

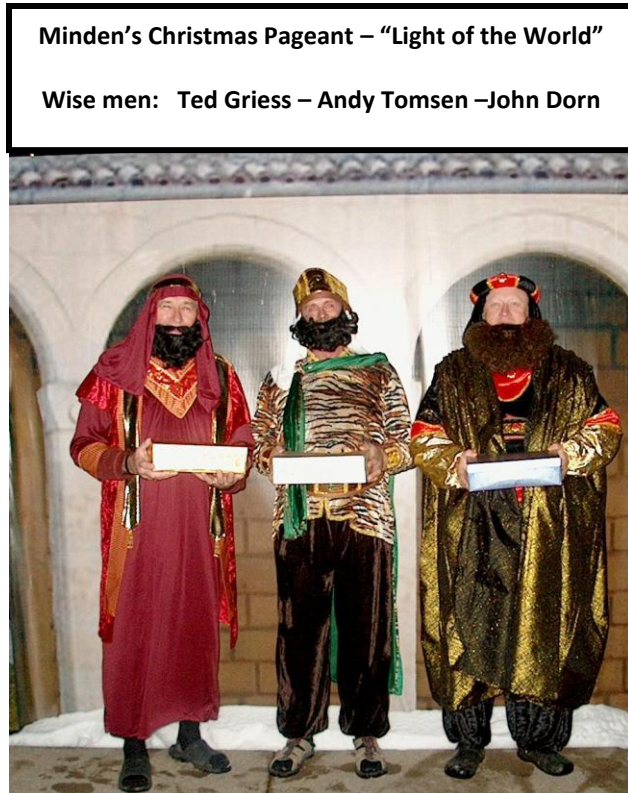
It is not the size of the gift that matters but rather the size of the heart that gives it.

Have you ever pondered the significance and value of the gifts the wise men gave to the Christ child? As the biblical story goes, the magi presented Mary, Joseph and baby Jesus gifts of gold, frankincense and myrrh.

It seems obvious that most everyone knows the value and importance of gold. Gold holds significant worth. In nearly all cultures and through the centuries, gold has always symbolized great wealth and power. We do not know if the gift of gold was in the form of jewelry, coins or the like, but the fact remains, gold is definitely a gift for royalty. Presenting their gift of gold was certainly fitting; after all, this child was called the King of the Jews.

However, what about frankincense and myrrh? What was their value or significance? Perhaps not as greatly valued today, these two substances were once as highly treasured as gold. Knowing that each is derived from a plant has prompted me to investigate more thoroughly.

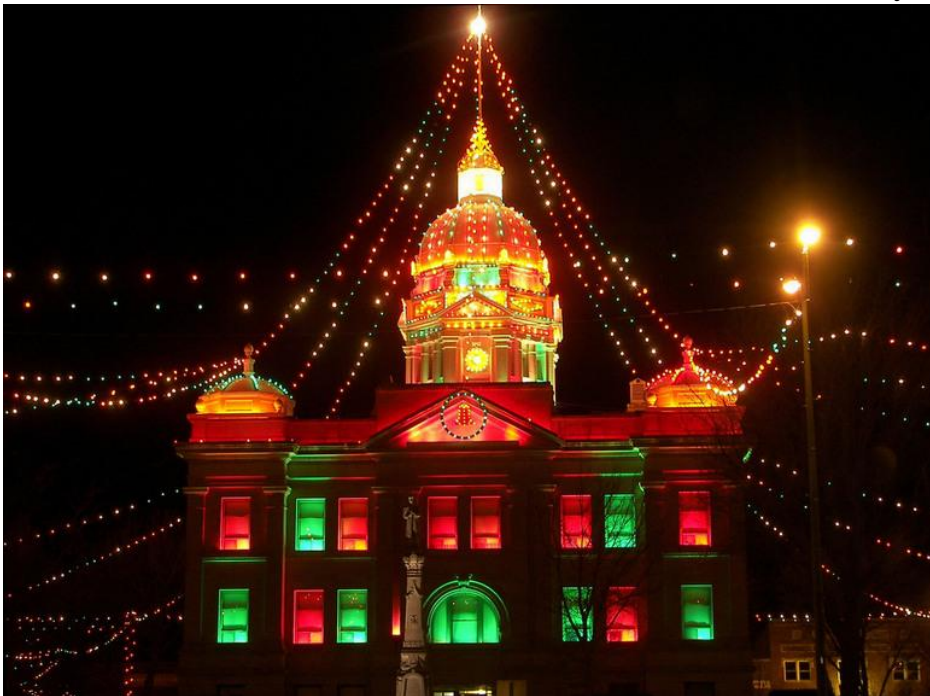
Frankincense is actually a resin resulting from the milky sap of the *Boswellia* tree indigenous to areas of the Middle East and Africa. At the time of Christ's birth, frankincense was extremely rare and deemed as valuable as gems or precious metals. In the temple, the Jews prayed before the altar, burning holy frankincense. When burned, frankincense gives off a sweet-smelling white smoke. According to Jewish faith, the rising smoke created from burning frankincense represented the



prayers of the people rising to God in heaven. Perhaps, the magi presented this holy gift to the Christ child knowing that he, too, was heavenly.

Myrrh, like frankincense, is a gummy resin extracted from the Commiphora plant, a shrub-like tree native to Ethiopia and Somalia. Myrrh was a rare and expensive spice used in the making of perfume, incense and anointing oil. Even before the birth of Christ, the Egyptians made myrrh famous. Most notably, they used myrrh in the embalming ointment of mummies. The Romans valued myrrh similarly to that of gold. It was often used as security for monetary debts. The *Bible* records using myrrh in the book of John, Chapter 19, Verse 39 as a burial spice. There, Joseph of Arimathea and Nicodemus brought myrrh to anoint the crucified body of Christ. Perhaps the wise men presented myrrh to the Christ child symbolically, knowing that he was born to die for the world.

Surely, we can credit the magi for inventing the art of gift giving at Christmas. However, I am convinced that it was not the size or value of these gifts of gold, frankincense and myrrh that really mattered; rather, it was the gift of faith, coming from their hearts that counted. After all, the *Bible* does say that after they



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presented Mary, Joseph and the baby with gold, frankincense and myrrh, they bowed down and worshipped the Christ child. Certainly, they were proclaiming to the world that indeed the savior, the King, had arrived.

Merry Christmas.