

Remember the Reason We Give Christmas Presents

Despite complaints about inflation and low wages, stores in the U.S. have been crowded this Christmas, and online retailers are racking up sales. Parents are rushing to buy Moana dolls, Legos, a popular robotic monkey toy named Peanut and a four-wheel drive vehicle for kids that costs \$405. Meanwhile, the most popular gifts for adults include pocket translators, wireless phone chargers, portable spy cameras and \$99 Black Falcon drones.

And don't forget the sleeper gift hit of 2024—miniature chain saws. You can find these on sale for \$ at Home Depot!

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The National Retail Federation says Americans spent \$967 billion on Christmas gifts, Christmas decor and holiday travel in 2023. That comes out to an average of \$902 per person. Financial observers say spending on gifts in 2024 will reach an all-time record.

But why give presents to each other at this time of year? The tradition goes back more than 2,000 years, when some foreign visitors brought unusual gifts to the baby Jesus in Bethlehem.

These visitors were called “magi from the east” in Matthew’s Gospel (Matt. 2:1). While the Jews were looking for a political savior, most of them had no idea God would send His Son in the form of a baby lying in a crude manger. Yet these magi,, who traveled from what is now Iran, Iraq or Saudi Arabia, had tracked the appearance of an unusual star. They believed it signaled the fulfillment of an ancient prophecy about the birth of a new king.

The magi were probably priests or astronomers. We assume there were three of them, but the Bible doesn't say that—only that they carried three gifts. In fact, they had no idea they were fulfilling the words of Isaiah, who prophesied centuries earlier that visitors on camels would bring “gold and frankincense” to Israel to witness the glory of God (see Isa. 60:1-6).

The magi brought gold, frankincense and myrrh to Jesus. But what do these gifts mean to us?

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