

## HOMILY – EPIPHANY “B” 1/7/18

In this last Sunday of the Christmas season, three mysterious figures take center stage. We know them as the Three Kings, the Wise Men, or the Magi. But in reality, we don't know a whole lot about them. What little we do, we learn from the account we just heard from the Gospel of Matthew. We are told they came from the east, but we do not know what country they came from. We hear they came to do homage to a new born King of the Jews but not sure why. We are not even sure there were three of them. We knew they brought gifts of gold, frankincense and myrrh but one of them could have brought two gifts, or a group of four or five could have chipped in for one.

We can be pretty sure that whoever they were or how many, they were not women. If they had been women, they would have asked for directions and arrived on time, helped deliver the baby, cleaned the stable, made a casserole, and brought useful gifts like diapers, instead of gold, frankincense and myrrh.

There are many lessons we could learn from the story of the Magi in today's Gospel. We could point to their courage for beginning the journey, for their perseverance in bringing it to completion, for their faith in seeking out the Christ child. But I would like to focus on the now – what gifts are we willing to give to Jesus in this New Year of 2018?

I read a wonderful story about a holy elderly woman. She was faithful in reading the Bible and she knew that the long awaited savior would be born in Bethlehem. She moved to David's city where she lived a simple life and prayed daily that God would let her know when the Savior was born. She wanted to offer as a gift all her humble possessions. One night while she was sleeping she heard a knock at her door, got up with her lamp in hand and opened the door.

To her surprise, there were three strangers with camels standing at the door. “The savior is born,” they announced, “and we have come from the east to worship him. We were told in a dream to stop here and bring you along with us. We have gifts to offer and we know that you do also.” The elderly woman was filled with joy and excitement. But it was late and cold and she told the three men she would bring her gifts in the morning. She carefully wrote down the exact directions she received from the three men. Early the next morning, she gathered her gifts, food, clothing and money. She followed the written directions but she arrived too late. The stable was empty. The holy family had left. She was upset at herself for not going the night before with the three men.

But she was a determined woman. “I'll keep looking for them, they must be nearby.” She asked everyone she met. Did you know of a child, of a poor child, perhaps to be found in a manger, perhaps even living on the streets? Some people knew of a poor

family who lived on the outskirts of the city. Other people knew of a young child who was sick. Others heard of strangers who were in town with no place to stay. The elderly woman visited them all. But she was never certain that these were the ones the three men told her about.

So she continued to look, week after week, month after month. She found many poor children everywhere. She found many a cradle, many a manger, and many a mother nursing her child. In each place she left a part of the gift that she was going to give to the Christ child. Here some food, to this family some money, to this child some clothes. In time all that she had was gone and she returned to her home empty handed.

That night Jesus appeared to her in a dream. "There you are, " she exclaimed, "I have been looking for you everywhere and could not find you. I had gifts to give you but now they are gone." "I know," said Jesus, "and I have received every one. For whatever you gave to the least of my brothers or sisters you gave to me." The old woman smiled. She was satisfied. She had not seen the Christ child in the manger, but she had lived his Gospel. We cannot go with the Magi to Bethlehem but we can offer Christ our gifts. Not gifts of Gold, Frankincense and Myrrh but gifts of respect, compassion, love and charity.

## **Closing story**

A man goes into an ice cream parlor and says, "I'd like two scoops of chocolate ice cream, please."

The girl behind the counter says, "I'm very sorry, sir, but our delivery truck broke down this morning. We're out of chocolate."

"In that case," the man says, "I'll have two scoops of chocolate ice cream."

"You don't understand, sir," the girl says. "We have no chocolate."

"Then just give me some chocolate," he says.

Getting angrier by the second, the girl says, "Sir, will you spell VAN, as in vanilla?"

The man says, "V-A-N."

"Now spell STRAW, as in strawberry."

"OK. S-T-R-A-W."

"Now," the girl says, "spell STINK, as in chocolate."

The man hesitates. Then he says. "There is no stink in chocolate."

"THAT'S WHAT I'VE BEEN TRYING TO TELL YOU!" she screams.