

THE CRAZY GIFTS

Some folks are hard to get presents for. Why ?

Because they've got everything.
Because we don't know what they like.
Because we don't know what they've got already.

There's one kind of person that it is easy to get something for – a baby.
Why?

Babies don't even know what's going on.
Babies don't have all their favourite toys worked out.
They are not looking for a Star Wars Stormtrooper Action Figure.
They don't want a Pokemon Z Crystal for their Nintendo.
They don't have a favourite minion character.
Babies don't have many opinions.
A baby is not going to say – *"I'd rather have had the red top than the yellow one."*
If you buy a baby some clothes it doesn't matter if they don't fit – as long as it isn't too small they'll grow into it eventually!

And to be honest, instead of giving a gift to the baby you can just give something practical to the mum and dad who are doing the looking after – a blanket, or some nappies.
So babies are pretty easy to get presents for.

So how could the wise men get it so wrong?
What stupid gifts!

Matthew seems to try to get it over quickly without comment by saying *"The wise men brought their gifts gold frankincense and myrrh..."*

But we want to say *"Stop a minute! What did you just say? What were the gifts?!!"*

It's not just funny for children. Children don't know what these things are, and they often say *'Frankenstein'* instead of *'frankincense'*.

But it's funny for the adults to hear too. Because these gifts seem crazy to us as well. There doesn't seem to be much sense to them.

(Photographs from recent Children's Nativity Presentation)
Archie the Jiggered Donkey and now James the Guzzling Joseph.

Here's the thing. ...

James reckons this is a bottle so it must be a drink.
But you couldn't drink anything that the wise men brought.

That isn't wine – it's either frankincense which is a perfume or (even worse) it's myrrh – which is an ointment you put on dead bodies.

So what's with these gifts?

GOLD

The first gift, gold was not as rare as it is today. There was plenty of gold to be found around Palestine.

But the thing about gold is not just that it is hard to find. It's that gold is beautiful.

What did they actually give? Well it wouldn't be a gold watch!

Maybe it was like a little stone or a nugget or a necklace or a ring.

One thing is certain – whatever it was it wasn't worth a fortune – we know that Jesus and his parents were never wealthy people.

Gold was associated with royalty – with Kings and Queens and Emperors, and that's what makes it so fitting for Jesus.

Despite his humble birth and humble life and lifestyle, Jesus is the King of Kings.

Jesus has come to turn things upside down.

He has come to change the world's ideas about kingship.

FRANKINCENSE

The second gift, frankincense, was like a perfume. And it was often used in the Temple during worship.

People were used to that smell when they came together to thank God and make their prayers to God.

And this is a fitting gift for Jesus, because when Jesus grew up he would give the world a completely new take on what God was like.

Jesus has come to turn things upside down.

He has come to change the world's ideas around about God and worship.

MYRRH

The third gift, Myrrh, was the strangest of them all.

Myrrh has another pleasant smell. In those days it was usually in the form of an ointment - a kind of gummy paste that was put onto dead bodies before they were buried.

It's hard to think of a crazier gift for a new-born child.

Yet it too had a reason, and is fitting, because Jesus had come into the world to change what people thought about life and death, and after Easter, people's views had moved from despair to hope.

People understood that the power of God – of love, of goodness, of life – is stronger than the power of hate and evil and death.

Jesus has come to turn things upside down.

He has come to change the world's ideas about life and death.

The story about the gifts is one that tells us who Jesus is and why he matters. Like the rest of the birth stories of Jesus, the gifts are saying something for us to think on about who Jesus is.

But they also stood for the devotion of the Wise Men. It was a reflection of the importance of Jesus to them.

The Wise Guys were the very first people to inspire the idea of giving gifts at Christmas time.

Jesus the baby didn't really need these things.

It was the wise men who needed to show that they were on Jesus side.

We don't need to give Jesus gold frankincense and myrrh, but what we need to give Jesus is something that shows that we are lining up with him, that we are going to be part of his movement in the world, that we are trusting Jesus to guide us through life and trusting in God to care for us now and always.

So at the beginning of a New Year lets decide
that we are going to be travelling with Jesus,
that we will play our part in his Church,
that we will be active in the community of his people,
that we will look to him for our values, look to follow in his steps
and walk into the uncertain weeks and months that lie ahead
with faith in the God who has come down to us
to bring us peace, and hope and love.

Matthew 2:1-12

January 1 2017 (New Year's Day!)