

Reflection for Sunday 10th Jan 2021

Yesterday, Nicky and I took, some of the Christmas presents that had been waiting under the Christmas tree, to my youngest daughter and her family. I had decided that they would be more useful now, than at some later date when we might, just possibly, be able to meet together in person once more.

But today, as I write, is also about gifts. It's the 6th Jan, Epiphany, the day when we both take down our decorations and remember the Magi's visit to Jesus. They also took presents with them, not the fluffy dressing gown, electric screwdriver and science games that we'd taken to my daughter's family, but Gold, Frankincense and Myrrh. These weren't the kind of gifts we might give a baby, but then this was no ordinary baby!

Most of us enjoy giving presents, carefully choosing and wrapping something we think the recipients will like, but if we were asked to give presents to our world right now, what would they be?

Would we, like the wise man, give gold, I wonder, assuming of course that we were in a position to do so? Gold is something we might present to a king, or someone very important, but what wouldn't some of our hard-pressed businesses, many of them very important to our economy, give for a little gold right now!

The pandemic has been very difficult to cope with and I'm sure that all those trying to make a living, from big corporations to the little shop on the corner; from large restaurants to the van man selling hot drinks in the park, would be only too glad to have a little gold in their pockets at the moment. The bible is often mis-quoted as saying that 'money is the route of all evil' (1Tim 6.10). It doesn't of course, it tells us that it's the **love** of money that causes the problem. We all need money in today's world, we just need to use it wisely and well and be as generous with it as we are able.

So, gold would probably be a good gift for the world, but what about frankincense?

Frankincense oil is produced from the resin of the Boswellia Sacra tree, found in the Arabian Peninsula. It's a symbol of holiness which was why it was used in the temple and considered to be a suitable gift for a priest

and Jesus is our high priest. Part our service of worship on a Sunday morning always includes our Prayers of Intercession. Intercession means 'going-between', and these prayers are when **we** appeal to God on another's behalf. Jesus, we know, does the same thing for us, because in 1 Tim 2.5 we read;

'For there is one God and one mediator between God and humankind, the man Christ Jesus'. Hebrews 7:23-27 tells us the same thing, 'but because Jesus lives forever, he has a permanent priesthood. ²⁵Therefore he is able to save completely those who come to God through him, because he always lives to intercede for them'.

But not only does frankincense symbolise of holiness, it also has many healing properties, being anti-inflammatory, anti-bacteriological and good for bronchitis and asthma too. Our bodies, hearts, minds and souls could all do with healing right now. So much is wrong in our world and there is so much that we could do better, I'm sure, that hypothetically at least, a good soothing dose of frankincense might really help!

And then there's Myrrh. Myrrh is sap or resin, this time from trees in Somalia, Eritrea and parts of Saudi Arabia. It's a great anti-oxidant and is used in medicine for coughs, colds, lung problems and various other conditions. Illness is never pleasant, so Myrrh was used as a symbol of suffering which was why it was brought to Jesus.

One of our well-loved hymns refers to this suffering when it says, *'Hands that threw stars into space, to cruel nails surrendered'*, while the chorus continues, *'This is our God, the Servant King'*. But the word 'our' is not exclusive, but inclusive, because Jesus came, and died, for everyone, including those who don't love or acknowledge him, or simply don't know him yet.

Jesus may be our priest, but he is also our Servant King, the one who came to earth purely for our sakes. Our world needs him, far more than it seems to know or recognise, because there's nothing that we face or suffer that Jesus hasn't faced or suffered before us. He's been on earth, gone through all kinds of suffering and therefore really does know what it feels like to be human. Right now, I suspect that we and the vast majority of people in our world are feeling scared and fed up, scared for ourselves,

our friends, our families and fed up with the restrictions we continue to have to live by.

But Jesus knows all about it! He was scared too! He was, and is, divine, but on earth he was just as human as we are, with all the human feelings that we have. Anything that we are feeling now, he will have felt too and this means that he really is the best go-to friend we can have; the one we can share absolutely anything with; the one who really *will* understand. How many worried, lonely, fed-up people in our world could do with a friend like that?

So maybe Myrrh would be a very good present for the world too.

But the hymn we've mentioned also says, *'he calls us now to follow him, to give our lives as a daily offering, of worship to the Servant King'*.

So, perhaps there's one more gift we could give our needy world, a really precious gift, perhaps even more precious than the gold, frankincense and myrrh we've already mentioned and that's the gift of listening, truly listening. Jesus is always ready to listen to us, so we, in turn, should surely be ready to listen to others.

Listening isn't always easy, but so many people need someone to talk to and this is one gift we all could give. They may well have problems we can do nothing about, but simply by paying them some attention for a while, will help them cope better with whatever it is they're going through.

We may not have any gold, frankincense or myrrh to give to our needy world, but maybe we could try to make attentive listening our New Year's gift. It won't cost money, just time and effort, but it would be a very good way, not only of helping those around us, but also of giving daily worship to the God who loves us, has suffered for us, is always ready to hear our prayers and to help us cope whatever circumstances we find ourselves in.

Take care; stay safe. Love & Blessings

Gill



Guiding Star

Lord, the sight of the guiding star,
brought hope, courage and joy
to those who had journeyed to find you.

When our journey seems long,
when hope seems far away,
when our courage is failing
fill us with faith and trust;
shine your light on our fears,
lift our hearts with your joy.

Help us to recognise you
in our brothers and sisters
throughout the world;
show us how we can work together
so that we may all come to share in the life
promised to us by Jesus,
the Saviour of us all. Amen

