

The Epiphany: 1-6-19

At Christmas, this year I invited those who were present to participate in a different form of gift exchange for Christmas. In exchange for who and what God has given to us in the person of Jesus, give the gift of ourselves to Jesus in the form of our love, our total commitment to follow him, to do his will.

Today we celebrate an important gift exchange that has worldwide implications, and does lead us once again to look at how we give back in exchange for what God has given us in and through Jesus Christ.

On this Feast we call the Epiphany, we recognize the manifestation of God in the person of Jesus for the whole world. These three gifts of gold frankincense and myrrh, given by the Magi represent the hopes of the gentile world. And on reflection we see how they represent what God will do for us through Jesus.

The Magi were pagans or gentiles who apparently study the stars and the planets. They have no foreknowledge of the coming of a Messiah. Apparently, the unusual alignment of the stars and planets have by God's grace caused them to travel to Bethlehem in search of a newborn king of Israel.

With the aid of Jewish religious leaders, who seem rather indifferent to what is unfolding, and with the deceptive encouragement of the evil king Herod, who will be threatened by the prospect of another king, they are able to follow the unusual light called "the star of Bethlehem" to the birthplace of this king they had been searching for.

As Matthew proclaimed: “On entering the house, they saw the child with Mary his mother. They prostrated themselves and worshiped him.” And they present him with three significant gifts that tell us exactly what this newborn king will give to the world.

First: The Gold: Gold is the gift for a king. In the pagan tradition, no one ever approached a king without a gift. And gold the king of metals would have been a most fitting gift for this king.

And Jesus will be a king, but not a king who would rule by force or fear or military power. He would be a king that would rule the hearts of believers. He would rule with love, a love that would be given for the whole world from his throne, the cross.

The only fitting response to this king is to submit to his love. We submit to his will, which is to love each other as he has loved us. Mary said it best at the wedding feast when she told the wine stewards to “do whatever he tells you” We do whatever he tells us to do by giving our love to each other but especially by our care for the most vulnerable in our lives.

Second: Frankincense: This is a gift for the temple priest for it is in the temple that the fragrant aroma of frankincense accompanies the priest’s sacrifices.

Of course, Jesus would become the great high priest who will offer the one final sacrifice that will free us from any form of bondage or slavery that comes through sin. In ancient Rome, the Latin word for priest is Pontifex which means bridge-builder. Jesus would become a bridge builder between God and all of humanity.

The Exchange comes through the Mass where he gives us the opportunity to participate by offering ourselves up with him in Mass to the Father, and to receive the gift of his body and blood from which flows the grace to take up our crosses daily as his disciples. That is a holy exchange like no other.

Third Gift: Myrrh- is the gift for one who is to die. It was used in Jesus day to embalm the bodies of the dead. Jesus would die for us. And his death would be a gift to the world. For it would be followed by a Resurrection. Death would have no more power over him. The exchange. For those who would believe in him by following his ways, a life-giving exchange, Eternal life.

Let us give thanks for this feast of the Epiphany- our little Christmas – and the Holy gift exchange initiated by the Magi representing the gentile world. Three Gifts given to Jesus representing what Jesus would give to us and to the whole world.

Gold signifying a kingdom ruled by unconditional love

Frankincense signifying the great high priest who would offer the sacrifice of himself to open the way for us to God.

Myrrh: the gift of his death which followed by his Resurrection would open the door for us to eternal life.

Gospel Challenge:

What did you give to Jesus This Christmas? How has that gift come back to you?

For group discussion:

The Magi were led by a star to find Jesus. What opportunities is God giving you to lead someone to Jesus? How are you responding?