

In the name of Jesus. Amen.

As the travelers stooped into the house, they presented their gifts to the Child. Among the gifts were gold and frankincense. The gold the family likely used to flee into and survive in Egypt. Apart from knowing that these men were guided to the Child by God Himself, it would seem that the gift of gold was fortuitous. They received the money they would need to flee a tyrant's blade and stay in that country long enough to outlive the tyrant. Frankincense is the perfume burned in deference to a god—here, the travelers give the gift to God-in-the-Flesh.

There was one last gift: myrrh. Myrrh is one of the perfumes used to prepare a body for burial. Wrapped in linen and spiced with myrrh and cassia and aloes (cf. Psalm 45:8), the body would be placed in the tomb perhaps more pleasantly fragrant than he had been in life. It was a ritual performed in mourning to honor the dead. After the wise men visit, God-in-the-flesh is about to flee into Egypt; the gold and frankincense make sense. (cf. Matthew 2:1-12)

The myrrh is one that is a little off, especially at this time in the Child's life. The Child is not much older than 2 at this point, if that. He flees to Egypt to escape the loss of His life at this time. If anything, the gift of myrrh is a little early.

It is a gift given in anticipation of the reason for God coming in the flesh. Jesus was conceived of the Holy Ghost and born of the Virgin Mary in order to spill the blood and give His flesh over to death. Though the wise men probably didn't understand the connection—one might wonder if they even realized what they were doing in giving myrrh—but, again led by God, they present this burial spice to the One who will die on the cross and be laid to rest in a new tomb, wrapped in linen and spiced with myrrh and cassia and aloes. Understanding or not, the stanza attributed to Balthazar in the song "We Three Kings" indicates this anticipation:

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

What was read tonight makes a little more sense. Once again, a traveler makes her way to the place where Jesus was. There, she broke open a flask and poured its contents onto Jesus: pure nard, another burial spice. The disciples, well intentions and all, were indignant about this act. But Jesus knew well what was going to happen, teaching His disciples in the process: "She has done what she could. She has come beforehand to anoint My body for burial." The wise men brought the myrrh in anticipation; the woman with the alabaster flask and used the nard inside in preparation. All of this is at God's direction, whether the wise men or woman realized it, and according to His plan and purpose.

Jesus is readying Himself and being readied for His death and burial. He is going to cross and grave in the place of sinful man—the wise men, the woman, the disciples...for you!

Of course, He's not the only one preparing for His death. "The chief priests and scribes sought how they might take Him by trickery and put Him to death." They later conspired with Judas, one of Jesus' disciples, to do just that.

The order of the events in tonight's text paint the picture that Judas was still indignant over the events of the woman with the alabaster flask. At the very least, it was the last straw, the event that finally put Him over the edge, the event which open the door widest to the devil and enabled him to take hold of Judas' heart once for all so that he would betray Jesus to the chief priests and scribes. John fills in some details which, perhaps, shed light on this; it was Judas who, in indignation, made the complaint heard in tonight's text—"This he said, not that he cared for the poor, but because he was a thief, and had the money box; and he used to take what was put in it." (John 12:4-6)

When the woman with the alabaster flask enters the room, Judas saw it as an opportunity to make a little extra money—300 denarii he says in John. That's nearly a year's wages! The holder of the money box may have said what the 11 were thinking, but he wasn't thinking what the 11 were thinking. His indignation was for the fact that he lost out on an opportunity to line his pockets. So, he conspires with the chief priests and scribes for 30 pieces of silver (cf. Matthew 26:15), less than a third of what he supposed he would get for the nard (30 shekels is about 89 denarii).

And so, the ball is rolling, and Jesus is at the beginning of His passion for you. From the moment after His baptism, when He was driven into the wilderness to be tempted by the devil (cf. Mark 1:12-13), Jesus had his face set resolutely toward Jerusalem, to a hill outside of Jerusalem called Skull, where He would give His life for the scribes and chief priests, for the woman who anointed Him for burial, for the 11, and, yes, even for Judas.

And if He laid down His life for Judas, then He laid it down for you, too.

Many a Christian has compared themselves to Peter. Peter was the disciples who either got things so right or so wrong. He was the disciple who often spoke before thinking, it would seem, putting his foot in his mouth. So many people identify with him, perhaps, because it is the easiest to identify with him. He sinned against Jesus in ways you might consider harmless so that it was easy for him to confess that sin and receive forgiveness. Even his thrice-denial is pittance compared to the betrayal of Judas, as one might compare it.

But I dare you to find anyone who would willingly compare themselves to Judas; find anyone who would say, "Yes, I get so fed up with Jesus and what He has done that I curse Him, deny Him, betray Him!" Who among you can truthfully say that you have never been angry at God because a day didn't go as you had planned, because you didn't get the answer you were expecting to your prayer, because you just don't understand a particular part of Scripture, because a particular part of Scripture speaks against something you have done, and so on? One last straw may be all that it takes so that you would find yourself breathing out insults against God and screaming curses to Him in your prayers. One last stray may be all that it takes to bring you to the point where you would gladly cheer Judas on or even step in his place.

But this Jesus knew that Judas would betray Him. He even called Judas a devil shortly after feeding the 5000 men, stating that He had chosen the 12 of them, including Judas. (cf. John 6:70) Jesus

chose Judas, and you could argue that Jesus chose him in order that he would betray Him to the chief priests and scribes. Judas was an integral part of Jesus' Passion, for Jesus **had** to be betrayed to the chief priests and scribes, be crucified, and on the third day rise again.

Jesus had all of this put in motion in order that He would give His life as the ransom for many, even Judas, the chief priests, and scribes, and be buried, from the moment he was anointed with nard, even from the time of His early childhood, even from before the world's foundation. (cf. 1 Peter 1:20) Judas had opportunity to repent, for the sin was still his, but in his remorse, he succumbed only the despair of having betrayed innocent blood and refused to be covered by that same blood, choosing instead to spill his own. (cf. Matthew 27:3-8; Acts 1:18-19) If he had repented and received the forgiveness won for him, we would have occasion to celebrate St. Judas Iscariot, Apostle, and his coat of arms would not be the blank white traitor's coat.

The point to make is that Jesus' spilled blood was sufficient for Judas, as it is sufficient for you in your Peter moments as much as it is in your Judas moments. The Word of God may speak against you in your sin as it does of Peter's sin and Judas' sin, but the Word of God also speaks words of forgiveness for you for the sake of Jesus. Inasmuch as the Word may give you cause, in your Old Adam, to be angry at God, it gives you greater cause, in your New Man—born of the waters of Holy Baptism—for comfort and relief, for in the death and burial of Jesus the Christ, you have rest from the weariness of your sin. The wrath due you for your sin has been fully exacted on Jesus Christ in your place; the work is done and the justice of God is satisfied. This is the Passion of our Lord Jesus Christ for you.

Jesus was incarnate, born, received gifts of gold, frankincense, myrrh, and nard, was betrayed, crucified, and buried for you. His death for sin is your death to sin. The forgiveness He won on the cross as He spilled His blood covers your guilt and shame and sin. To you, the blood of the Lamb was applied for life as you were washed in the water and the Word, and it is your daily sign and seal of a life redeemed from the pit of hell and righteous indignation. For by that water, blood, and Word, you are the righteousness of God. You are forgiven for all of your sins.

In the name of Jesus. Amen.