

If you were up late last night ringing in the New Year, you may be starting 2012 a little sleepy, but we've got an epiphany to help wake you up, in fact "The Epiphany:" Jesus as a light for the world, and for others, not just for ourselves.

The story of the Epiphany is surely one of the best loved stories in the Bible. We love it so much that, over the ages, we have added to it. The number of wise men has become fixed at three and we've given them names, Gaspar, Melchior, and Balthazar. We have seen them in great art, and met them in Church pageants and crèche scenes.

Who were these mysterious travelers? Were they astrologers? Proto-astronomers? Zoroastrian Priests? Kings? Or what? They are fellow travelers on our human journey, seeking God at the intersection of matter and spirit. They are finding God by reading nature through the lens of scripture. It is the ministry of the Church to help the perennial seeker to be found by the living God and to know the passionate heart of love that fired the sun and the stars, and set galaxies in their courses.

The Epiphany to the Magi happened once and for all but we are invited to present day epiphanies as scripture meets our world and our daily lives. The practice of concluding the public reading of scripture with the statement "Hear what the Spirit is saying to the Church" is both new and ancient, as we find it repeated many times in the Book of Revelation in the Bible. As readers and hearers of the Word, we are being invited to listen and discern what God is revealing about our world and ourselves today, not just in a distant place in a distant past, but right here, right now.

We love the Magi and we are fascinated by their treasures. One could think of more practical gifts for a little one and his parents: perhaps some clothes he could grow into, a stock of receiving blankets, little wipes and diapers, diapers, and more diapers! The three gifts of the Magi, gold, frankincense, and myrrh, have been traditionally understood as honoring Christ as King, Priest, and sacrificial Savior.

We follow in the footsteps of the Magi as we also honor Christ with our gifts. Canadian Evangelist and Anglican Priest Harold Percy once said that "ministry costs money, good ministry costs more." We give Christ the gold of our financial offering as we support the mission and ministry of his Church. But beyond our money gifts, giving Christ our gold implies offering him our best; for most of us the place that we will do that is out in the world; in our family circle, in our neighborhood, in our workplace and in the marketplace, in our volunteering. Our gold is our best effort to live our baptismal covenant: seeking and serving Christ in all persons, loving our neighbor as ourself; and striving for justice and peace among all people, and respecting the dignity of every human being.

The gift of frankincense speaks of holy worship. The times I have experienced incense in worship I found it to be a beautiful and fragrant symbol of prayer rising to God. However, given the number of people with breathing issues and allergies, it might be a good way to clear out the church. Offering to Christ our worship in common prayer is to be taken out of isolation into community as we break the bread and share the cup. To worship God in Christ is to be turned outward in his mission to the world.

After all, the story of the Magi is about Good News for outsiders, not just insiders. I believe that it was the great Archbishop of Canterbury Michael Ramsey who said that the Church was the only organization that exists for the sake of those who are not members. We must be careful that our pastoral care, our fellowship, our programs, and our worship are not only inward and for us, but are also focused outwards. As a follow up to our Vision Day with the Reverend Canon Peter Lackey we are invited to think about two things that we could do better here at St. Thomas', write them down and submit them for consideration. I would hope that many such suggestions will focus on our mission; that's why God planted a Church here in the first place.

The gift of myrrh is a sobering one to begin our New Year. Traditionally the gift of myrrh, an ointment used in burial, was understood as honoring Christ as the sacrificial savior, whose death and resurrection would bring life and hope to the world. We offer Christ our life and we offer him our death, trusting in his promise that nothing can separate us from his love. Whether we are young or old, it's never too early and never too late to consider our legacy, and to live the way we want to be remembered, not out of vain pride, but as an offering, like myrrh, to Christ.

I've been thinking about funerals lately, including my own, not because I have any premonitions about death, but because the Bishop asked the clergy to send him their wishes concerning their funeral. It is an act of caring to our loved ones to make prearrangements not only with the funeral home, but with the Church as well, and to make a copy and file it with your will. Sometimes people will say to me that they want to go as quietly as possible, no fuss and bother. The one question I would ask is how does your funeral witness to your faith and to God who created you and who receives you home. Even if you think that you are the poorest example of the Christian faith, that faith is truth and is your saving hope. Funerals are a comfort, strength, and witness to the living as well as thankful remembrance of the departed. It need not be expensive or elaborate, but for the Christian, it ought to witness to our faith and our hope.

The Magi returned to their own country by another way, not only to avoid Herod, but because they had been affected and changed by the Christ. As we begin this new year of 2012, may we be open to the ongoing inner change that is the Spirit's work in our lives as we journey along. And in one of the great hymns of the Church, may we be "changed from glory into glory, till in heaven we take our place, till we cast our crowns before thee, lost in wonder, love, and praise."