

Scriptural Truths

E-Mail Meditations

The Lord Will Come . . . Perhaps Today . . . Behold, I Come Quickly . . . Rev. 22:7

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Christmas Thoughts

Introduction

If there is one time of year when many reminisce I suspect Christmas would be among the foremost. For some it brings memories of Christmas past with loved ones who are now gone. For others it brings memories of happy times of togetherness which will never be repeated due to age and distance.

- a) As I think back there are two Christmases that really come foremost to my mind. It was Christmas 1960 and we were all at Mum Jennings' home. It was to be the last Christmas with Grandpa Jennings and that evening the snow began to fall. I recall the family driving up the Newtownards Road in Belfast as the snow fell and the whole place was covered in snow with scarcely a car on the road. The silence of the drive I shall possibly never forget.
- b) The other Christmas was the first time I felt the delight of giving. I bought for the family a record player. I had saved my few pennies and when Christmas Eve came (I was about 15), with great excitement I went to the store and brought the record player home. The family were so pleased and I so happy.
- c) It is understood that the gifts at Christmas (and any time) signify thoughtfulness of others, and I pondered, "What could I give that would give the ones I love happiness?" It also necessitated considerable time and searching for the right gift.

The First Christmas gifts

At the first Christmas scarcely no one noticed. There were no church choirs singing beautiful carols, no trees and no festive hangings. It was a sad dark time. Rome ruled the world and Israel was subject to them. A decree was given and the hierarchy of Rome cared nothing about family conditions or the horrendousness of a journey or cost. The decree had been given and it was to be obeyed. For Mary and Joseph it meant a journey of, on today's roads, approximately 160 kilometres or 100 miles. We can be sure that walking or riding on a donkey and being nine months pregnant would make for a very arduous journey. Joseph and Mary were not well off financially, in fact being quite poor, it would have meant little money for a room for a night, of which there would be several. For them it was not a festive season.

The Wise Men From The East

When Matthew wrote the gospel which bears his name, he stressed two matters: there came wise men from the East and the star which is mentioned in Matthew 2:2, 7, 9, 10.

- 1) The wise men from the east and what we do not know about them. Nowhere are we given the slightest hint as to their names, the number of them, or what they were governmentally. We do know they came from the East and beyond that we dare not go. The paintings etc. of the child lying in a manger with the three men in royal apparel is man's

imagination and unbiblical. Dr. Luke informs the readers of the babe in the manger, whereas Matthew informs us that when the wise men came, the family were in the house (Matt. 2:11). Furthermore, the literal translation is, "But Jesus having been born", and judging from the decree of Herod, it is evident considerable time had passed from the birth.

- a) How they associated the star with the birth of a king is unknown. There are various presentations suggested but they are all conjectures. Since the scriptures records nothing about these, the matter must be left silent.
- 2) The wise men from the east and what we do know about them.
- a) They were aware of the governmental position of the Lord for they came to see the one who was born "King of the Jews" (Matt. 2:2).
 - b) They knew He was worthy of gifts, just as the Queen of Sheba brought gifts to Solomon (1 Kgs. 10:13).
 - c) The gifts were practical for a new mother and baby, and for them at that point, the unknown journey to Egypt. God is practical and the gifts were carefully thought of - that which would be best beneficial to the new mother and baby. Everyone who has had a child knows that a great deal of money is to be spent on them and Joseph and Mary were no different. It is quite evident they were poor for they only had the means to offer two young pigeons (Lk. 2:24). The gifts presented to the baby of Bethlehem were those which had a practical value for the family. This is a beautiful truth for the Lord knew that which lay ahead of them, and since the journey from Nazareth would have been costly, the journey to Egypt more so for it was at least double the distance. Then when they would get there, it would take time for Joseph to get a job and get paid. They needed money, hence the gold.
 - i) A little research will indicate that frankincense and myrrh were medications that were used on scratches, bruises and illnesses. They could be put together in a number of ways to produce the medication needed. These three gifts were very practical and would be greatly welcomed by the new parents.

Thoughts On The Gifts

It has often been said that the gold, frankincense and myrrh were symbolic of the life of the Lord and there may be an element of truth in that. However, one must be careful for the passage is not teaching the spiritual significance of the items. Let's assume that there is a deeper purpose than the practical. What would the gifts indicate?

- a) Gold never, as mentioned, indicates deity but it does signify glory, and being mentioned in Matthew it indicates the glory of Christ the King and the glory of His Kingdom.
- b) Frankincense indicates fragrance, however, that fragrance is intensified when it comes in contact with fire. Therefore, in the frankincense we have signified the fragrance of the life of the Lord, especially when in the temptations and afflictions of life.
- c) Myrrh, the Hebrew word indicates bitter, however, because it is used more often in the Song of Solomon, it indicates the bitterness of the experiences the Lord endured out of love for humanity and the Father.

The Other Side Of The Story

Having looked at the gifts brought to the Lord at His birth we then need to consider what gifts He left His own after His resurrection and ascension.

- a) After His resurrection and ascension He left them not with monetary goods or material possessions but things far more valuable. He left them with:
 - i) the memory of a godly example in a sinful world
 - ii) the importance of communion with God in every situation of life
 - iii) the awareness of deep spiritual instruction
 - iv) the promise that He would be there to help them in the seemingly impossible task of world evangelism.

What about us as parents and grandparents? What gifts are we leaving to our children and grandchildren? If the Lord has given us finances is it being left to family members who care nothing for God, is that why He gave us money? The greatest gifts we can leave to our children are memories:

- a) Memories of a godly parentage when they knew that mum and dad had a reverential fear of God.
- b) A godly example and never to use vulgar, curse crude innuendos, especially in the listening of our children.
- c) The memory of the family altar where the day at some point was a time of Bible consideration and prayer.
- d) The memory of Mum and Dad praying audibly for their children's salvation.

Even if a child is left nothing materially but has such memories, the children, like the disciples, will still be blessed after our departure to our Heavenly home.

... Rowan Jennings



www.scripturaltruths.org e-mail: scripturaltruths1@shaw.ca

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