Epiphany 2018

Isaiah 60 :1-6

Psalm 72

Ephesians 3:2-3,5-6

Matthew 2:1-12

The story of the three kings…

They were kings, so they are the one-percenters of their time. Yet they search. Why should search for some person from a third world country that the kings knew was a conquered people? Because they seek a king – another one-percenter. They check in with King Herod. Of course a mistake. But their search goes on. Guided by heavenly intercession, they finally arrive at the place of the new-born king. In a stable, no less. A place made royal by the presence of the Babe of Bethlehem.

In honor of this new king, they bring presents as homage. Expensive gifts no less. Frankincense a rare find used in incense (used by priests) and perfumes. Myrrh another rarity used for medicinal purposes and for the preparation of the body before burial. And of course gold, rare and expensive. All birthday presents fit for a king.

The consensus of theologians considers this story as a message that Jesus is not just for the Jews but also for the Gentiles – the nations at large. We heard that argument in our second reading from Ephesians. “…The Gentiles are coheirs, members of the same body, and copartners in the promise in Christ Jesus through the gospel.”

Our first reading reveals the effect of this new-born king on the People of God. “Rise up in splendor, Jerusalem! Your light has come, the glory of the Lord shines upon you.” All because of a baby born in a stable no less.

Anybody can walk into a stable. It is not a palace. There are no royal guards. Even lowly shepherds make their way in. According to another story, a little drummer boy comes to see the baby and the boy has nothing to give, not frankincense, myrrh, or gold, but all he had – his playing of his drum.

So let us approach the stable and for the baby let us bear our gifts.

Our frankincense is our willingness to worship. After all frankincense was used in religious services. So just by our being here at Mass, is a gift to the Babe of Bethlehem. Our myrrh is our willingness to give to him our promise to help people who are sick - because Myrrh is used to heal. Also we make sure, because Myrrh was used to prepare the dead for burial, that we see to it that our loved ones are given a suitable wake, a church funeral service, and a Christian burial even if the body is cremated. And our gift of gold is our money of course but what is as good as gold is giving of our talents and our time.

Would not the infant Jesus smile kindly at the presence of the shepherds, the gifts of the Magi, and our gifts of coming to Mass, healing (perhaps by giving blood), proper burial out of respect for our loved ones, and the offer of our money for charity, the offer of our talents to help our community, and the gift of our time given to Christian pursuits (like being part of our Blue Teams)?

One more thing. There are people out there searching for that new born king. That is wise of them and we know the way for them to go. Our young people are searching for spiritual fulfillment. They believe in God but know not our Jesus. For them, their belief is in a greater power. And they search for the Way, the Truth, and the Life. They shy away from us because we are organized religion. They see us cooped up in a sterile church; obeying outdated laws; and if they join up, they think they would go blind. Of course, we know better. We have been given the gift of Wisdom after all.

“So rise up in splendor, Jerusalem! Your light has come.” Show them the gifts you have to give – your frankincense, your myrrh, your gold. Let them know that as your present your gifts to the Babe of Bethlehem, you are willing to share these gifts with them. Show them you find refreshment, solace, and Christian community when you come to Mass. Show them that you respect your fellow church-goers because you visit them in hospitals and when the time comes you honor them with a Mass of Christian burial. Show them you support your church with your money, your talents, and your time because ‘church’ is important you. If you can share, “Raise your eyes and look about; they all gather and come to you: your sons from afar, and your daughters in the arms of their nurses.”

Amen. Let it be so.