

Giving Up Treasure

And going into the house, they saw the child with Mary his mother, and they fell down and worshiped him. Then, opening their treasures, they offered him gifts, gold and frankincense and myrrh. Matthew 2:11

“Please be seated, as we worship the Lord with our offerings”. What do you think about as you pull out your wallet and place your offerings in the plate, or sign up for the automatic withdrawal program or write out a check to Our Saviour Lutheran Church? “What is my share as we seek to carry a budget?” How is the Church using my money? Will I cross the minimum threshold in offerings to receive a tax benefit this year? How much should be budget or non-budget specified offerings?

There’s nothing wrong with any such questions, especially as we seek to plan for the future year of offerings. After all, there is some thinking and decision making involved in planning one’s offerings. We are called to be good stewards. We are called to take on some responsibility as members of a congregation which includes some concern over how we spend money for the furtherance of the Kingdom. We are called to protect our families and ensure their financial welfare and so rightfully ask questions about taxation. All are legitimate questions. God’s Word says, “Each one must give as he has decided in his own heart”. We’re also counselled: “If anyone does not provide for his relatives, and especially for his immediate family, he has denied the faith and is worse than an unbeliever”(1 Timothy 5:8). All are legitimate issues and questions to be weighed and answered. But the first and foremost question is why? The first and foremost issue is one of motive. The Magi teach us something important about motive.

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Matthew 2:11*

The Magi saw the Child! The Christ was at the centre of their giving! This festival day is Epiphany. The Babe of Bethlehem is revealed as God, the splendour of the divine glory bursting through the humanity. And so we sing in the Introit, a compilation of verses from Psalm 24 and ancient liturgical text:

*Behold the Lord, the ruler has come,
And the kingdom and the power and the glory are in his hand.*

The Magi saw beyond all the earthly poverty of the Christ Child. Sure, he's no longer in the manger but a house. But sure isn't a palace. We know of the simplicity of the place by examining houses from that period. The recent archaeological discoveries at Nazareth tell us about the kind of homes that most people lived in. And the child Jesus was living as "most people". A few hundred square feet at best, most likely on an earthen floor.

But these Magi could see beyond it all to behold the divinity of the Christ. They also had to see past all previous expectations that he be born in a palace. They had an epiphany! God in flesh made manifest!

Our ability to give is directly related to our sharing in their epiphany. Can we find the humility of the Magi and seek Christ where we might not have expected him? Can we see beyond the outward circumstances that people find themselves in to see the true treasure? Can we see in the poor, the sick and the imprisoned, the Christ. For on the day of judgement Jesus says "Truly, I say to you, as you did it to one of the least of these my brothers, you did it to me." In seeing the Christ the why of our giving is answered. Is the Christ at the centre of our giving? Do we bow down and worship Him?

These Gentiles beheld the Christ. This was the focus of their trip and their giving. Their appreciation of the Christ is truly seen when we consider what it took for them to plan for and embark on the journey. Much is often made about the fact that once the Holy Family returned from Egypt, Jesus never travelled far from his home. People did not travel in those days. But these Magi deliberately set out on an arduous journey.

There are many fine theories as to the place these “magi from the East” came from. But it is sufficiently important for us to know that they came from afar. From Matthew 2 itself and Herod’s probing concerning the time when the Magi saw the star and his subsequent murder of the Baby boys of Bethlehem under 2 years old, we can surmise that reaching the Christ was a two year venture begun even before his birth.

We enlist in the army for 3 year stints. Well, the magi took on a two year one. And they, reputable persons all, would have left their safe, secure and comfortable court existence for travelling “hill and valley, field and fountain following yonder star”. Sometimes we can’t even make the commitment to spare the 2 or 3 hours it takes to travel here to meet Christ in the Sacrament. And that meeting, I assure you, is every bit as real as that experienced by the Magi and the shepherds. What is more, he gives us gifts of the forgiveness of sins, defeat of Satan and His Kingdom and Life Everlastingⁱ.

The Magi did not have as defined a faith as we do. But they acted on what little they did know. Certainly they knew he was the King. Certainly they learned of the prophecies concerning “A Saviour”. With scant details and the star alone, even a hint of significance was enough to get a real response: the gift of time; gold, frankincense and myrrh.

For us who know so much more, a greater response would be expected. Liturgically we live in the Christmas Season. Christ is still a Babe. But we also live in the year of our Lord 2010. We live in the time of fulfilment of those prophetic gifts: the exercise of His kingship foretold by gold, His Divine nature foretold by Frankincense, and His sacrificial nature foretold by myrrh. We do not have a star to follow but rather His sure and certain Word. “Your Word, O Lord is a Light unto my path and a Light to my feet”. We live in the strength of His Holy Spirit and the communion of saints. We have seen this most unique king of Kings reign. We have heard of his miracles whereby his diety shone forth. We have beheld the cross upon which Christ Sacrificed His life for us. We have heard of the pounds of myrrh with which his body was buried. We have the witnesses who saw the stone rolled away, his body risen from the dead, ascending into glory.

We have the clear promise of the resurrection.

We have stood to hear Him in His Word and have come and bow down before Him in the Sacrament. We claim to see him in the least of our brethren.

Therefore may we respond to such truth. May we lay before Him our greatest treasures. In Jesus’ name we pray.

Amen.

ⁱ Also consult [The Magi in the west and their search for the Christ : a tale for the Christmas tide](#) - Dewhurst, Frederic Eli, 1855-1906