

Volume 8, Issue 2

Refresh



Connecting God's Word to Life Today

Christmas 2022

A Lighthouse Bible Studies Publication

Contents

Click on an
article title
to start
reading.



Volume 8, Issue 2, December 2022



Refresh Bible Study Magazine
is a publication of
Lighthouse Bible Studies, LLC,
whose mission is to connect people to God
through His Word.

Editor-in-Chief
Beebe Kauffman

Editor & Designer
Katy Kauffman

Contact Us

For subscriptions and queries, e-mail us at
lighthousebiblestudies@hotmail.com

or write to

PO Box 304

Buford, GA 30515

Copyright © 2022 by
Lighthouse Bible Studies

Scripture quotations marked CSB are taken from The Christian Standard Bible, Copyright © 2017 by Holman Bible Publishers. Used by permission. Christian Standard Bible®, and CSB® are federally registered trademarks of Holman Bible Publishers, all rights reserved.

Scripture quotations marked (ESV) are from The Holy Bible, English Standard Version® (ESV®), copyright © 2001 by Crossway. Used by permission. All rights reserved.

Scripture quotations marked KJV are taken from the King James Version, Public domain.

Scripture quotations marked NASB are taken from the New American Standard Bible®, Copyright © 1960, 1971, 1977, 1995, 2020 by The Lockman Foundation. All rights reserved.

Scripture quotations marked NIV are taken from the HOLY BIBLE, NEW INTERNATIONAL VERSION, Copyright © 1973, 1978, 1984 International Bible Society. Used by permission of Zondervan Bible Publishers.

Scripture quotations marked NKJV are taken from the New King James Version, Copyright © 1979, 1980, 1982 by Thomas Nelson, Inc. Used by permission. All rights reserved.

Scripture quotations marked NLT are taken from the New Living Translation, copyright © 1996, 2004, 2015 by Tyndale House Foundation. Used by permission of Tyndale House Publishers, Inc., Carol Stream, Illinois 60188. All rights reserved.

Merry Christmas 5

From the Editors

Have Yourself a Smoky Little Christmas

by Lori Williams 6

A Baby Made the Difference 12

by Barbara Latta

Just a Shepherd 18

by Dorcas Asercion Zuniga

Restoring the Joy of Christmas 23

by Joyce Dunaway

Living Light 30

by Carolyn Thigpen

Jesus Is a Game-Changer 36

by Julia Rogers



Have Yourself a Smoky Little Christmas



BY LORI WILLIAMS

It was the Sunday before Christmas, and smoke rose from the lectern. Sticks of incense smoldered just out of sight, lending ambience to a Sunday School lesson about the gifts from the Magi.

Those ubiquitous sticks of incense that you find at the checkout this time of year aren't flashy or beautifully packaged. In fact, if you went to the source of frankincense, you'd find that *Boswellia* trees are downright scraggly. They're native to countries most of



us don't yearn to visit: Oman, Somalia, Yemen, and Ethiopia. Be prepared to scale rock faces or at least hike over pebbled terrain if you want the stuff straight from the source.

Or, you can just imagine the scene some twenty-five years ago when the ushers noticed the smoky smell. They didn't know my husband Dean was teaching an object lesson. They didn't know the smoke was innocent. They just knew it was time to call the fire department. Luckily, the head usher hurried through our little corner of the fellowship hall on the way to the telephone.

"Everybody out," he shouted. "Something's burning."

"It's just incense," Dean explained as he turned back to the podium and retrieved the waxy sticks. "You know, like what the Magi brought to Jesus."



The ushers shook their heads while the rest of us chuckled at our wise guy teacher. But I couldn't help but wonder, and I still do to this day: Why would the Magi set aside precious cargo space to bring incense to a baby? Why did frankincense make the cut?

Did the Wise Men know that God ordered the High Priest to burn perpetual incense on the altar in front of the Mercy Seat?

You shall make an altar on which to burn incense; you shall make it of acacia wood. ... And Aaron shall burn fragrant incense on it. Every morning when he dresses the lamps he shall burn it, and when Aaron sets up the lamps at twilight, he shall burn it, a regular incense offering before the LORD throughout your generations. (Exodus 30:1, 7-8 ESV)





Did they know that the incense, when mixed properly, was considered pure and holy?



The LORD said to Moses, "Take sweet spices, stacte, and onycha, and galbanum, sweet spices with pure frankincense (of each shall there be an equal part), and make an incense blended as by the perfumer, seasoned with salt, pure and holy." (Exodus 30:34-35)

Did the Magi know that the fragrant incense symbolized prayer?

Let my prayer be counted as incense before you, and the lifting up of my hands as the evening sacrifice! (Psalm 141:2)

Did they know that Zechariah was burning incense in the Lord's temple when he learned his barren wife would bear a son?

Now while he [Zechariah] was serving as priest before God when his division was on duty, according to the custom of the priesthood, he was chosen by lot to enter the temple of the Lord and burn incense. ... And there appeared to him an angel of the Lord standing on the right side of the altar of incense. And Zechariah was troubled when he saw him, and fear fell upon him. But the angel said to him, "Do not be afraid, Zechariah, for your prayer has been heard, and your wife Elizabeth will bear you a son, and you shall call his name John. And you will have joy and gladness, and many will rejoice at his birth." (Luke 1:8, 11-14)



I don't know if the Wise Men knew these things. But they did know Biblical prophecy well enough to travel hundreds of miles to worship at the feet of Jesus.

Did the Magi collect the frankincense themselves? If so, they knew that frankincense "bleeds" from a deep incision in the trunk of the Boswellia tree. The first cut bestows only impurities, but subsequent cuts yield a resin that dries in about three months. Once hardened the yellowish "tears" are highly prized.



I don't know if the Wise Men were also wealthy men who could pay someone else to stripe the trees and collect the residue after three months. But whether they did the work themselves or paid someone else to do it, they considered the cost and brought the fragrance to the King of Kings.

Ahhhh ... I can almost feel the incense clearing the cobwebs from my head. A costly fragrance is a gift fit for the King. At first whiff it is salty, like the cleansing tears of repentance. Then its aroma goes to the heart of the matter, as the writer of Ephesians puts it, *Walk in love, as Christ loved us and gave himself up for us, a fragrant offering and sacrifice to God* (Ephesians 5:2).

Could the Wise Men have recognized that Jesus would be striped and then bleed in our place?

*But he was wounded for our transgressions,
he was bruised for our iniquities:
the chastisement of our peace was upon him;
and with his stripes we are healed. (Isaiah 53:5 KJV)*





Jesus' sacrifice on the Cross forever nullifies the need for any other sacrifice for my sins. Yet it compels me to want to, like the Wise Men, bring a gift to the King. So this year I'm asking myself: What fragrance can I offer to Jesus on His birthday?

Can I forgive when it's hard to forgive? Can I give when it requires sacrifice? Can I walk in love when it's inconvenient?



What about you? What fragrance will you be wearing this holiday season?

Prayer:

Dear God, I want to be the fragrance that compels people to come around my corner of the world. Help me to be that person that points others to You, the Christ of Christmas. Amen.

Questions:

1. Why do you think God ordered the High Priest to burn perpetual incense on the altar—a symbol of prayer—in front of the Mercy Seat?
2. Boswellia sacra trees are so hardy they can grow out of solid rock. What picture does it present to you that fragrant incense can be born out of such a hard, unforgiving place?
3. What fragrance can you offer to the King of Kings this Christmas? Have the challenges and experiences of this year inspired a particular offering?

*All Scripture verses are taken from the ESV unless otherwise indicated.



Lori Williams likes to write stories (and they're even true!) about cantaloupe moons, big hosannas, and pink flamingo sunsets. She loves being a mom to Aurelia and a music teacher to the preschoolers at her church. Please write to her at lawordwright@gmail.com.

