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St. Margaret's Church
Christmas IIB – The Magi
January 4, 2009**

My wondering question this week.

What did Mary, Joseph and Jesus do with the gold, frankincense and myrrh?

Maybe they sold them to buy food for their flight into Egypt. Or maybe they regifted them and passed them off to the shepherds? Maybe Jesus had a bracelet made for his mother and used the frankincense to cover up the stench of the animals in the stable. Did they sell them on HolyLandeBay.com? Did they try to take them back for a store credit on the day after? Or because Jesus saves, did he just take them to his safety deposit box? Or did he have the gold made into a thurible so he could burn the frankincense and myrrh?

What did they do with the gifts?

The magi had brought those gifts a long way.

They were following a star to find their newborn king. It was leading them far from home. They did not know their final destination nor even what they would find there. It is a strange occurrence isn't it? It could only be a miracle that a star would move so that a group of people could follow it to one stable far far away.

After all, there is nothing in scripture that says there were only three of them. We have just made that up since there were only three gifts of gold, frankincense and myrrh. And of course we also have just made the assumption that they were kings. That comes from Psalm 72:10 "The kings of Tarshish and of the isles shall bring presents: the kings of Sheba and Seba shall offer gifts." But in fact they were magi, astrologers, magicians or sorcerers. But regardless, they probably travelled with a posse. Someone to take care of their animals, and their fancy outfits. And surely there were some women magicians somewhere.

But anyway, you have to wonder what they thought when they got to that place where Jesus had been born. I doubt that it was what they expected. No fancy decorations. Their turbans hit the header of the door when they tried to get a glimpse of the new baby. They dragged their coats in the animal stuff. It didn't smell like their own sweet perfume and there was no royal banquet meal to welcome them. And yet they already felt like they were home.

Let's use their legendary names Caspar, who is old and semitic, Melchior, middle-aged and European, Balthasar is young and African. I have to imagine that Joseph pushed the sheep and goats out from in front of the manger so that they could see. Caspar went first and got very close. Mary lifted Jesus up out of the straw and gently laid him in Melchior's arms. Balthasar tied up the camels and started unpacking the gifts. The innkeeper and his wife did their best to scrounge up something for them to eat calling the neighbors to come and see once again another weird appearance by strangers dressed in fine clothes.

Mary and Joseph welcomed the magi into their new home and the magi bowed down and worshiped Jesus the Christ. They followed the star to find their king and they paid him homage. It was all they could do. They laid their gifts before him and knelt down and worshiped him. They couldn't help it. They were overwhelmed with joy.

They had been in search of the newborn king. They had read the scriptures and had followed. They had heard the message and they acted. They went on the journey. And they found Jesus there. And they worshiped him.

It is the first instance of worship in Matthew's gospel. Worship is the fourth gift the magi gave to Jesus in response to the gift he had given them. Epiphany means revelation, the gift of the manifestation of God among us. We are entering this season when as Christians we celebrate Christ coming into the world. It begins with some foreign magi from the East and spreads to every corner of the world.

So what is the gift of our Christian worship all about? Our worship of God in Christ is a gracious wonder, the awe and adoration of the best gift we ever received. In our worship we engage with the presence of Christ, the incarnate God among us, Emmanuel.

And all we can do is worship him. We do it here in this sacred space. That's what you think of when I say worship right? We read and we pray and we sing and we confess and we break bread together. We praise the name of Jesus and give him all the glory and laud and honor. We bring our best here to this place and strive to have excellence in worship.

But we sell ourselves short and we sell Jesus short if we think our worship ends here. This is only an hour or two of our week. If we only define worship as what we do in our religious services, we are denying what the mystery of God among us is all about. The sacred is not only here in this place. If worship is an engagement with the sacred, then we must surely expand our understanding of what we do the rest of the week, for the sacred is all around us.

The sacred is also about the loving redemptive power in God human history. In our worship we give thanks for that mystery that God could love us so much. And so we are called not to just put forward our needs and our wants but rather to respond with gratitude for the gift of the presence of God among us.

And if God is among us all the time, shouldn't we then worship in all that we do? Shouldn't we respond to that presence when making decisions at work? Shouldn't we respond to that presence when making decisions about raising our children? Shouldn't we respond to that presence when making decisions with our money and our time?

Of course we should, but I wonder how many of us do that every day. How often do you think gift thanks for the presence of Christ with you as are stuck in traffic on Route 50 or West Street? How often do you think about worshiping the newborn King in the midst of the grocery store or in a business meeting or when you're teaching school? It is the challenge of this story isn't it? It is the challenge of the gift of Jesus Christ we have chosen to receive.

It is not just a one-time hour long gift but rather a life-long journey. At times it seems we will never make it there. At times it seems that the star keeps moving farther and farther away. At times the camels don't seem to be walking fast enough. At times the sand dunes and thirst will overwhelm us. But the light still shines, and the darkness will never be able to overcome it.

All we have to do is keep on following that light. For we know that in that light is the Christ. The one who has come to save us all. The one who gives us the gifts we have and the one

to whom all glory, laud and honor belong. All we have to do is stay on the journey and offer our gratitude, our adoration and our gifts.

I don't know what Mary and Joseph and Jesus did with those gifts. But I have a feeling that they didn't keep them for themselves. I have a feeling that Jesus transformed them. He used them for good in some mysterious way. He gave them away, or helped someone in need. Maybe Jesus gave them to the innkeeper to keep in a trust for the homeless of Bethlehem. Maybe he used the myrrh for one of his miraculous healings. I don't just feel that's what Jesus did, I know it.

Because the magi were changed by the gift of the presence of the Christ child. That presence even changed the dreams of the magi. Their worship transformed them and they knew to go home a different way. They were changed forever, and they couldn't help but respond to that change in their hearts.

Because Jesus transforms all of our gifts. When we offer up our gift of worship without strings attached, God heaps grace upon them and turns them into blessings. So this week let's make a covenant with one another to do just that. In all that we do this week, let's worship God together, not just for the next few minutes but for the next 6 days. Let's remember we're on this journey toward Christ together. Offer up your praise and your work and your time with one another to God, no strings attached. And let's see what God can do with it. And maybe, just maybe, God will show us a different grace-filled way home.