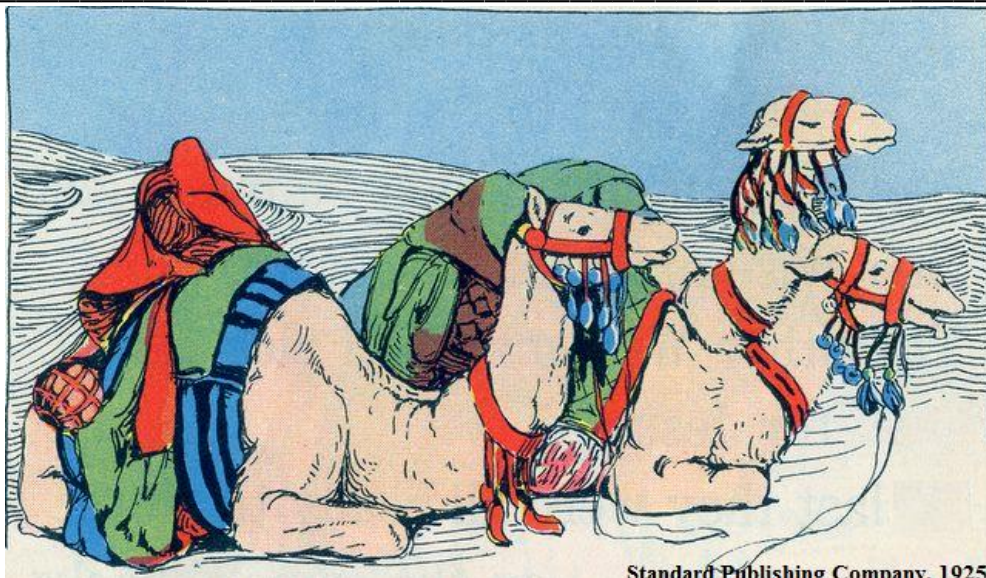
[5F] 2 Corinthians 9:3-5 When should we decide how much to give? _____

[5G] 2 Corinthians 9:6-7 Who does God love? _____

[5H] 2 Corinthians 9:15 Who should we thank for what we receive? _____

[5I] Matthew 2:11 Why does Matthew go to the trouble of identifying the specific gifts that the Magi gave? What was the purpose of giving us this information?

Think & Pray _____



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----- ANSWERS -----

Lesson 5 – Gifts & Giving (Matthew 2:1-20)

[5A] Acts 20:35 What is better than getting gifts? Giving gifts

[5B] Malachi 3:10-11 God offers to let Himself be tested. What is the test?

It is impossible to out give God.

[5C] 2 Corinthians 8:1-6 How much did they give? Beyond their ability v. 3, Themselves v. 5

[5D] 2 Corinthians 8:14-15 Who did not lack? He who gathered little

[5E] 2 Corinthians 8:16 Where did Titus get his earnestness (or care, concern or enthusiasm)? God

[5F] 2 Corinthians 9:3-5 When should we decide how much to give? Beforehand

[5G] 2 Corinthians 9:6-7 Who does God love? A cheerful giver

[5H] 2 Corinthians 9:15 Who should we thank for what we receive? God

[5I] **The Gifts of the Magi** -- One possibility is to demonstrate that this event is a fulfillment of prophecy. Isaiah had said that Gentiles would come bringing Gold and Frankincense. While this is part of what the Holy Spirit is leading Matthew to do, there is more. If that were his only motive in naming the gifts he would not have mentioned Myrrh. He might have written "Gold, Frankincense, and other gifts." You see Myrrh is not mentioned in any prophesies that I know of. So perhaps there is some other significance to these gifts?

Each of the gifts of the wise men reveal something about who Jesus is and what he came to do. The gold shows that Jesus came to rule the hearts of people as the King of kings and that He is of ultimate value. The Frankincense speaks of Jesus' role as our great high priest making offerings for the faithful and that Jesus came as God in the flesh - the object of our worship. And the Myrrh reminds us that Jesus came to die - for the sins of the world. He came to die for your sins and my sins.

It could also be symbolic of the three responses to Jesus just mentioned in the passage. Men who love Gold and the Power it represents, Kings like Herod, that hate Jesus. Men who love religion, like the false priests and scribes, who ignore Jesus, may be represented by the Frankincense. Men who love God might be represented by the Myrrh. We must die to self, to belong to God.

For further thought:

(5j) Should Christians give Christmas Gifts?

(5k) It has been suggested that the three gifts represent the Trinity. Gold is God the Father who shines most obviously of the three. Myrrh is God the Son who died a bitter death on the cross. Frankincense is the Holy Spirit the more ephemeral of the three. What do you think of this theory and why?

My further thoughts:

(5j) We have all seen the perversion of Christmas by values of materialism. Principally the emphasis some people have of receiving. Perhaps it would be best if we Christians remember the words of our Lord, "It is more blessed to give than to receive"(Acts 20:35). Giving gifts is not a participation in the commercialization of Christmas unless our motive for giving is to receive. If however our motive is to give then we are simply following the example of our Heavenly Father who "Gave his only begotten son so that whosoever believes in him shall not perish but have eternal life."(John 3:16)

(5k) I think it is a stretch to make it fit the Trinity but it is an intriguing idea. It is hard to see how it would help our understanding or inform our life decisions to think this, but it is also hard to see any harm in it.