



# Parent Pages

## *Preparing the environment of the Domestic Church\**

\* The term "Domestic Church" refers to the family, the smallest body of gathered believers in Christ. Though recovered only recently, the term dates back to the first century AD. The Greek word *ecclesiola* referred to "little church." The early Church understood that the home was fertile ground for discipleship, sanctification, and holiness.

## Gold, Frankincense, and Myrrh

*On entering the house, they saw the child with Mary his mother; and they knelt down and paid him homage. Then, opening their treasure chests, they offered him gifts of gold, frankincense, and myrrh.*

– Matthew 2:11

### **The Adoration of the Magi**

In the second chapter of the gospel of Matthew, we find the account of the Adoration of the Magi. God places a sign from nature, a star, so that the Magi, who were visiting from far away, could know about the coming of the newborn King. The Magi followed the star so that they find they could honor the King and offer Him gifts. The gifts that were given were not the typical gifts offered to an infant or toddler, these gifts offered clues about the identity of this Child. What can these gifts tell us about the presence of this Child in the life of our family?

### **Gold**

The first gift mentioned is gold. Gold is a precious and valuable commodity. It does not rust, tarnish, or corrode as other metals do. Gold keeps its value over time. How do we measure value? It can be traded for things that you want or need. Our children can teach us much about what is truly needed and valuable in our life as a family.

As parents we know that children are the most precious and valuable. Our children do not long for objects or things, their greatest need is to be in a loving relationship with us. Our children love us and hopefully know we love them. How can we ensure that our youngest children know how precious and valuable they are to us? We can be intentional in the way we speak to our children. What is the tone of our voice? Do we use a calm voice when speaking to our children? Why is tone important? Human brains are wired to read and hear tone before the words. Sometimes we do not hear words at all. We only hear tone. We respond best to a neutral tone. What is coming out in our tone is what our child will hear. Of course, there are instances when family life and the role of a parent may give rise to a more agitated tone than we would prefer. We can practice our tone, in the mirror, with a friend. And as you practice, remember to smile when you speak. The easiest way to have a kind tone, is to smile when we speak. As we practice our tone, as it becomes a habit for us, it will be easier and more natural every day.

## **Frankincense**

The second gift is frankincense, a type of incense, which was burned by the priest in the temple. The temple is the place where God dwells. Frankincense has a particularly fragrant aroma. As soon as the baby is born, the child's fragrance initiates an experience of feeling a special well-being, of happiness. Not only emotionally but also chemically stimulating the production of dopamine. Children ages 0-6 years of age have absorbent minds. Even the baby, who cannot see but 12 inches in front of his or her face, is absorbing visually, as well as the smells and sounds in their environment. What creates our sacred environment at home? What are those sacred items in our home environment that our children are absorbing?

Do we display images of Jesus and his parents, hung at eye level or in a simple frame on a shelf that is accessible to the child? Do we have a prayer table with a colored cloth and small Bible, that the child may hold and carry? The child's greatest desire is to be in relationship with the One who gives us life. Prayer consists of listening to the Voice of God. Children have a tremendous capacity for prayer. It is different from the prayer of the adult in its form and content. Young children's prayer is filled with thanksgiving and praise and also silence and contemplation. Their prayer may be very brief, such as "Jesus," "Amen," "Hosanna," and followed by a long silence. We may also hear, "Thank you for the light!" or "Thank you, Mary," when hearing about the Annunciation or the birth of Jesus. God dwelt in the temple. God dwells in our Church. God also lives in our home and is present among us. How do we help our child(ren) nourish their prayer life and see our home as an environment that is inhabited by God? It is noteworthy how the environment can transform us. To prepare the environment is to arrange it wisely so that it serves the development of the person.

## **Myrrh**

When a tree's bark is wounded, it secretes a resin. Myrrh gum, like frankincense, is such a resin. Myrrh resin has been used throughout history as a perfume, incense and for medical purposes. In the Bible, myrrh is mentioned as a rare perfume, and was mixed with aloe and used to wrap a body at the time of burial. It is known to heal cuts and other abrasions. As parents, it is painful and distressing for us to see our children hurt, whether it is a scraped knee, or their hurt feelings, or tears that come when they are tired and hungry. Our instinct is to take them in our arms and hold them close to us, to kiss and bandage the abrasion, and comfort them with all our heart. How do we share moments of healing in our home and among the hearts who reside there?

We offer our family healing actions of kindness and gentleness, and healing words of comfort and peace. We proclaim that the Kingdom of God is at hand, especially when we pray, "Thy Kingdom Come, Thy Will Be Done." We share with our family the good news that Jesus brings. He wanted us to know about His Kingdom. In the Bible we read that He healed every kind of illness, made the blind see, made the mute speak, the deaf to hear, made the lame and the paralyzed walk and He resurrected the dead. For our youngest children, it is enough to offer them love and to remind them how much God loves them, especially when they are hurting. And in His wisdom, God gives us the young child, who dwells in our household and in our heart, to offer us healing, and transform the environment of our home, and remind us what is most valuable and precious.