

# Three Gifts 2023

Pastor James Foley – Shared on Sunday, December 17, 2023

---

## ANNUAL BUSINESS MEETING 2023

The 2023 ABM will take place on Sunday, January 21, 2024, following service (January 28 in case of poor weather). Nomination forms necessary to nominate individuals for the elected office of Deacon on our Board shall again be distributed to the membership after service today. Please place your completed form in the designated box located on the front foyer table prior to your departure. Lastly, Ministry Leader Reports are due on Sunday, December 31, 2023.

### SETTING THE STAGE PT. 1

Thank you for joining us. Whether you are here in person or joining via the livestream you are most welcome! Please have a Bible at the ready and be prepared to take notes as you desire. We have much to cover in a rather short space of time. This morning I want to touch upon some material I have not formally touched upon in years.

**NOTE 1** – Scottish minister Robert Murray M’Cheyne articulated the following remarks in the mid-19<sup>th</sup> Century:

**QUOTE** – “Learn much of the Lord Jesus. For every look at yourself, take ten looks at Christ. He is altogether lovely. Such infinite majesty, yet such meekness and grace: and for all sinners. . . . Let your soul be filled with a heart-ravishing sense of the sweetness and the excellency of Christ and all that is in Him. Let the Holy Spirit fill every chamber of your heart and there will be no room for folly or the world or Satan or the flesh.”

**FYI** – I stand amazed that one who died at twenty-nine possessed such spiritual insight!

**NOTE 2** – As the Christmas holiday draws near, I feel the impact of his words. Though I revel in speaking about the Christmas Story and its cast of characters (e.g., Mary, Joseph, angels from heaven and shepherds of the field, the villainous Herod and the apathetic religious elite, etc.), I want to hone our corporate attention upon the person and work of Jesus Christ. After all, He is the center-point of Christmas and the reason why we are all here.

**NOTE 3** – In full disclosure, the account we will note—the visit of the Magi—is tangentially related to Christmas. Students of Scripture must note that the Magi did not behold the Christ-Child at His Birth, but some years later. Yet the story of said visit is so commonly connected with the upcoming holiday—and so prophetically revelatory concerning Christ—I cannot help but think about these figures, their journey, and their three gifts in this season!

**KEY**—Let us turn to Matthew 2 in order to explore the visit of the Magi (i.e., occurring app. two-years post-Nativity):

## SETTING THE STAGE PT. 2

### Matthew 2:1–12 (NIV)

1 After Jesus was born in Bethlehem in Judea, during the time of King Herod, Magi [i.e., wise men] from the east came to Jerusalem 2 and asked, “Where is the one who has been born king of the Jews? We saw his star when it rose and have come to worship him.” 3 When King Herod heard this he was disturbed, and all Jerusalem with him. 4 When he had called together all the people’s chief priests and teachers of the law, he asked them where the Messiah [Greek – “Christ”] was to be born. 5 “In Bethlehem in Judea,” they replied, “for this is what the prophet has written:

6 “But you, Bethlehem, in the land of Judah,  
are by no means least among the rulers of Judah;  
for out of you will come a ruler  
who will shepherd my people Israel.” [Micah 5:2, 4]

7 Then Herod called the Magi secretly and found out from them the exact time the star had appeared [cf. v. 16]. 8 He sent them to Bethlehem and said, “Go and search carefully for the child. As soon as you find him, report to me, so that I too may go and worship him.”

9 After they had heard the king, they went on their way, and the star they had seen when it rose went ahead of them until it stopped over the place where the child was. 10 When they saw the star, they were overjoyed. 11 On coming to the house, they saw the child with his mother Mary, and they bowed down and worshiped him. Then they opened their treasures and presented him with gifts of gold, frankincense and myrrh. 12 And having been warned in a dream not to go back to Herod, they returned to their country by another route.

**NOTE 1** – There are many aspects of this account worthy of our attention. However, let us highlight their gift(s):

### Matthew 2:11 (Emphasis Mine)

11 On coming to the house, they [i.e., the Magi] saw the child with his mother Mary, and they bowed down and worshiped him. Then they opened their treasures and presented him with gifts of **gold, frankincense and myrrh**.

#### Q. What do we see herein?

A. A three-fold gift for the Messiah!

**NOTE 2** – As an aside, it is the threefold nature of the gift that has led some to speculate there were three magi. Tradition even offers three names for these wise men: **a)** Gaspar (or Caspar); **b)** Melchior; and **c)** Balthasar. However, the biblical text neither notes said names nor indicates the number of magi (i.e., may have been more).

**NOTE 3** – What we do know is that these costly gifts—gifts fit for a king—funded the escape of Joseph, Mary and Jesus to Egypt and provided for their tenure in said nation. In this way, the gold, frankincense and myrrh served a PRACTICAL purpose in helping them to evade the slaughter of the innocents. Read on in ch. 2 for more!

**KEY** – However, I posit that these gifts also served a heightened role, providing PROPHETIC insight into the Christ.

#### Q. What do I mean by this?

A. The gifts speak to His nature and work.

LET US DELVE IN...

## #1 – GOLD

Let us begin with the gift of GOLD...

**NOTE 1** – For those who may be unaware, gold is a precious metal of great value. In fact, gold has possessed exceeding value across all cultures throughout space and time. I could spend much time addressing the worth varying civilizations have placed on gold, yet I will note the following. Whether it be for religious, commercial or technological reasons, gold has always been a precious resource. I cannot watch TV without an add selling gold!

**Q. Why is gold so valued?**

**A.** Because it is exceedingly rare.

**Q. How rare is gold (i.e., accounting for its value)?**

**A.** It is estimated that a mere 244,000 metric tons of gold have been mined or extracted from the earth to date.

**Q. How are we to make sense of such a number (i.e., 244,000 metric tons)?**

**A.** Perhaps this image will help. An Olympic swimming pool would contain app. 48,000 metric tons of gold. Therefore, all of the gold that has ever been mined from the earth would fill just 3.4 Olympic swimming pools!

**NOTE 2** – Such rarity and value has always led humanity to associate gold with the following: royalty or kingship. After all, only the monarch of a kingdom could afford to possess something so luxurious, scarce and invaluable. Thus, many believe that the gold offered to Jesus speaks prophetically to His nature and work as King of Kings!

**NOTE 3** – Frankly, this point is not much of a stretch against the backdrop of the words of the Magi. Please note:

**Matthew 2:1–2 (Emphasis Mine)**

1 After Jesus was born in Bethlehem in Judea, during the time of King Herod, Magi from the east came to Jerusalem 2 and asked, “Where is the one who has been born **king** of the Jews? We saw his star when it rose and have come to worship him.”

**NOTE 4** – Even if you disagree with this line of thought, there is little doubt that Scripture portrays Jesus as King!

### 1) The Old Testament Prophets Proclaimed the Kingship of Christ

**Micah 5:2, 4 (cf. Matt. 2:6) (Emphasis Mine)**

2 “But you, Bethlehem Ephrathah,  
 though you are small among the clans of Judah,  
 out of you will come for me  
 one who will be **ruler** over Israel,  
 whose origins are from of old,  
 from ancient times.”

4 He will stand and shepherd his flock  
 in the strength of the Lord,  
 in the majesty of the name of the Lord his God.  
 And they will live securely, for then his greatness  
 will reach to the ends of the earth.

## 2) The Birth Announcements of Christ Speak to His Kingship

### Luke 1:26–33 (Emphasis Mine)

26 In the sixth month of Elizabeth’s pregnancy, God sent the angel Gabriel to Nazareth, a town in Galilee, 27 to a virgin pledged to be married to a man named Joseph, a descendant of David. The virgin’s name was Mary. 28 The angel went to her and said, “Greetings, you who are highly favored! The Lord is with you.” 29 Mary was greatly troubled at his words and wondered what kind of greeting this might be. 30 But the angel said to her, “Do not be afraid, Mary; you have found favor with God. 31 You will conceive and give birth to a son, and you are to call him Jesus. 32 He will be great and will be called the Son of the Most High. The Lord God will give him the **throne** of his father David, 33 and he will **reign** over Jacob’s descendants forever; his **kingdom** will never end.”

## 3) The Gospel Records Attest to His Authority and Dominion

The inspired writings of Matthew, Mark, Luke and John establish the supremacy of Jesus in the following ways: **a)** authority over the natural world and earthly elements; **b)** authority over demonic forces and wicked powers; **c)** authority over matters of physical disease, ailment and affliction; and **d)** supremacy over the power of death.

## 4) Jesus Claimed to Have Ultimate Authority and Dominion

### Matthew 28:18–20 (Post-Resurrection)

18 Then Jesus came to them [i.e., apostolic band] and said, “All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me. 19 Therefore go and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, 20 and teaching them to obey everything I have commanded you. And surely I am with you always, to the very end of the age.”

## 5) The New Testament Witnesses Heralded Jesus as King

### Philippians 2:9–11 (Emphasis Mine)

9 Therefore God exalted him to the highest place  
and gave him the name that is above every name,  
10 that at the name of Jesus every knee should **bow**,  
in heaven and on earth and under the earth,  
11 and every tongue acknowledge that Jesus Christ is **Lord**,  
to the glory of God the Father.

## 6) The Bible Culminates w/ the Advent of the King of Kings

### Revelation 19:11–16 (Emphasis Mine)

11 I saw heaven standing open and there before me was a white horse, whose rider is called Faithful and True. With justice he judges and makes war. 12 His eyes are like blazing fire, and on his head are many **crowns**. He has a name written on him that no one knows but he himself. 13 He is dressed in a robe dipped in blood, and his name is the Word of God. 14 The **armies** of heaven were **following him**, riding on white horses and dressed in fine linen, white and clean. 15 Out of his mouth comes a sharp sword with which to strike down the nations. “He will **rule** them with an **iron scepter**.” He treads the winepress of the fury of the wrath of God Almighty. 16 On his robe and on his thigh he has this name written: **king of kings and lord of lords**.

**Q. Do you recognize Him as King? Do you know His authority today? Are you prepared for His imminent rule?**

## #2 – FRANKINCENSE

Let us continue with the gift of FRANKINCENSE...

**Q. What is frankincense?**

**A.** Such is a resin or gum obtained from a tree by making incisions in the bark (i.e., allowing the gum to flow out).

**Q. What was frankincense used for in antiquity?**

**A.** Frankincense is highly fragrant when burned, and was therefore commonly used in matters of ritual worship (i.e., both pagan worship and the worship of the God of Israel). The ancients believed their prayers would rise with the aromatic smoke, reaching the deities they sought to honor. Before we mock such an idea, you and I do well to consider that the Jews—per God’s command—had an altar of incense placed before the Holy of Holies!

**Q. What do you think the Jews were to burn on said altar?**

**Exodus 30:34b–38 (Emphasis Mine)**

34 . . . the Lord said to Moses, “Take fragrant spices—gum resin, onycha and galbanum—and **pure frankincense**, all in equal amounts, 35 and make a fragrant blend of incense, the work of a perfumer. It is to be salted and pure and sacred. 36 Grind some of it to powder and place it in front of the ark of the covenant law in the tent of meeting, where I will meet with you. It shall be most holy to you. 37 Do not make any incense with this formula for yourselves; consider it holy to the Lord. 38 Whoever makes incense like it to enjoy its fragrance must be cut off from their people.”

**NOTE 1** – Frankincense, therefore, became connected to the priesthood of Israel and their mediatorial work. The incense for the altar was to be made by the priests and reserved for the use of the Lord in His “house” alone. They maintained the Altar of Incense and such served a critical role in the offerings they were to ong. perform!

**KEY** – Thus, many posit that the gift of frankincense speaks “prophetically” to Jesus’ work as our G. High Priest.

**NOTE 2** – Once again, you may deem such a prophetic connection a stretch, yet Jesus is identified in such a way:

**1) The Life and Ministry of Christ**

Consider that the life of Christ was one of continual prayer and worship. That is, the praise of God and prayer was ongoingly on the lips of Jesus, rising before the Lord (i.e., similarly functioning as the sweet-smelling offerings of the Old Testament era). Consider how He would often retreat to a serene place to offer such prayer, ministering before the Father whom He loved AND on the behalf of the people He was called to serve/represent.

**Q. Would you like an example of such from the Gospel record?**

**A.** Turn with me to the seventeenth chapter of the Gospel of John.

**John 17:6–26**

6 “I have revealed you to those whom you gave me out of the world. They were yours; you gave them to me and they have obeyed your word. 7 Now they know that everything you have given me comes from you. 8 For I gave them the words you gave me and they accepted them. They knew with certainty that I came from you, and they believed that you sent me. 9 I pray for them. I am not praying for the world, but for those you have given me, for they are yours. 10 All I have is yours, and all you have is mine. And glory has come to me through them. 11 I will remain in the world no longer, but they are still in the world, and I am coming to you. Holy Father, protect them by the power of your name—the name you gave me—so that they may be one as we are one. 12 While I was with them, I protected them and kept them safe by that name you gave me. None has been lost except the one doomed to destruction so that Scripture would be fulfilled.

13 I am coming to you now, but I say these things while I am still in the world, so that they may have the full measure of my joy within them. 14 I have given them your word and the world has hated them, for they are not of the world any more than I am of the world. 15 My prayer is not that you take them out of the world but that you protect them from the evil one. 16 They are not of the world, even as I am not of it. 17 Sanctify them by the truth; your word is truth. 18 As you sent me into the world, I have sent them into the world. 19 For them I sanctify myself, that they too may be truly sanctified.

20 My prayer is not for them alone. I pray also for those who will believe in me through their message, 21 that all of them may be one, Father, just as you are in me and I am in you. May they also be in us so that the world may believe that you have sent me. 22 I have given them the glory that you gave me, that they may be one as we are one: 23 I in them and you in me. May they be brought to complete unity to let the world know that you sent me and have loved them even as you have loved me.

24 Father, I want those you have given me to be with me where I am, and to see my glory, the glory you have given me because you loved me before the creation of the world. 25 “Righteous Father, though the world does not know you, I know you, and they know that you have sent me. 26 I have made you known to them, and will continue to make you known in order that the love you have for me may be in them and that I myself may be in them.”

**2) The New Testament Speaks Further to His Priestly Role**

**Q1. Do you realize that Jesus still functions as our High Priest?**

**Q2. What do you think Christ has been doing since His Ascension?**

**A.** Jesus intercedes on the behalf of those who are His upon the earth!

**Romans 8:31b–35, 37–38 (Emphasis Mine)**

31 . . . If God is for us, who can be against us? 32 He who did not spare his own Son, but gave him up for us all—how will he not also, along with him, graciously give us all things? 33 Who will bring any charge against those whom God has chosen? It is God who justifies. 34 Who then is the one who condemns? No one. **Christ Jesus** who died—more than that, who was raised to life—**is at the right hand of God** and is also **interceding** for us. 35 Who shall separate us from the love of Christ? Shall trouble or hardship or persecution or famine or nakedness or danger or sword? . . . 37 No, in all these things we are more than conquerors through him who loved us. 38 For I am convinced that neither death nor life, neither angels nor demons, neither the present nor the future, nor any powers, 39 neither height nor depth, nor anything else in all creation, will be able to separate us from the love of God that is in Christ Jesus our Lord.

**Hebrews 7:24b–25 (Emphasis Mine)**

24 . . . because Jesus lives forever, he has a permanent priesthood. 25 Therefore he is able to save completely those who come to God through him, because he always lives to **intercede** for them.

**Hebrews 4:14–16 (Emphasis Mine)**

14 Therefore, since we have a **great high priest** who has gone through the heavens, Jesus the Son of God, let us hold firmly to the faith we profess. 15 For we do not have a high priest who is unable to sympathize with our weaknesses, but we have one who has been tempted in every way, just as we are—yet was without sin. 16 Let us then approach the throne of grace with confidence, so that we may receive mercy and find grace to help us in our time of need.

**1 Timothy 2:5–6**

5 For there is one God and one mediator between God and men, the man Christ Jesus, 6 who gave himself as a ransom for all men

**Q1. To what degree do you recognize the priestly nature of Jesus' work?**

**Q2. To what degree do you revel in His advocacy before God on your behalf?**

**Q3. Do you perceive how effective and/or competent Christ in re: such a labor?**

**#3 – MYRRH**

Let us conclude with the gift of MYRRH...

**Q. What exactly is myrrh?**

**A.** Myrrh is a resin produced by a small, tough, scraggly tree that grows in the semi-desert regions of North Africa and the Red Sea. It is collected in much the same way as frankincense. The word “Myrrh” is an Arabic term that means “bitter.”

**NOTE 1** – Myrrh had numerous functions in the ancient world, giving it value: **a)** it was an article of commerce (cf. Gen. 37:25); **b)** it was an agreeable perfume (cf. Esther 2:12; Psa. 45:8; Prov. 7:17) that could retain its fragrance for centuries when kept in alabaster; **c)** it also possessed a medicinal purpose, as it was often mingled with wine to produce a mixture called gall. Gall had a stupefying effect for those in pain (i.e., hence why such was offered to Christ amidst the Crucifixion cf. Matt. 27:34).

**NOTE 2** – Ultimately, myrrh was chiefly used in the embalming of the dead (i.e., as it delayed putrefaction). Because of such elements, myrrh possessed a longstanding association with “suffering, affliction and death” Therefore, many see a “prophetic” aspect in this gift, in that it speaks to Christ’s suffering, affliction and death!

**NOTE 3** – There is no denying that “bitter” suffering, affliction and death were aspects of the life of Christ Jesus:

**Q. Have you ever considered Christ as a man of sorrows?**

**NOTE 4** – It is a tragic reality that Jesus’ life was marked by bitter suffering: **a)** the sorrows of daily life and living; **b)** the sorrows of ongoing rejection by those He loved (cf. Luke 13:34–35; 19:41–44 Lamentation of Jerusalem); **c)** the sorrows of betrayal (e.g., Peter and Judas); **d)** the sorrows of loss and its impact (i.e., Lazarus and Joseph); **e)** the sorrow of facing His own mortality (Gethsemane); and **f)** the sorrows of facing His own death (the Cross).

**NOTE 5** – Arguably the greatest summation of the suffering Messiah is found in the fifty-third chapter of Isaiah:

**Isaiah 53 (Emphasis Mine)**

1 Who has believed our message  
and to whom has the arm of the Lord been  
revealed?

2 He grew up before him like a tender shoot,  
and like a root out of dry ground.  
He had no beauty or majesty to attract us to him,  
nothing in his appearance that we should desire  
him.

3 He was despised and rejected by mankind,  
a **man of suffering** [i.e., **sorrows**], and **familiar  
with pain**.  
Like one from whom people hide their faces  
he was despised, and we held him in low esteem.

4 Surely he took up our pain  
and bore our suffering,  
yet we considered him punished by God,  
stricken by him, and afflicted.

5 But he was pierced for our transgressions,  
he was crushed for our iniquities;  
the punishment that brought us peace was on him,  
and by his wounds we are healed.

6 We all, like sheep, have gone astray,  
each of us has turned to our own way;  
and the Lord has laid on him  
the iniquity of us all.

7 He was oppressed and afflicted,  
yet he did not open his mouth;  
he was led like a lamb to the slaughter,  
and as a sheep before its shearers is silent,  
so he did not open his mouth.

8 By oppression and judgment he was taken away.  
Yet who of his generation protested?  
For he was cut off from the land of the living;  
for the transgression of my people he was  
punished.

9 He was assigned a grave with the wicked,  
and with the rich in his death,  
though he had done no violence,  
nor was any deceit in his mouth.

10 Yet it was the Lord's will to crush him and cause  
him to suffer, and though the Lord makes his life  
an offering for sin,  
he will see his offspring and prolong his days,  
and the will of the Lord will prosper in his hand.

11 After he has suffered,  
he will see the light of life and be satisfied;  
by his knowledge my righteous servant will justify  
many, and he will bear their iniquities.

12 Therefore I will give him a portion among the  
great,  
and he will divide the spoils with the strong,  
because he poured out his life unto death,  
and was numbered with the transgressors.  
For he bore the sin of many,  
and made intercession for the transgressors.

**NOTE 6** – Many would argue that the gift of myrrh was a prophetic indicator of bitter suffering and deep sorrow. This Christmas, as we consider the Christ-child and His entry into the world, we do well to consider His departure and its purpose: Christ came to die that we might live. God came to man so that we might come home to God!

**Q1. Do you understand the cost of His sacrifice?**

**Q2. Do you understand the benefits you derive from it?**

**Q3. Have you chosen to accept His sac. work on your behalf?**

**SUMMATIONS**

**KEY** – This Christmas let us consider both the nature and work of Christ as our King, Priest and Sacrificial Servant.



## CONCLUSION

**NOTE 1** – Feel free to give either in person or online at [www.NewLifeBarre.org](http://www.NewLifeBarre.org).

**NOTE 2** – Check out our website for any of our beyond Sunday ministries (MM, WM & CYC).

**NOTE 3** – Upcoming “Christmas” Services: **a)** Thursday, December 21<sup>st</sup>; and **b)** Sunday, December 24<sup>th</sup>.

**NOTE 4** – I would direct all members in good standing to see our Secretary for Nomination Forms re: the ABM.

### **2 Corinthians 13:14**

14 May the grace of the Lord Jesus Christ, and the love of God, and the fellowship of the Holy Spirit be with you all.