

FRANKINCENSE — JESUS OUR HIGH PRIEST

“THE GIFT” Advent Sermon Series #1

Matthew 2:1-12, Hebrews 4:14-16, 10:10-12

Dave Geldart

November 30, 2025

Announcements:

- Welcome: Connect Cards & Giving
- ADVENT KICKS OFF TODAY!

1. [1] Introduction

- a. As we enter the season of Advent, we enter a season of longing,
 - i. waiting, and preparing our hearts
 - 1. to celebrate the arrival of Jesus
 - ii. not only His birth in Bethlehem 2,000 years ago,
 - iii. but His presence with us now and His return yet to come.
- b. Advent slows us down; it helps us remember that God comes to us.
 - i. Advent teaches us to wait with hope and expectation.
- c. **This year, I want to invite our church into a deeper look at the gifts** brought by the magi and discovering what each gift reveals about who Jesus truly is.
 - i. **And what each shows us about the gifts he gives us!**
 - ii. Because Scripture tells us that these were not random baby gifts,
 - 1. but prophetic symbols of about Jesus’ identity and mission.
- d. We’re likely familiar with this nativity scene:
 - i. three wise men, each with his gift.
 - 1. 3 camels tied up outside under a palm tree.
 - ii. But Scripture doesn’t actually tell us how many magi there were—only that they brought three gifts:
 - 1. gold,
 - 2. frankincense,
 - 3. and myrrh.
- e. And as a dad, I can tell you that when we had babies, no one brought us gold, frankincense, or myrrh.
 - i. We got the baby wipes, the diapers, the snuggly blankets,
 - ii. and that little clear tube with a mouthpiece at one end called a Nose Frida
 - 1. that every parent knows is both amazing and terrifying.
- f. Yet these gifts the magi –
 - i. these wise men, proto-astronomer royal scientists from the east

ii. brought to baby Jesus were not only valuable and practical,

1. but deeply theological as we will see.

g. [2] Today we begin with the gift of **frankincense**, and I want you to see how this gift points us to something incredibly beautiful and deeply personal:

i. [3] **Jesus is our great High Priest who brings us to God.**

h. Since today is Family Sunday, I want to say a special welcome to all our kids in the room — first grade and up.

i. Raise your hands!

ii. We're so glad you're here with us today!

iii. You're part of our church family, and you help us worship God.

iv. So if you wiggle a little, or whisper a little, or laugh at my jokes more than the adults do... that's fine.

v. This is your church too.

1. In fact, I'll have a few parts during this teaching that I'll need your help with. So, stay with me...

2. Before we go further, let's read the Scripture that frames this entire series.

a. Let's read **Matthew 2:1–12 (NIV)** slowly and thoughtfully as an Advent people wanting to hear the Word of God.

b. Invite up Cade Swanson:

3. **Read Matthew 2:1–12 – CADE SWANSON READS**

[4] 2:1 After Jesus was born in Bethlehem in Judea, during the time of King Herod, Magi from the east came to Jerusalem and asked, "Where is the one who has been born king of the Jews? We saw his star when it rose and have come to worship him." When King Herod heard this he was disturbed, and all Jerusalem with him. When he had called together all the people's chief priests and teachers of the law, he asked them where the Messiah was to be born. "In Bethlehem in Judea," they replied, "for this is what the prophet has written:"

[5] "'But you, Bethlehem, in the land of Judah, are by no means least among the rulers of Judah; for out of you will come a ruler who will shepherd my people Israel.'"

Then Herod called the Magi secretly and found out from them the exact time the star had appeared. He sent them to Bethlehem and said, "Go and search carefully for the child. As soon as you find him, report to me, so that I too may go and worship him."

[6] After they had heard the king, they went on their way, and the star they had seen when it rose went ahead of them until it stopped over the place where the child was. When they saw the star, they were overjoyed. On coming to the house, they saw the child with his mother Mary, and they bowed down and worshiped him. Then they opened their treasures and presented him with gifts of gold, frankincense and myrrh. And having been warned in a dream not to go back to Herod, they returned to their country by another route.

PRAY

a. [7] This is not just a Christmas story—it is a revelation.

- i. It is God unveiling who this Child is:
 - 1. a **King** (gold),
 - 2. a **Suffering Servant** (myrrh),
 - 3. and today, a **Priest** (frankincense).
- b. It is remarkable that the first reaction to Jesus' birth from people outside Israel—these Gentile magi—is **worship**.
- c. Before Jesus teaches, heals, or performs a miracle, He is already worthy.
 - i. Advent begins with worship.

4. Sensory Hook (Smelling the Gift of Frankincense)

- a. Kids — you may smell something a little different in the room.
 - i. Can any kid tell me what this smells like?
 - 1. Citrus, pine..., peppery
 - ii. It's called
 - 1. [8] frankincense.
- b. To help us connect this ancient story to our senses today, I want to invite you to smell what the magi brought baby Jesus.
 - i. People used it to worship God long before Christmas trees or candy canes or hot cocoa ever existed.
 - ii. So if you smell something new — that's not your smelly neighbor — it's frankincense.
- c. I'm diffusing frankincense essential oil today — which, by the way, is probably the only time in my life I will willingly diffuse essential oils.
 - i. [ESSENTIAL OILS JOKE] Let me just confess something: I am naturally derisive of essential oils.

- ii. People will say, “This one helps digestion... this one cures headaches... this one resets your aura, this one fixes your broken arm, and pays your taxes.”
 - iii. And I just smile, because I know some of you swear by this stuff.
 - iv. But if you ever see me willingly rubbing lavender on my temples,
 - 1. just assume I’ve given up.
- d. But today — I will gladly diffuse frankincense, because frankincense is not just aromatherapy.
 - i. It’s a symbol.
 - ii. It’s worship.
- e. Let it remind you that the worship of Jesus has always involved the whole person—
 - i. body, mind, heart, and senses.
- f. It’s a picture of what priests did when they burned incense before God.
 - i. A practice that’s full of symbolism and meaning
- g. Frankincense is a prized resin from the
 - i. [9] boswellia tree
 - ii. incredibly expensive, used in worship for thousands of years, especially by priests offering sacrifices.
 - iii. And it’s still produced the same way today
 - 1. Puncture tiny holes in the bark, let the sap come out and form these little resin chunks
 - iv. **Bring kids up to touch frankincense resin**
 - 1. Then ask them to pass them around
 - 2. [10] Can also make into fragrant frankincense oil like the amber colored vial in the picture, and like we’re diffusing into our air
- h. In the Old Testament, priests burned frankincense during sacrifices because its fragrance symbolized the prayers of God’s people rising to heaven.
- i. So when the magi set frankincense before baby Jesus,
 - i. they were doing far more than giving an expensive and thoughtful baby gift.
- j. They were proclaiming something about Him that would shape His entire mission:
 - i. [11] **Jesus came to be our Perfect and Compassionate High Priest—**
 - 1. **the One** who brings us to God and God to us!

5. [HOLIDAY HUMOR]

a. [ELF ON THE SHELF]

- i. During Christmastime, we hear so much about “being good,” especially if you have young kids.

- ii. Some people treat Elf on the Shelf like the Holy Spirit:
 - 1. “Don’t do that... the Elf is watching.”
- iii. We act like the Elf is reporting to Santa in real time.
 - 1. “No need for confession — he already knows.”

b. [CRAZY FAMILY HUMOR]

- i. And this time of year, we are reminded that every family has a little crazy in it.
 - ii. If you don’t believe yours does...
 - 1. just know everyone else in your family definitely thinks it’s you.
 - iii. Holiday gatherings are wonderful, but they remind us that life is messy.
- c. Jesus was born into this kind of world —
- i. a world with drama, conflict, fear, politics, family tension, spiritual longing, and unmet expectations.
 - ii. He didn’t come into a sanitized nativity scene—He came into real life.

6. Understanding the Role of a Priest in Scripture

- a. If the idea of a “High Priest” feels distant or confusing, it is worth slowing down first.
 - i. Priests in ancient Israel were not simply religious professionals;
 - 1. like pastors or church staffers,
 - 2. they were functional bridges between God and people.
 - ii. So, for all the kids here — a priest was kind of like a spiritual helper.
 - 1. Imagine someone who helped people talk to God
 - a. and helped them know that God loved them and forgave them.
 - 2. That’s what a priest did.
 - a. SUPER IMPORTANT!
 - 3. And Jesus became the BEST Helper to bring us to God!
- b. A priest served two main purposes:
 - i. **The priest made sacrifices** on behalf of the people for the forgiveness of sins.
 - ii. **The priest prayed for the people**, interceding before God
- c. A priest stood in the gap—bringing the people to God and God’s mercy to the people.
 - i. That was their entire calling
- d. So when the magi lay frankincense before Jesus, they are declaring something profound:
 - i. **This Child has come to fulfill the ultimate priestly role.**

7. The Problem That Requires a Priest (Holiness of God vs. the Sinfulness of Humanity)

- a. Why do we need a priest at all?
 - i. Because two realities define our natural human spiritual condition:

1. **God is holy and we are sinful**

- b. Kids — if you’ve ever made a mistake before, raise your hand.
 - i. Yep — me too. We all have.
 - ii. And that’s why Jesus came —
 - 1. because God loves us so much that He wants to forgive us and help us start new.
 - 2. So we can be close with him
- c. Advent is a time when we remember why Jesus had to come—
 - i. because the world, and our hearts, are broken by sin.
- d. Our culture prefers to downplay sin.
 - i. We say things like “Mistakes Were Made,”
 - 1. “I slipped up,” or “I’m not perfect but who is?”
 - ii. Yet Scripture is honest: sin is super serious because it separates us from God.
- e. To understand the beauty of forgiveness, we have to understand the weight of holiness.
 - i. God is other.
 - ii. Set apart
 - iii. God is pure.
 - iv. God is flawless in justice, love, mercy, and righteousness.
- f. And because God is holy, sin cannot simply be ignored.
 - i. Sin wounds.
 - ii. Sin destroys.
 - iii. Sin breaks relationships.
 - iv. Sin turns our hearts inward until we forget God.
 - v. Sin brings death.
- g. So Advent reminds us not just that Jesus came, but **why** He came.
 - i. He came to bridge the gap between a holy God and sinful people.

8. **The Old Covenant Solution (Temporary, Costly, and Loaded with Meaning)**

- a. So, in light of all this, in the Old Testament, God gave Israel a sacrificial system not as punishment but as mercy.
- b. It provided a way for sinful people to remain in relationship with a holy God.
- c. Once a year, on the Day of Atonement, the High Priest would enter the inner sanctuary—the Holy of Holies—to make a sacrifice for the sins of the nation
- d. The priest would:
 - i. **Sacrifice an innocent animal** on behalf of the guilty people.
 - ii. **Burn frankincense**, representing prayers rising to God.

- iii. **Sprinkle blood from the sacrifice on the mercy seat**, symbolizing the cost of forgiveness.
 - iv. **Send the scapegoat into the wilderness**, symbolizing sin being removed.
- e. And yes—this sounds strange to our modern Western ears.
 - i. Why not just rip out an apology video on Insta
 - 1. And give a big chunk of money to charity?
 - ii. This sacrificial system is bloody and uncomfortable, and it is meant to be.
 - iii. Sin is actually destructive, and true forgiveness is costly.
- f. But even with all that, it was still temporary.
 - i. A bandaid, rather than a cure
 - ii. Because sacrifices had to be repeated.
 - iii. Priests had to stand daily
 - iv. The work was never done.
- g. Frankincense burned every year, every season, every offering—
 - i. because sin never stopped and people never stopped needing mercy.
 - ii. **KIDS, ARE YOU STILL WITH ME?**

9. **Jesus — The Final and Perfect High Priest**

- a. Everything in the Old Testament pointed forward to our need for a better Priest, a better Sacrifice, and a better Covenant.
- b. **[12] Hebrews 10:10 (NIV) declares this boldly:**
 “And by that will [the will of God to rescue his people], we have been made holy through the sacrifice of the body of Jesus Christ once for all.
- c. Jesus did what no priest could ever do—
 - i. He offered **Himself** as the perfect, complete, final sacrifice.
- d. **Heb 10:11-14** ¹¹Day after day every priest stands and performs his religious duties; again and again he offers the same sacrifices, which can never take away sins. ¹²But when this priest had offered for all time one sacrifice for sins, he sat down at the right hand of God, ¹³and since that time he waits for his enemies to be made his footstool. ¹⁴For by one sacrifice he has made perfect forever those who are being made holy.
- e. Under the old covenant, sacrifices were repeated endlessly.
 - i. Keeping things going, but never able to cure the deep problem
 - ii. But Jesus offered **one sacrifice for all time**, and then He sat down beside the Father God in heaven—because the work was finished.
- f. This is the heart of the Gospel:

- i. **Jesus takes our sin and gives us His righteousness.**
 - 1. **DONE!**
- ii. By his sacrifice he has made us perfect forever
 - 1. Even as we are being MADE HOLY
- g. This is the heart of Advent.
 - i. This is Christmas.
 - ii. Christ came to take on flesh so He could take on sin.
 - iii. He was born to die so we could be born again.

10. MOVEMENT MOMENT

- a. To help us refocus, everyone — kids and adults — take one deep breath in... and out.
 - i. Now kids, stand up and stretch your arms out
 - ii. Now stretch your legs to the side
- b. Okay. You're doing great! Let's keep going.

11. Illustration: The Robe Exchange

- a. **Kids**, you know how sometimes your clothes get messy — spaghetti stains, chocolate syrup, mud from outside — and you wish you could just switch with someone who has a clean shirt?
 - i. What Jesus does is even better:
 - ii. He takes ALL our messy stuff on Himself, and He gives us HIS clean, perfect life.
- b. In some more traditional kinds of churches, the church leaders are actually called priests, and they wear special robes.
 - i. A priest in one of these churches once described how, at his ordination, his supervising priest removed his own beautiful, pure, priestly robe — the robe with the stripe representing ordination — and placed it on the shoulders of the newly ordained priest.
 - ii. He then said, "This is what Jesus does for us. He takes your worn-out, stained, messed-up robe of sin and puts His own robe of righteousness on you."
- c. This is what it means that Jesus is our High Priest.
 - i. He doesn't just remove your sin —
 - ii. He clothes you in His complete righteousness.

12. Jesus Understands Us (A High Priest Who Sympathizes)

- a. But here is where all of this becomes incredibly personal:

- i. Jesus is not just the perfect sacrifice; He is the perfect High Priest **who understands us.**
 - ii. It's one of the most comforting truths in Scripture
 - 1. Not in theory.
 - 2. Not from a distance.
 - iii. But personally understands us.
- b. [13] Hebrews 4:14–15 (NIV) says:

¹⁴Therefore, since we have a great high priest who has ascended into heaven, Jesus the Son of God, let us hold firmly to the faith we profess. ¹⁵For we do not have a high priest who is unable to empathize with our weaknesses, but we have one who has been tempted in every way, just as we are—yet he did not sin.
- c. Jesus is able to EMPATHIZE WITH US, Weakness and all
 - i. **He knows what it is like to be human—**
 - ii. He was born into scandal.
 - iii. He grew up in poverty.
 - iv. He lived in an obscure town where people whispered about Him.
 - v. He worked long days as a laborer.
 - vi. He got tired — bone-tired.
 - vii. He felt hunger and thirst.
 - viii. He grieved the death of loved ones.
 - ix. He faced spiritual attack at His weakest moments.
 - x. He was misunderstood by His family.
 - xi. He was betrayed by His friends.
 - xii. He was spoken unfairly about
 - xiii. He was unjustly accused.
 - xiv. He felt the weight of stress and anxiety so crushing He sweat drops of blood.
 - xv. And on the cross, He felt abandoned — crying out, “My God, my God, why have You forsaken me?”
 - xvi. JESUS UNDERSTANDS WHAT IT’S LIKE TO BE US**
- d. And kids — Jesus understands you too.
 - i. When you feel left out at school...
 - ii. When you're scared at night...
 - iii. When you get your feelings hurt...
 - iv. When things change and you don't know why...
 - v. Jesus understands all of that.
 - vi. He really does.

- e. Whatever you feel, **He has felt.**
- f. Wherever you hurt, **He has been there.**
- g. Whatever you carry, **He carried**
- h. Wherever you struggle, **He has struggled** — yet without sin.
- i. This is why Advent matters
 - i. **God came near.**
 - ii. **God put on flesh.**
 - iii. **God stepped into our world, our struggle, our pain.**
- j. Jesus is not only your Savior; He is your Sympathizer.
 - i. He is not distant or detached; He is present and compassionate.

13. **Jesus Invites Us to Approach God Boldly**

- a. Because Jesus is our High Priest, we have access to God that humanity never had before.
- b. [14] Hebrews 4:16 (NIV) invites us:
 Let us then approach God's throne of grace with confidence, so that we may receive mercy and find grace to help us in our time of need.
- c. In Christ, you do not come to God as a stranger or a beggar.
 - i. You come as a beloved son or daughter.
- d. My kids do not check my mood before they ask for something.
 - i. They come boldly because they know they belong.
 - ii. They know my love for them.
- e. Jesus wants you to approach the Father with that same freedom—
 - i. With boldness.
 - ii. With messy honesty.
 - iii. With confidence.
 - iv. With love.
- f. This is the gift of frankincense:
 - i. **We can come to God because Jesus came to us.**

14. **Advent Application: What Does Jesus Our High Priest Mean for Us Right Now?**

- a. During Advent we remember that the world is still groaning, still waiting, still longing.
 - i. But we do not wait alone.
- b. Your High Priest is with you in whatever you're facing:
 - i. **If you have a loved one far from God**, Jesus is interceding for them.
 - ii. **If you are stressed about finances**, Jesus knows and provides.
 - iii. **If you are emotionally hurting**, Jesus comforts the brokenhearted.

- iv. **If you're physically suffering**, Jesus is the compassionate healer.
- v. **If you're weary or overwhelmed**, Jesus strengthens.
- vi. **If you are battling anxiety**, Jesus gives peace that the world cannot give.
- c. The hope of Advent is not that we pretend everything is okay.
- d. The hope of Advent is that **God enters our not-okay world with us.**

15. **Returning to Frankincense (A Symbol of Our Worship Today)**

- a. Adults, and -- we'll see if the kids are listening — kids, what was the name of that gift we're focusing on again??
 - i. **[15] FRANKINCENSE!**
- b. As the aroma of frankincense lingers in the air, I want you to let it anchor the truth of Advent in your soul:
 - i. **Jesus is our High Priest**
 - ii. **Jesus came to bring you to God.**
 - iii. **Jesus still brings you to God.**
 - iv. **Jesus will bring you to God forever.**
- c. Frankincense is not just an ancient smell; it is a reminder:
 - i. Today, Jesus gives access, forgiveness, and grace to us.
 - ii. Your prayers rise like incense before God.
 - iii. Your tears are seen.
 - iv. Your struggles are not ignored.
 - v. Your life is carried by your High Priest to Our Heavenly Father
 - 1. As you trust in Him

16. **Invitation — Come Boldly to Your High Priest**

- a. I want to invite you now to come boldly before God in prayer.
- b. **This is your moment to respond.**
 - i. Not with fear.
 - ii. Not with shame.
 - iii. Not with distance.
 - iv. But with boldness.
- c. Bring your anxiety.
 - i. Bring your sin.
 - ii. Bring your grief.
 - iii. Bring your longing.
 - iv. Bring your family.

- v. Bring your wounds.
 - vi. Bring your hope.
- d. Come boldly—because Jesus made the way.
- e. For our kids in the room — if you want to remind yourself that Jesus is close to you and loves you, you can just put your hand on your heart for a moment.
 - i. And adults, you can join them if you want.
 - ii. Let's all remember together that Jesus is our High Priest, and He loves us more than we could ever imagine.
- f. If you are carrying anxiety, bring it to Him.
 - i. If you are carrying sin, bring it to Him.
 - ii. If you are carrying fears, bring them.
 - iii. If you are carrying grief, bring it.
 - iv. If you are longing for hope this Advent, come to the One who gives it
- g. And if you are here and you recognize, "I need forgiveness...I need grace...I need the Savior this season," then I want you to know that Jesus—your High Priest—has already done everything necessary for you to come home.
 - i. All he asks of you is to place your trust in Him alone to make you right with God
- h. Jesus lived the life you couldn't live.
 - i. Jesus died the death you should have died.
 - ii. Jesus rose to give you a life you could never earn.
 - iii. And Jesus stands even now interceding for you.
- i. This Advent, come boldly.
 - i. Come honestly.
 - ii. Come just as you are.
- j. Your High Priest is waiting.

17. PRAY

- a. give space for those who want to respond to God

The Gift

Gold ⁷⁹ Au
Precious Metal
Symbol of Kingship
on earth
196.967



Frankincense
Resin from tree
Highly fragrant
Symbol of healing



Myrrh
Resin from tree
Spice for embalming
Symbol of suffering

The Gift



↗
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Resin from tree
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Jesus is our High Priest

Matthew 2:1-12

¹ After Jesus was born in Bethlehem in Judea, during the time of King Herod, Magi from the east came to Jerusalem ² and asked, “Where is the one who has been born king of the Jews? We saw his star when it rose and have come to worship him.”

³ When King Herod heard this he was disturbed, and all Jerusalem with him. ⁴ When he had called together all the people’s chief priests and teachers of the law, he asked them where the Messiah was to be born. ⁵ “In Bethlehem in Judea,” they replied, “for this is what the prophet has written:



Matthew 2:1-12

⁶ ““But you, Bethlehem, in the land of Judah,
are by no means least among the rulers of Judah;
for out of you will come a ruler
who will shepherd my people Israel.””

⁷ Then Herod called the Magi secretly and found out from them
the exact time the star had appeared. ⁸ He sent them to
Bethlehem and said, “Go and search carefully for the child. As
soon as you find him, report to me, so that I too may go and
worship him.”



Matthew 2:1-12

⁹ After they had heard the king, they went on their way, and the star they had seen when it rose went ahead of them until it stopped over the place where the child was. ¹⁰ When they saw the star, they were overjoyed. ¹¹ On coming to the house, they saw the child with his mother Mary, and they bowed down and worshiped him. Then they opened their treasures and presented him with gifts of gold, frankincense and myrrh. ¹² And having been warned in a dream not to go back to Herod, they returned to their country by another route.



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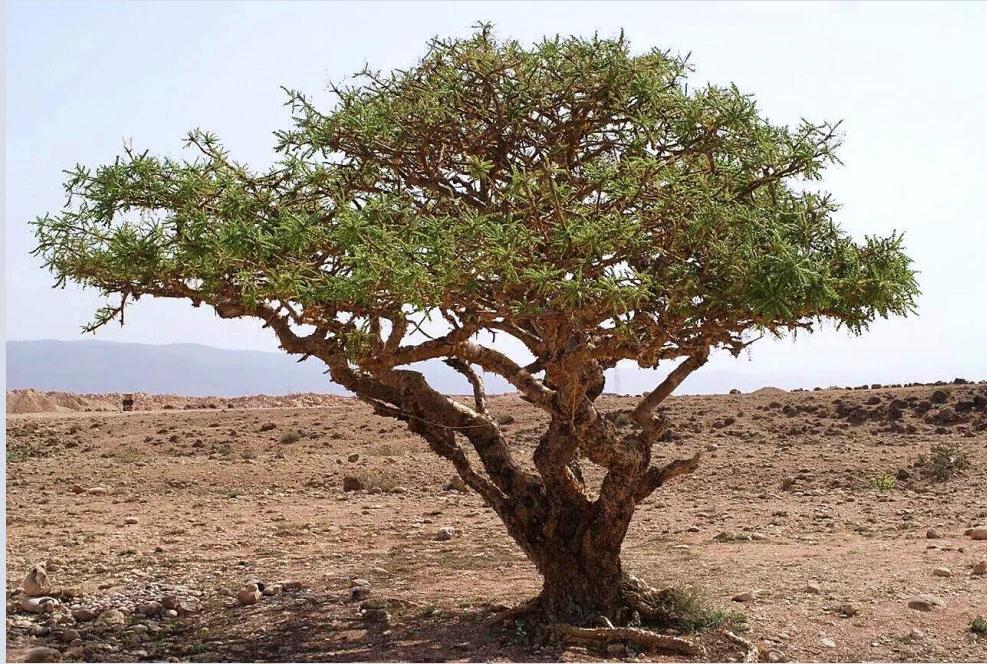
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Jesus is our High Priest

Hebrews 10:10-14

¹⁰ And by that will, **we have been made holy through the sacrifice of the body of Jesus Christ once for all.**

¹¹ Day after day every priest stands and performs his religious duties; again and again he offers the same sacrifices, which can never take away sins. ¹² But when this priest had offered for all time one sacrifice for sins, he sat down at the right hand of God, ¹³ and since that time he waits for his enemies to be made his footstool. ¹⁴ **For by one sacrifice he has made perfect forever those who are being made holy.**



Hebrews 4:14-15

¹⁴ Therefore, since we have a great high priest who has ascended into heaven, Jesus the Son of God, let us hold firmly to the faith we profess. ¹⁵ For **we do not have a high priest who is unable to empathize with our weaknesses**, but we have one who has been tempted in every way, just as we are—yet he did not sin.



Hebrews 4:14-16

¹⁴ Therefore, since we have a great high priest who has ascended into heaven, Jesus the Son of God, let us hold firmly to the faith we profess. ¹⁵ For we do not have a high priest who is unable to empathize with our weaknesses, but we have one who has been tempted in every way, just as we are—yet he did not sin. ¹⁶ **Let us then approach God's throne of grace with confidence, so that we may receive mercy and find grace to help us in our time of need.**



The Gift



↑
Frankincense

Resin from tree
Highly fragrant
Symbol of healing

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