

“Our presents to Jesus”

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Matthew 2.1-12
January 7, 2023.
Westby UMC

Today we celebrate the Epiphany, which is when the Lord manifests himself to the world to make himself known. The story we read today in Matthew is quite mysterious: Some wise men from the east, with knowledge of astronomy, travel a long distance. They arrive in Bethlehem guided by a star. They worship Jesus and give him three gifts: gold, frankincense, and myrrh. They then disappear from the biblical account as mysteriously as they appeared.

For some traditions this day is called “the day of the manifestation of Christ to the Gentiles.” So today we celebrate that Jesus manifests himself not only to the Jews, but to all the peoples of the earth.

We are all born into this world as totally helpless babies. We need to be fed, kept warm, and diapered. Those are also gifts that Joseph and Mary gave to Jesus. We assume that María was breastfeeding him. We assume José helped her if she had to change her diapers.

Although we don't remember it, those are gifts that all of us received when we were babies. We also receive, as gifts, a name and a nationality. And when we grew up, we received more gifts: the mother tongue, to be able to speak and communicate; and the opportunity to learn to read and write. Many of us also receive other important gifts from our parents: principles such as work, honesty, patience, generosity, wisdom. Those are gifts more valuable than gold.

There are other gifts that are more personal. Sometimes we call them gifts or talents, and we say they come from God. But they can also be talents we learned from our family. It may be the talent of knowing how to listen to and console those who suffer; For others, it is the gift of playing the guitar or singing. We have received all these talents to build our family; to share and to build the kingdom of God.

Have you ever noticed that giving gifts can have a contagious effect? If we grow up in a generous environment, we learn generosity. There are countless examples of people who received talents or gifts from God and, instead of hiding them or using them selfishly, they shared them with others. When that happens, there are many gifts that circulate freely and benefit many people. A society like that can transform the world!

On this day we recognize that we also receive a gift from God. The gift that God's promise is not only for the people of Israel, but for all the nations of the earth. And what did Paul do with that gift? Instead of hiding it, he shared it with everyone! That was his way of thanking God for the gift he had received. In that, Paul is a good example of following the teaching of Jesus.

In Matthew, chapter 5 verses 14 to 16, Jesus taught about what we should do with the light we receive: "You are the light of this world," Jesus says. "A city on top of a hill cannot be hidden. Nor do we light a lamp to put it under a drawer; Rather, he lifts it up so that it gives light to all who are in the house. In the same way, make sure that your light shines before the people, so that, seeing the good that you do, everyone may praise your Father who is in heaven.

Can we be Three Wise Men, you and I? What gifts can we give to Jesus?

One of the most famous songs of this era is the song of the Little Drummer. The song describes a boy who arrives in Bethlehem, the place where Jesus is, and sees the gifts that Jesus received. The Little Drummer Boy tells Jesus the following, from the Spanish tradition:

I would like to put at your feet,
some present that pleases you, Lord.
But you already know that I am poor too
and I only own an old drum.
In your honor in front of the portal I will play
with my drum.

Jesus does not ask us for gold or incense. But he is pleased when we use our gifts and talents, whatever they may be, to bless and brighten the lives of others. The Little

Drummer of the song gives a gift as valuable as gold when he plays his drum. And we give Jesus a gift as valuable as gold when we are kind to our neighbors, when we help those in need, when we have a word of comfort for those who are depressed or worried.

What Jesus taught us is that those gifts and those acts of service that we think we are giving to our neighbors, we are giving directly to Jesus. Every time we do an act of service, it is as if we were there in Bethlehem on Epiphany Day, kneeling before Jesus, giving him gifts alongside the wise men of the East.

Can we be Three Wise Men, you and I? What gifts can we give to Jesus?

Maybe, like the poor little drummer, we can offer him our hearts.