



# SMALL GROUP OUTLINES



# ‘WE THREE KINGS’

These Small Group Outlines are produced by the Youth and Children’s Ministry Unit in collaboration with Kay Moorby (soulwithaview). They are available every month from our website.

For more information and other resources, visit [salvationist.org.uk/resources/youth-ministry-resources](https://salvationist.org.uk/resources/youth-ministry-resources)

### SESSION ONE:

#### GOLD

In today's session we consider the gifts brought to Jesus by the wise men. Often associated with royalty, the gift of gold signified the kingship of Jesus. Due to its scarcity, gold was a highly valued gift. What characteristics reflect the qualities of gold in our Christian faith? As we approach the celebration of the birth of Jesus, what gift of gold can we bring to Jesus this Christmas?

### SESSION TWO:

#### FRANKINCENSE

Today we'll consider the second gift brought by the wise men: frankincense. This beautiful fragrance played a central role as believers gathered to worship. To acquire this incense, the bark of the tree is cut, with the frankincense resin forming as the tree heals. We'll explore why a gift such as frankincense was so appropriate for the newborn King.

### SESSION THREE:

#### MYRRH

The final gift brought by the wise men was myrrh. This bitter aromatic resin was used in medicines and in the burial of the deceased. Why would the wise men want to bring a newborn baby a gift like this? In today's session we will explore the role that myrrh plays in the life of Jesus and how it points to the future suffering he would endure for us all.

### SESSION FOUR:

#### CHRISTMAS MOVIE NIGHT

Session Four provides resources for planning and enjoying a Christmas movie night with your young people. Please read through the content of this session before you start Session One. Those not intending to hold a Christmas movie night can remove this session. Fun planning activities are provided which will need to be added to Sessions 1-3.

*Any text in italics represents notes for the leader. It gives more context around the Scripture/activity. You may choose to share verbatim, summarise or not share at all.*

## GOLD

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## WELCOME

*If you intend to hold a Christmas movie night for Session Four, then spend time discussing which film the group would like to watch. See the content of Session Four for more information.*

*If you are able to, then decorate the room in which you are meeting with as much Christmas 'gold' as you can. You could also encourage the group to wear something golden to the session.*

## CHRISTMAS QUIZ

*Test the group's knowledge of the festive season with the following Christmas quiz (answers in bold). They can either work individually or in teams. Give each person/team a sheet of paper and pen to record their answers. Don't forget to have a prize for the winner.*

- How many wise men came to see Jesus?
  - Seven
  - Two
  - Three
  - d) the Bible doesn't say**
- What does 'wise men' most likely refer to?
  - Lawyers
  - b) Star-gazers**
  - Priests
  - Doctors
- The wise men met Jesus in a:
  - a) house**
  - manger
  - castle
  - stable
- What is frankincense?
  - a form of gold
  - b) an incense from a tree**
  - a jewel
  - none of the above
- What is myrrh?
  - a musical instrument
  - b) a spice used for burial**
  - a valuable wine
  - none of the above
- How long was the trip for the wise men after they saw Herod?
  - more than two years
  - less than a day
  - c) a little less than two years**
  - none of the above
- The magi asked Herod where the Christ was to be born. Herod summoned his priests and scribes, who knew the location of the birth because of the prophecy of which man?
  - Jonah
  - Joel
  - Amos
  - d) Micah**

8. In which books of the Bible do we find the story of Jesus' birth?
  - a) **Matthew**
  - b) Mark
  - c) **Luke**
  - d) John
9. When was Jesus born?
  - a) 25 December
  - b) Sometime in September
  - c) **The actual date is unknown**
  - d) 6 January
10. Which prophet foretold the birth of Jesus with these words? – 'Therefore the Lord himself will give you a sign: the virgin will conceive and give birth to a son, and will call him Immanuel.'
  - a) Jeremiah
  - b) **Isaiah (7:14)**
  - c) Ezekiel
  - d) Zechariah

Total up the scores to discover the Christmas quiz winner. You may want to provide a prize for the person with the most points.

## ADDITIONAL ACTIVITY

Think back through all the answers to the Christmas quiz.

 What new fact did you discover about the Christmas story?

## WORD

We read about the visit of the wise men to Jesus in the Gospel of Matthew. The wise men, sometimes referred to as the Three Kings or the Magi, came from the east, following a star to locate the newborn king of the Jews.

It doesn't actually say in the Bible how many wise men came from the east, nor does it mention their names. Matthew does not call them kings, or state their method of travel. Three is only a guess because they brought with them three gifts. It is speculated that they were learned men and perhaps even astrologers (though this term meant something very different from what we think of today!). They would have probably been very rich and held in high esteem in their own society and also by people who weren't from their country or religion. They probably would also have had many servants with them. It is thought that it may have taken some time for the Magi to find Jesus after their disastrous visit to Herod. Jesus was by then, it seems, in a normal house rather than the stable scene so often depicted (Matthew 2:11). The Magi travelled hundreds of miles to bring their gifts to Jesus, items that were very precious and undoubtedly expensive, and were an indication of the highest honour and respect which they wanted to give to Jesus.

Either read Matthew 2:1-12, or watch the clip based on selected Scriptures.

 **Watch: Lumo-Gospel of Matthew Chapter 1:18-25 2:1-12 (4:02)**  
[https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=LspA-t\\_DZbw](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=LspA-t_DZbw)

Over the next three sessions we are going to focus on the story of the wise men and reflect on the meaning of the gifts that they brought to Jesus.

Give each member of the group the 'Gift of Gold' handout to follow throughout this part of the session. Work through the handout following the question prompts below.

### THE GIFT OF GOLD

Gold is the first gift mentioned as given by the wise men. It's a gift fit for royalty. It says to the Christ child, 'You will be a King.'

Gold was an offering frequently presented to kings by their subjects, or by those wanting to pay respect or gain favour. The gift of gold was considered worthy of a king. The buildings and treasures of kings and pharaohs from the ancient past have left reminders that gold was the prize of rulers and kings.


Both secular and biblical kings valued gold. Men such as King Solomon and King Nebuchadnezzar treasured gold, as these two passages illustrate:


**'All King Solomon's goblets were gold, and all the household articles in the Palace of the Forest of Lebanon were pure gold. Nothing was made of silver, because silver was considered of little value in Solomon's day.'**

— (2 CHRONICLES 9:20)

**'King Nebuchadnezzar made an image of gold, sixty cubits high and six cubits wide, and set it up on the plain of Dura in the province of Babylon.'**

— (DANIEL 3:1)


 Why do you think the wise men brought the baby Jesus the gift of gold?

 Why is gold a suitable gift for a king?

The metal we know as gold has always held extremely high value – as long ago as 2,500 BC gold was especially prized and used as a medium of exchange.

But why has gold always represented great value?

Firstly, gold is scarce, which adds immeasurably to its value. Gold is dug in small quantities from the earth in a painstaking process. Secondly, gold is very beautiful – think of the shimmering gold-covered dome of a mosque or temple, or a glittering gold engagement ring. Thirdly, gold is enduring and can withstand all natural acids and even fire. And finally, gold is adaptable. It is soft enough to be easily moulded, but can also easily be combined with other metals to provide an even greater strength.

 How did gold play an important part in the building of the Jewish Temple? Read 1 Kings 6:21,22 to find out.

In both the Old Testament Tabernacle and the Temple, gold was used plentifully, so we see that gold is also associated with worship. And we are told in picture language that in the heavenly city even the streets will be of gold.

Gold in the Bible has always stood for divinity – that which is like God. It should not surprise us then to learn that gold is mentioned from beginning to end in the Bible. Just as God has always been, so gold appears at the beginning of Creation in the Garden of Eden: 'The name of the first (river) is the Pishon; it winds through the entire land of Havilah, where there is gold. (The gold of that land is good...) (Genesis 2:11-12). And it is what the New Jerusalem is made of in the book of Revelation: 'The wall was made of jasper, and the city of pure gold, as pure as glass... The twelve gates were twelve pearls, each gate made of a single pearl. The great street of the city was of gold, as pure as transparent glass (Revelation 21:18,21).

When the wise men presented gold, they were honouring Jesus with the very best that they possessed, and they were also recognising that Jesus was King. The wise men had seen the star and they recognised the importance of the star in the sky as a sign of a spectacular birth. So the wise men brought gold in some form. Whether it was jewellery, coins, or just pieces, we are not told. Any amount of gold, if ever so small, would still be a testimony from these men that they knew that Jesus was not just the son of David with the right to the throne, but the King of all kings of the Kingdom of God. This was the significance of the first gift.

Inspired by content from the following webpages which are now no longer available.

[www.neverthirsty.org/pp/corner/read1/r00574.html](http://www.neverthirsty.org/pp/corner/read1/r00574.html)

[www.whispersofthespirit.com/gold\\_frankincense\\_and\\_myrrh.html](http://www.whispersofthespirit.com/gold_frankincense_and_myrrh.html)

We are going to spend some time reflecting on the 'gift of gold' we can bring to Jesus this Christmas. In the article, we read about four qualities gold possesses. As you think about each of these qualities, discuss what they might look like in the everyday life of a follower of Jesus.

*Spend time exploring the following qualities of gold. Notes are added below to help prompt the discussion.*

**Scarce** – Gold is difficult to come by and requires patience in its discovery. In a world filled with darkness, how can we be a rare glimmer of hope for those around us? When something is scarce it is often highly valued and noticed by others. How can we stand out as someone different who follows Jesus?

**Beautiful** – The word 'beautiful' is often associated with something external. But what behaviours can we display to show our inner beauty this Christmas?

**Enduring** – Gold is a resilient metal and in its purest form is virtually indestructible. Fire will not destroy it and it never rusts or corrodes. How would these qualities be represented in the life of a Christian?

**Adaptable** – Despite its resilience to damage, gold is adaptable. It can be melted, purified and remoulded into something new. What does this quality look like in the everyday life of Christians?

- \* Which of these qualities would you like God to develop in your life? Explain your answer.
- \* How could you display these qualities in the coming week?

Next week you will have the opportunity to share how you have developed these qualities and how God has worked in your life.

## ADDITIONAL ACTIVITY

Each member of the group has identified a quality that they would like God to develop in them. Encourage the young people to work together to find a Scripture passage that links to each quality that can be used in prayer throughout the following week.

### Example

Quality: kindness

Scripture: 'Watch the way you talk. Let nothing foul or dirty come out of your mouth. Say only what helps, each word a gift.' (Ephesians 4:29 MSG)

## WITNESS

### SECRET PRAYER PARTNER

At Christmas people often take part in a Secret Santa activity, where they pick a name and buy a small gift for that person anonymously. This year we are going to do something similar, but the gift will be a promise to pray. We will reveal your prayer partners at the Christmas movie night.

Give each member of the group a small piece of paper to write their own name on. Place all the pieces of paper in a tub or bag and mix them up. Ask each member of the group to select a name (not their own!) and keep it to themselves. Over the period of Advent, they will need to promise to pray for this person every day. Go around the group, asking each person for a prayer request for the week. Remind them that they each have a prayer request to bring to God and that their 'gift' to their prayer partner is to remember to pray every day.

## ADDITIONAL ACTIVITY

 In what way does this quote about prayer link to what we have discovered about gold?

“Prayer should not be regarded as a duty which must be performed, but rather as a privilege to be enjoyed, a rare delight that is always revealing some new beauty.”

— EM BOUNDS

### WORSHIP

God signifies Jesus was a King – more than that, he was God come to earth. When the wise men presented gold, they were honouring Jesus with the very best that they possessed, and they were also recognising that Jesus was King. The gift of gold was given to Jesus to symbolise that he was God in flesh.

*Read the following verse from the Christmas carol 'We Three Kings' and discuss what it means.*

Born a King on Bethlehem plain,  
Gold I bring to crown him again.  
King for ever, ceasing never  
Over us all to reign.

— JOHN HENRY HOPKINS JR

*Give each person a gold bauble. With a permanent marker ask each person to write his/her name on the bauble and then the following words from 'We Three Kings':*


*'Gold I bring to crown him again.'*

*Listen to the following song as the young people complete the activity.*

 **Watch: We Three Kings (Christian Lyrics Video) (4:40)**  
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=E0BJonwPCds>

*Encourage the group to take their bauble home and either hang it up in their room or on their Christmas tree.*

### ADDITIONAL ACTIVITY

 What does bringing a gift of gold to Jesus look like for you this Christmas?

# THE GIFT OF GOLD

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Both secular and biblical kings valued gold. Men such as King Solomon and King Nebuchadnezzar treasured gold, as these two passages illustrate:

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and even fire. And finally, gold is adaptable. It is soft enough to be easily moulded, but can also easily be combined with other metals to provide an even greater strength.

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## FRANKINCENSE

Today we'll consider the second gift brought by the wise men: frankincense. This beautiful fragrance played a central role as believers gathered to worship. To acquire this incense, the bark of the tree is cut, with the frankincense resin forming as the tree heals. We'll explore why a gift such as frankincense was so appropriate for the newborn King.

## WELCOME

*If you intend to hold a Christmas movie night for Session Four, then spend time discussing what snacks you would like to eat during the film. See the content of Session Four for more information.*

*The aim of this game is for one team member to get their team to recognise and then sing a Christmas carol/song.*

*Divide the group into teams and provide pencils and paper. Each team sends one person up to the leader to get the name of a Christmas carol. Then the person returns to the group and, in the manner of Pictionary, ie without speaking, tries to get the group to guess the name of the carol by drawing only. As soon as the group knows the song, they must sing it together until you give the thumbs-up sign (10–20 seconds). Once they get the thumbs up, the team sends a new person for another song. Play continues until one group completes all their songs.*

### TEAM ONE

1. Jingle Bells
2. Deck the Halls
3. Here comes Santa Claus
4. Rudolph the Red-nosed Reindeer
5. Silent Night
6. All I want for Christmas is You
7. Rockin' Around the Christmas Tree
8. Santa Baby

### TEAM TWO

1. Joy to the World
2. Away in a Manger
3. We wish you a Merry Christmas
4. We Three Kings
5. Hark! The Herald Angels Sing
6. Santa Claus is Coming to Town
7. Frosty the Snowman
8. It's the most wonderful time of the year

 What is your favourite Christmas song? Why do you love it so much?

## ADDITIONAL ACTIVITY

In last week's session you were asked to try and display your 'gold' characteristics to everyone you met. Share examples of times you shared your 'gold' characteristics during the week.

## WORD

Before we discover more about the gifts brought by the wise men, let's listen to their story from *The Message* paraphrase:

<sup>1-2</sup> After Jesus was born in Bethlehem village, Judah territory – this was during Herod's kingship – a band of scholars arrived in Jerusalem from the East. They asked around, 'Where can we find and pay homage to the newborn King of the Jews? We observed a star in the eastern sky that signalled his birth. We're on pilgrimage to worship him.'

<sup>3-4</sup> When word of their inquiry got to Herod, he was terrified – and not Herod alone, but most of Jerusalem as well. Herod lost no time. He gathered all the high priests and religion scholars in the city together and asked, 'Where is the Messiah supposed to be born?'

<sup>5-6</sup> They told him, 'Bethlehem, Judah territory. The prophet Micah wrote it plainly:

'It's you, Bethlehem, in Judah's land,  
no longer bringing up the rear.'

From you will come the leader  
who will shepherd-rule my people, my Israel.”

<sup>7-8</sup> Herod then arranged a secret meeting with the scholars from the East. Pretending to be as devout as they were, he got them to tell him exactly when the birth-announcement star appeared. Then he told them the prophecy about Bethlehem, and said, “Go find this child. Leave no stone unturned. As soon as you find him, send word and I’ll join you at once in your worship.”

<sup>9-10</sup> Instructed by the king, they set off. Then the star appeared again, the same star they had seen in the eastern skies. It led them on until it hovered over the place of the child. They could hardly contain themselves: They were in the right place! They had arrived at the right time!

<sup>11</sup> They entered the house and saw the child in the arms of Mary, his mother. Overcome, they kneeled and worshipped him. Then they opened their luggage and presented gifts: gold, frankincense, myrrh.

<sup>12</sup> In a dream, they were warned not to report back to Herod. So they worked out another route, left the territory without being seen, and returned to their own country.

— (MATTHEW 2:1-12 MSG)

*For this session, you will need to have purchased some frankincense resin which is available at a reasonable price online.*

*Prepare a few plastic tubs with different smells in them, eg bananas, oranges, lavender, soap, fresh bread, coffee, burnt matches etc. Try and collect a variety of nice and nasty smells. Make sure that frankincense is in one of the containers. Take it in turn for a group member to be blindfolded and try to guess the smell.*

*Which smell was the least familiar to the group? Show the frankincense resin to the group and see if they can tell what it is.*

*Give each member of the group the ‘Gift of Frankincense’ handout to follow throughout this part of the session. Work through the handout following the question prompts below.*

## THE GIFT OF FRANKINCENSE





The second gift given to Jesus by the wise men was frankincense.

Frankincense is a fragrant gum distilled from a tree that is found in Persia, India and Arabia, as well as the East Indies, and was very costly at the time of Jesus’ birth. It is a white resin obtained by slitting the bark of the tree and allowing the sap to flow out. This resin is also known as olibanum. When the bark is cut, the sap is left to harden on the tree for about three months. When it is ready, it is scraped off into containers. It is gathered at the end of the summer and sold in the form of ‘tears’, or clumps of hardened resin. Frankincense was once greatly valued throughout the Middle East, from Rome to India. It was very expensive and a gift having a wonderful fragrance.

 **Watch: Frankincense: Harvesting – Young Living Essential Oils (1:22)**

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=1ed5hyCsnJM>

(Bear in mind these videos are advertisements!)

-  How is the frankincense extracted from the tree?
-  How long does the harvester wait before returning for a second cut?
-  Up to how many times a year do the harvesters return to cut the tree?
-  Do you think you would have the patience to be a frankincense harvester? If not, why not?

Frankincense is a word of Hebrew origin. It means ‘white’, referring to the white-coloured juice which flows out of the wound in the tree. It speaks of holiness and righteousness. It is first mentioned in Exodus 30:34–36:

**‘Mix equal amounts of the costly spices stacte, onycha, galbanum, and pure frankincense,**

then add salt to make the mixture pure and holy. Pound some of it into powder and sprinkle it in front of the sacred chest, where I meet with you. Be sure to treat this incense as something very holy.'


— (CEV)

There are over 17 references to frankincense in the Bible. Frankincense is highly fragrant when burned, and was used as holy incense as an essential part of the worship in the Temple to the Holy God. It was placed upon the golden altar of incense by the High Priest to be burned as a pleasant offering to God.

**'Aaron must burn fragrant incense on the altar every morning when he tends the lamps. He must burn incense again when he lights the lamps at twilight so incense will burn regularly before the Lord for the generations to come.'**

— (EXODUS 30:7,8)





Ancient people burned frankincense, believing it helped carry their prayers to Heaven. Its use as incense illustrates Jesus' role as our High Priest.

 **Watch: Frankincense: Trees – Young Living Essential Oils (1:36)**

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ZGiCu3HHCXs>

Frankincense was, and still is, used for a variety of purposes: incense, medical treatment and perfume (Song of Solomon 3:6; 4:14). And the charred frankincense is still used today in kohl, a black eyeliner. Some churches all over Europe still use incense during certain ceremonies.

Frankincense speaks of the worship of God. Remember, this sweet-smelling resin comes as the result of the tree's woundedness and pain. When we can worship God in the midst of our sorrow, our brokenness, then it is a sweet-smelling offering. Our worship is to be pleasing to God.

-  Why do you think the wise men brought the baby Jesus the gift of frankincense?
-  What does frankincense smell like and how does it make you feel when you smell it?
-  If the frankincense resin comes as a result of the tree's woundedness and pain, what does this suggest for Christian worship?
-  What do we mean when we talk about Jesus as the high priest?

The gift of frankincense given to Jesus symbolised his holiness, his purity, his willingness to freely and wholly give himself up as a burnt offering. Just as frankincense is gathered by cutting the bark of a tree, the Lord was broken upon a tree – the cross – that we might share in this gift.

Based on content from the following websites that are now no longer available.

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## ADDITIONAL ACTIVITY

*If the young people would like to discover more about Jesus as the High or Royal Priest, then watch and discuss the following clip.*

 **Watch: Jesus the Royal Priest – Bible Project (5:43)**

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=LBr-blQxlm4>

## WITNESS

To obtain the frankincense resin, the bark of the tree is cut, and the sweet-smelling fragrance released as the tree heals.

-  In what way is this similar to our lived experience?

Read through a selection of the following quotes as a group and discuss what they teach us about challenging times in our lives.

“ ‘Each day holds a surprise. But only if we expect it can we see, hear, or feel it when it comes to us. Let’s not be afraid to receive each day’s surprise, whether it comes to us as sorrow or joy.’

— HENRI NOUWEN

“ ‘Often, we endure trials seeking God’s deliverance from them. Suffering is painful for us to endure or to see those we love endure. While our instinct is to flee trials, remember that even in the midst of suffering, God’s will is being done.’

— PAUL CHAPPELL

“ ‘When one door of happiness closes, another opens; but often we look so long at the closed door that we do not see the one which has been opened for us.’

— HELEN KELLER

“ ‘It is impossible to accept Christianity for the sake of finding comfort; but the Christian tries to lay himself open to the will of God, to do what God wants him to do.’

— CS LEWIS

“ ‘When God gets us alone through suffering, heartbreak, temptation, disappointment, sickness, or by thwarted friendship – when he gets us absolutely alone, and we are totally speechless, unable to ask even one question, then he begins to teach us.’

— OSWALD CHAMBERS

“ ‘Let’s face it: we learn from the mistakes we make and the suffering they bring. The universe is a soul-making machine, and part of that process is learning, maturing, and growing through difficult and challenging and painful experiences. The point of our lives in this world isn’t comfort, but training and preparation for eternity. Scripture tells us that even Jesus “learned obedience through suffering” – and if that was true for him, why wouldn’t it be even more true for us?’

— PETER KREEFT

💬 Which quote(s) resonated with you the most? Explain why.

### ADDITIONAL ACTIVITY

Think of a challenging situation you have faced in the past.

💬 How has your faith grown and developed as a result of this experience?

💬 Has God used this situation to help you share your faith or support others? If so, how?

### WORSHIP

Ancient people burned frankincense, believing it to carry their prayers to Heaven. Frankincense speaks of worship, holiness, and Jesus’ role as our High Priest.

Read the following verse from ‘We Three Kings’, as it is written in traditional language and discuss what it means.

Frankincense to offer have I,  
Incense owns a Deity nigh.  
Prayer and praising, all men raising,  
Worship him, God most high.

— JOHN HENRY HOPKINS JR

*Use a tealight oil burner and add a few drops of frankincense essential oil so that the group can experience the smell.*

*Spend some time in prayer together. The group may want to spend time praying for their secret prayer partner.*

*Use the following clip to sing 'We Three Kings' together.*

 **Watch: Rend Collective – 'We Three Kings (We're Not Lost)' (3:32)**

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=QFvGaXWDqw4>

### ADDITIONAL ACTIVITY

*Share this prayer together to bring the session to a close.*

Lord and giver of all good things, the Magi travelled for miles to bring the Christ child the first Christmas presents. So may we, too, remember with thankful hearts the love that comes with each present we open. We also thank you for the love you have for each of us, and we thank you for the many gifts that you give us, especially the gift of life itself. Amen.

— AUTHOR UNKNOWN

# THE GIFT OF FRANKINCENSE

The second gift given to Jesus by the wise men was frankincense.

Frankincense is a fragrant gum distilled from a tree that is found in Persia, India and Arabia, as well as the East Indies, and was very costly at the time of Jesus' birth. It is a white resin or gum, and is obtained by slitting the bark of the tree and allowing the sap to flow out. This resin is also known as olibanum. When the bark is cut, the sap is left to harden on the tree for about three months. When it is ready, it is scraped off into containers. It is gathered at the end of the summer and sold in the form of 'tears', or clumps of hardened resin. Frankincense was once greatly valued throughout the Middle East, from Rome to India. It was very expensive and a gift having a wonderful fragrance.

Frankincense is a word of Hebrew origin. It means 'white', referring to the white coloured juice which flows out of the wound in the tree. It speaks of holiness and righteousness. It is first mentioned in Exodus 30:34–36:

'Mix equal amounts of the costly spices stacte, onycha, galbanum, and pure frankincense, then add salt to make the mixture pure and holy. Pound some of it into powder and sprinkle it in front of the sacred chest, where I meet with you. Be sure to treat this incense as something very holy.' (CEV)

There are over 17 references to frankincense in the Bible. Frankincense is highly fragrant when burned, and was used as holy incense as an essential part of the worship in the Temple to the Holy God. It was placed upon the golden altar of incense by the High Priest to be burned as a pleasant offering to God.

'Aaron must burn fragrant incense on the altar every morning when he tends the lamps. He must burn incense again when he lights the lamps at twilight so incense will burn regularly before the Lord for the generations to come.' (Exodus 30:7,8)

Ancient people burned frankincense, believing it to carry their prayers to Heaven. Its use as incense illustrates Jesus' role as our High Priest.

Frankincense was, and still is, used for a variety of purposes: incense, medical treatment, and perfume (Song of Solomon 3:6; 4:14). And the charred frankincense is still used today in kohl, a black eyeliner Middle Easterners wear under their eyes. Many churches all over Europe still use incense during certain ceremonies.

Frankincense speaks of the worship of God. Remember, this sweet-smelling resin comes as the result of the tree's woundedness and pain. When we can worship God in the midst of our sorrow, our brokenness, then it is a sweet-smelling offering. Our worship is to be pleasing to God.

The gift of frankincense given to Jesus symbolised his holiness, his purity, his willingness to freely and wholly give himself up as a burnt offering. Just as frankincense is gathered by cutting the bark of a tree, the Lord was broken upon a tree – the cross – that we might share in this gift.

Inspired by content from the following webpages which are now no longer available.  
[www.neverthirsty.org/pp/corner/read1/r00574.html](http://www.neverthirsty.org/pp/corner/read1/r00574.html)  
[www.whispersofthespirit.com/gold\\_frankincense\\_and\\_myrrh.html](http://www.whispersofthespirit.com/gold_frankincense_and_myrrh.html)

### MYRRH

The final gift brought by the wise men was myrrh. This bitter aromatic resin was used in medicines and in the burial of the deceased. Why would the wise men want to bring a newborn baby a gift like this? In today's session, we will explore the role that myrrh plays in the life of Jesus and how it points to the future suffering he would endure for us all.

### WELCOME

*If you intend to hold a Christmas movie night for Session Four, then spend time finalising the arrangements for the evening. See the content of Session Four for more information.*

*Play the Christmas Points Quiz, attached below. This is a great game whereby your group members accumulate points for Christmas activities. Each member of the group will need a piece of paper and a pen to keep track of their scores.*

*Read the quiz aloud and ask the group to jot down the points they are getting as you go along. Have a prize ready for the person with the most/least points. Note the minus points in the quiz.*

*Adapted from Jane Logan, 2003 [www.loganstrategy.ca](http://www.loganstrategy.ca)*


### POINTS

If you have a real Christmas Tree.....	5
If you helped decorate it.....	10
If you are wearing something red or something Christmassy.....	5
If you have Christmas underwear.....	5
If you are a secret Santa this year.....	5
If you have met Santa this year.....	5
...And had your picture taken with him.....	5
...And felt jolly at the time.....	5
If you have Christmas decorations outside your home.....	10
If you've started listening to Christmas music at home or in the car (at the shops doesn't count!).....	5
If you have ever been in a Christmas Nativity play.....	5
...And were actually one of the holy family, not just an angel or a shepherd.....	5
...Or if you were a wise man.....	5
...Or if you were a donkey, camel or sheep.....	10
If you have ever worn a Father Christmas costume.....	5
If you have finished your Christmas shopping.....	10
If you have already opened a Christmas gift.....	-5
If you bought something for yourself while Christmas shopping.....	-10
If your birthday is in December.....	10
If you have ever roasted a turkey.....	5
If you watched the King's speech on Christmas Day last year.....	5

If you are in a choir that sings Christmas songs. ....	5
If they sing any songs in a language other than English.....	5
If you will sing one of them for us now. ....	10
If you wrap your own gifts.....	5
If you have ever eaten fruitcake.....	5
If you have ever eaten a roasted chestnut.....	5
If you have ever eaten a Christmas pudding.....	5
If you have ever eaten a Christmas goose. ....	5
If you have kissed under the mistletoe. ....	5
If you wish it was January! .....	-5

### ADDITIONAL ACTIVITY

Think about the activities you haven't done so far this Christmas.

 Which ones will you try out this week?

### WORD

Before we discover more about the gifts brought by the wise men, let's listen to their story from the Good News translation.

<sup>1</sup> Jesus was born in the town of Bethlehem in Judea, during the time when Herod was king. Soon afterward, some men who studied the stars came from the east to Jerusalem <sup>2</sup> and asked, 'Where is the baby born to be the king of the Jews? We saw his star when it came up in the east, and we have come to worship him.'

<sup>3</sup> When King Herod heard about this, he was very upset, and so was everyone else in Jerusalem. <sup>4</sup> He called together all the chief priests and the teachers of the Law and asked them, 'Where will the Messiah be born?'

<sup>5</sup> 'In the town of Bethlehem in Judea,' they answered. 'For this is what the prophet wrote:

<sup>6</sup> "Bethlehem in the land of Judah,  
you are by no means the least of the leading cities of Judah;  
for from you will come a leader  
who will guide my people Israel."

<sup>7</sup> So Herod called the visitors from the east to a secret meeting and found out from them the exact time the star had appeared. <sup>8</sup> Then he sent them to Bethlehem with these instructions: 'Go and make a careful search for the child; and when you find him, let me know, so that I too may go and worship him.'


<sup>9-10</sup> And so they left, and on their way they saw the same star they had seen in the east. When they saw it, how happy they were, what joy was theirs! It went ahead of them until it stopped over the place where the child was. <sup>11</sup> They went into the house, and when they saw the child with his mother Mary, they knelt down and worshipped him. They brought out their gifts of gold, frankincense, and myrrh, and presented them to him.

<sup>12</sup> Then they returned to their country by another road, since God had warned them in a dream not to go back to Herod.

— (MATTHEW 2:1-12, GNT)



Prepare some pieces of unsweetened bitter chocolate in a bowl. Have each person take a piece and see what the reaction is when they eat the bitter chocolate when they were expecting 'normal' chocolate. (As a variation you could have just one piece of bitter chocolate in the bowl amongst normal chocolate ... then watch the reaction of the one person who gets the unsweetened chocolate!)

 Why did you have to endure tasting something so bitter? Our final gift of the wise men is myrrh and it is known for its extremely bitter taste.

Give each member of the group the 'Gift of Myrrh' handout to follow throughout this part of the session. Work through the handout following the question prompts below.

## THE GIFT OF MYRRH

The last gift brought by the wise men was myrrh. This is perhaps the most mysterious of the gifts, less expensive than frankincense, but still highly valued. Myrrh is first mentioned in the Bible in Genesis 37:25, where it was being carried by camels on a caravan.

Myrrh is an aromatic resin produced by a small, tough, scraggy tree that grows in semi-desert regions of North Africa and the Red Sea. Myrrh is obtained from a tree in the same manner as frankincense. When it oozes from the wounded shrub, myrrh is a pale yellow colour at first, but as it hardens it changes to dark red or even black in colour. When the myrrh hardens it is usually made into powder, which was used in perfumes and as incense. The Chinese used it for centuries to treat wounds, bruises and bleeding and to relieve painful swelling. As late as the 19th century it was given as a treatment for worms, coughs, colds, sore throats, asthma, indigestion, bad breath, gum disease. Today myrrh is used in mouthwashes, toothpaste and make-up. Too much myrrh can make you violently sick.

However, if frankincense represents sweetness, myrrh represents bitterness, at least to the taste. In fact, the name myrrh is an Arabic word for bitter, given to it on account of its great bitterness.

 **Watch: Myrrh's History – Meaning of Myrrh (2:38)**  
[https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=KEtOT1Ny\\_X4&t=12s](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=KEtOT1Ny_X4&t=12s)

 Share three facts that you discovered about myrrh from the clip.

As you read through the following section, encourage the group to look up the different Bible references. Discuss how they add to our understanding of the significance of the gift of myrrh brought to Jesus as a baby.

Myrrh was used for a variety of purposes in Egypt and in Judea. It was at an early period an article of commerce (Genesis 37:25), and was an ingredient of the holy ointment (Exodus 30:23). It was also used as an agreeable perfume (Esther 2:12; Psalm 45:8; Proverbs 7:17). For many of the ancients, myrrh was considered to be a favourite perfume, said to keep its fragrance for several hundred years when kept in an alabaster pot. Until the discovery of morphine and other modern painkillers, myrrh was a common analgesic. In ancient times it was often mixed with wine to make the drink more potent. Such a drink was given to Jesus to ease the pains of the cross. However, he refused to drink it (Mark 15:23).

In the New Testament, myrrh is primarily associated with death. Myrrh was used chiefly in embalming the dead, used in Egyptian mummies, because it had the property of preserving them from putrefaction. John 19:39 records that myrrh was used in Jesus' burial:

**'He was accompanied by Nicodemus, the man who earlier had visited Jesus at night. Nicodemus brought a mixture of myrrh and aloes, about seventy-five pounds.'**

Because myrrh was used in the embalming or anointing of the dead, it came to represent mortality, suffering and sorrow. The Israelites used perfumed ointments of myrrh in their funeral preparations to postpone the decay and alleviate the odours of the deceased. Although less than one pound was normally used in Israelite funeral preparations, Nicodemus brought about a hundred pounds to prepare Jesus' body for burial. This was to show his respect for Christ. Other people burned myrrh as incense during cremations.






Myrrh then is brought as a gift to acknowledge the human suffering that Jesus endured when he came into our world. As an embalming ointment it signified that he was born to die for the world. The gift of myrrh symbolises

suffering, trials, tribulations and afflictions. The gift of myrrh reminds us of Jesus' sacrifice, his very life for our salvation.

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-  In what way is myrrh different from frankincense?
-  Why do you think the wise men brought the baby Jesus the gift of myrrh?
-  What role does myrrh play throughout Scripture?
-  In ancient times, as with frankincense, some myrrh was used for medicine and perfume; but what was the main use of myrrh and what does it symbolise about the baby Jesus?
-  The drink offered to Jesus contained myrrh – why was it refused?

### ADDITIONAL ACTIVITY

Over the past few weeks the group has explored the symbolism of the gifts of gold, frankincense and myrrh. If they would like to discover more, then watch the following clip together.

 **Watch: The Symbolism of Gold, Frankincense, and Myrrh (5:17)**

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=NgiTPVIZ9hg>

## WITNESS

### WRITE A CHRISTMAS 'CINQUAIN'.

A cinquain (pronounced 'sin-CANE') is a five-lined poem whose rhythm relies on the number of syllables in each line. First created in 1911, these were short unrhymed poems consisting of 22 syllables. They were distributed into 2, 4, 6, 8, 2 syllables in five lines.

Ask each person to have a go at writing a special Advent or Christmas poem illustrating the feelings of one of the people involved or highlighting something of the real meaning of Christmas. (You could do this in pairs if you prefer.) This is a great way to dig deeper into the thoughts and feelings of characters in the story or to reflect on the real meaning of the coming of Christ.

Create a five-lined poem based on the 'cinquain' method where:

Line one has only one two-syllable word, the title of the poem (noun).

Line two has two words, describing the title (adjectives).

Line three has three action words (or a three-word phrase) that tell you something that the title can do (verbs).

Line four has four words (or a four-word phrase) describing a feeling about your title.

Line five is one word that refers back to your title (synonym).

Here is an example based on the story of the wise men coming to see Jesus:

MAGI  
GAZING UPWARD  
HOPEFUL, JOYFUL, SEARCHING,  
FOLLOWING THE EASTERN STAR  
WISE MEN

(Cinquain Poems activity taken from: <http://insight.typepad.co.uk/insight/2008/12/rethinking-christmas.html>)

Share your cinquain poem together.

### ADDITIONAL ACTIVITY

Ask the group to create a social media post featuring their cinquain. These could be posted on the church website, social media platforms, or before gathered worship.

### WORSHIP

Read the following verse from the 'We Three Kings' Christmas carol and, as it is written in traditional language, discuss what it means.

Myrrh is mine; its bitter perfume  
Breathes of life of gathering gloom;  
Sorrowing, sighing, bleeding, dying,  
Sealed in the stone-cold tomb.


— JOHN HENRY HOPKINS JR

At Christmas, we celebrate the birth of Jesus Christ and are thankful to God that he sent his only son to this earth.

 As we read the verse about myrrh, what else are we reminded to be thankful for?

Within the Christmas story, there are reminders of what Jesus will face in the future for our sake.

As the music plays, take time to write a prayer of thanksgiving to God for Jesus.

 **Watch: Travis Cottrell feat. Lily Cottrell – 'What a Beautiful Name/Agnus Dei' (Live) (6:39)**  
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=diQPE7LYNsQ>

When the music finishes, give the group an opportunity to read out their prayers of thanksgiving. When they have shared their prayers, then bring the time to a close by reading the final verse of 'We Three Kings'.

Glorious now behold him arise,  
King and God and sacrifice.  
Alleluia, alleluia,  
Earth to the heavens replies.

#### Chorus

O star of wonder, star of night,  
Star with royal beauty bright,  
Westward leading, still proceeding,  
Guide us to thy perfect light.

— JOHN HENRY HOPKINS JR

### ADDITIONAL ACTIVITY

Bring the session to a close by singing along to this fun version of 'We Three Kings'.

 **The Star Music Video – 'We Three Kings (2017)' Movieclips (4:02)**  
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=3182kVUk-5A>

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## CHRISTMAS MOVIE NIGHT

Session Four provides resources for planning and enjoying a Christmas movie night with your young people. Please read through the content of this session before you start Session One. Those not intending to hold a Christmas movie night can remove this session. Fun planning activities are provided which will need to be added to Sessions 1-3.

### WHAT ARE YOU GOING TO WATCH?

Ask the group members to think about their all-time favourite Christmas movie. Before selecting a final film you will need to consider its certificate and whether you will need to gain parental permission. A link is provided below for the BBFC where you can check the certificate of any film suggestions.

<https://www.bbfc.co.uk>

Create a shortlist of films and hold a vote to choose the group's favourite Christmas movie.

### WHAT ARE YOU GOING TO EAT?

Discuss with the group ideas for Christmas snacks at the movie night. If you have any budding chefs in the group, then you could share the link below for them to bring a fun Christmas creation for everyone to eat.

<https://www.eatsamazing.co.uk/category/christmas>

### SECRET SANTA

As part of Session One the group will choose a secret prayer partner for the Advent season. You may want to extend this to a Secret Santa, setting a small budget, to share a gift as part of your movie night.

At the end of the movie night, you could exchange gifts and reveal the prayer partners.

### GATHER YOUR GROUP FOR A CHRISTMAS MOVIE NIGHT.

Think carefully about the location of your movie night. You will obviously need a large-screen TV and DVD player (or internet access) as well as enough comfortable seating for everyone. You may need to check with the group members' parents if the location is somewhere different from normal.

Although this may be a relatively easy activity to put together, don't get too caught up in making sure that everything goes according to plan. Your group might not end up watching much of the movie, but remember that the most important thing is that they build relationships with each other and with you and are having fun.

Most of all, do remember that the goal for this week is to be together, enjoying each other's company, having fun and celebrating Christmas.