



Daily Verse and Comment

Matthew 2:11

(11) And when they had come into the house, they found the little Child with Mary His mother, and they bowed down and worshiped Him; then they opened their treasures *and* presented their gifts to Him—gold and frankincense and myrrh.

A Faithful Version

When it comes to the "most important" part of all in this [Christmas](#) observance—the Christmas *shopping* season—the buying and exchanging of gifts—many will exclaim triumphantly, "Well, at least the Bible tells us to do that! Didn't the wise men give gifts, when Christ was born?"

Again, we are due for some surprises, when we learn the plain truth. First, let us look at the historic origin of trading gifts back and forth, then see exactly what the Bible *does* say about it.

From the *Bibliotheca Sacra*, volume 12, pages 153-155, we quote, "The interchange of presents between friends is alike characteristic of Christmas and the Saturnalia, and *must have been adopted by Christians from the Pagans*, as the admonition of Tertullian plainly shows."

The fact is, this custom fastened upon people of exchanging gifts with friends and relatives at the Christmas season *has not a single trace of Christianity about it*, strange though that may seem! This does not celebrate Christ's birthday or honor it or Him! Suppose someone you [love](#) has a birthday. You want to honor that person on his or her birthday. Would you lavishly buy gifts for *everyone else*, trading gifts back and forth with all your *other* friends and loved ones, but ignore completely any gift for the one whose birthday you are honoring? Rather absurd, when viewed in that light, is it not?

Yet this is exactly what people [the world](#) over are doing! They honor a day that is not Christ's birthday by spending every dime they can scrape together—even spending what they cannot afford—in buying presents to trade back and forth among friends and relatives.

Now consider what the Bible says about giving gifts when Christ was born. It is in [Matthew 2:1-11](#). "Now when [Jesus](#) was born in Bethlehem of Judea in the days of Herod the king, behold there came wise men from the east to Jerusalem, saying, Where is he that is born *King of the Jews*?' . . . And when they were come into the house, they saw the young child with Mary His mother, and fell down, and worshipped him: *and when they had opened their treasures*, they presented unto HIM gifts; gold and frankincense, and myrrh."

Notice, they inquired for the child Jesus, who was born *King* of the Jews! Now why did they present gifts to Him? Because it was His birthday? Not at all, because they came several days or weeks after the date of His birth! Was it to set an example for us, today, to trade gifts back and forth among ourselves? No, notice carefully! They did not exchange gifts among themselves, but "they presented unto *Him* gifts." They gave their gifts to Christ, not to their friends, relatives, or one another!

Why? Let me quote from the *Adam Clarke Commentary*, volume 5, page 46: "Verse 11. (*They presented unto him gifts.*) The people of the East never approach the presence of kings and great personages, without a *present* in their hands. The custom is often noticed in the [Old Testament](#), and still prevails in the East, and in some of the newly discovered South Sea Islands."

There it is! They were not instituting a new Christian custom of exchanging gifts with friends to honor Christ's birthday. They were following an old and ancient eastern custom of presenting gifts to a king when they come into his presence. They were approaching Him, born *King* of the Jews, *in person*. Therefore custom required they present gifts—even as the Queen of Sheba brought gifts to Solomon—even as many people today take a gift along when they visit the White House for an appointment with the President.

No, the custom of trading gifts back and forth does not stem from this scriptural incident at all, but rather, as quoted from history above, it is the *continuance* of an ancient pagan custom.

— Herbert W. Armstrong

To learn more, see:

[The Plain Truth About Christmas](#)

Related Topics:

[Christ's Birth](#)

[Christ's Birth Not In December](#)

[Christ's Birth Not In Winter](#)

[Christmas](#)

[Christmas, Pagan Origins of](#)