

Epiphany - Matthew 2:1-12

Noah was engaged in a conversation with God and asked, "Is it true that to You a million of our years is like a second?" God then responded, "Yes, Noah. Why do you ask?" Whereupon Noah said, "Since a million is such a small insignificant figure to You, may I have a million dollars to help me with this ship-building project?" God replied, "Of course, Noah, just a second!"

On this feast of the Epiphany we recall the visit of the three wise men, sometimes called the three Kings, to the Christ child. But if you listened very carefully to the gospel that was just proclaimed, you might have discovered something rather surprising.

The gospel passage (which is the only one that recounts this incident from Jesus' life) never tells us how many wise men there were. It simply says, "wise men from the East arrived one day in Jerusalem."

So, if the scriptures do not tell us how many wise men there were, why is it that we all are convinced that there were three? The answer to that question is not to be found in the scriptures, but rather in the Christian imagination.

Because as subsequent believers reflected upon this passage from scripture, they tried to fill in the details not given in the text. They noticed that at the end of the gospel, the Christ child is presented with three gifts: gold, frankincense, and myrrh. Consequently, Christians drew the conclusion: if there were three gifts, there were three wise men.

Now this is not the only possible conclusion. One of the wise men could have brought all three of the gifts. Or there could have been six or ten wise men with some bringing no gift at all. But the Christian imagination was consistent and clear: three gifts meant three wise men.

I think that conclusion was guided by the Holy Spirit. If we take it seriously, we can derive three lessons from today's gospel.

The first lesson is this: Every one of us has a gift to offer. Christians could have imagined that there were ten wise men and many of them came without bringing any gift. But they refused to accept the possibility of an empty-handed wise man.

This flowed from the faith conviction that God does not create gift-less people. Every person that God has made is a gifted person. **Every** person has something to offer.

So, if you're sitting here today and saying, "I can do this and that, but I really have nothing that is worthy of offering to God", you are wrong. This story invites you to think again. If you don't know what your gift is, find it. It is there. If you exist, you are gifted. That is simply the way that God makes people. Find your gift and claim it.

The second lesson moves in the opposite direction: No one of us has **all** the gifts. Christians could have imagined that one wise man gave all three gifts to the Christ child. But they rejected that possibility, because Christians know that gifts are spread throughout the community.

No one of us has them all. Therefore, we should not waste our time longing over other people's gifts. How often we do that! How often do we say, "I wish that I could be as intelligent as that person, or have that person's sense of humor, or that person's success, or that person's popularity"?

This story tells us, "Don't be jealous of other people's gifts. Claim your own gift and be satisfied." Accept the gift that was given to you. No one has all the gifts.

The third lesson is this: Every gift is **necessary**; every gift is important. The three gifts of the Wise Men were meant to describe the person of Christ. Gold indicated his kingship and authority as our Lord. Frankincense, his divinity as our God. Myrrh, his suffering as our Savior.

If any one of those gifts were missing, an incomplete picture of Christ would result. Therefore, each of those gifts had a purpose, and each of those gifts was necessary.

In the same way, any gift which God has given to us is necessary. Each person's gift is something that is important. It is only when every gift is used that the fullness of God's kingdom will emerge.

Three lessons from the three gifts of the three wise men: Each person has a gift to offer. No person has all the gifts. Each gift is necessary.

To these three let me add a fourth: Once you know that you are gifted, once you have located your gift and seen its importance, don't hide it. Do not keep it for yourself.

Be like the three kings and offer your gift in God's service. Be like the three wise men and give the gift that you have received to the One who is both Messiah and Lord.