

Acknowledgement

Gifts of Christmas: Part 2 “Blessings”

Rev. Cameron D St. Michael – December 27th, 2020

Epiphany Sunday

Readings: Matthew 2:1-12

Reflection: Psalm 72:1-7, 10-14

Greeting: So we have the prophetic message more fully confirmed. You will do well to be attentive to this, as to a lamp shining in a dark place, until the day dawns and the morning star rises in your hearts.

Prayer: Everlasting God, the radiance of faithful souls, you brought the nations to your light and kings to the brightness of your rising. Fill the world with your glory, and show yourself to all the nations; through him who is the true light and the bright morning star, even Jesus Christ your son our Lord. Amen.

Reflection: Psalm 72

Give the king your justice, O God, and your righteousness to a king's son. May he judge your people with righteousness, and your poor with justice. May the mountains yield prosperity for the people, and the hills, in righteousness. May he defend the cause of the poor of the people, give deliverance to the needy, and crush the oppressor. May he live while the sun endures, and as long as the moon, throughout all generations. May he be like rain that falls on the mown grass, like showers that water the earth. In his days may righteousness flourish and peace abound, until the moon is no more. May the kings of Tarshish and of the isles render him tribute, may the kings of Sheba and Seba bring gifts. May all kings fall down before him, all nations give him service. For he delivers the needy when they call, the poor and those who have no helper. He has pity on the weak and the needy, and saves the lives of the needy. From oppression and violence he redeems their life; and precious is their blood in his sight.

(Psalm 72:1-7, 10-14 NRSV)*

We read the words of Psalm 72 and hear of honoring God for all that he has done. About kings coming to give gifts to recognize God's greatness. We hear about all of the ways that God delivers those in need. Which rescuing act of God do you relate to the most? Which one is hardest for you to imagine? How do you celebrate and acknowledge God's presence in your life? Do you give thanks for all that God has done for you? How do you share God's grace and love with others? Do we treat others in a way that honors God? Do we have mercy in the same way that God has mercy on us? How can we do more to show God's love?

Prayer: Oh Lord, help us to celebrate the birth of our Savior. Let us remember all the good that has come and all that is yet to come. Help us to remember promises made and promises kept. Help us to trust in your steadfast love. Let us acknowledge your role in our lives as we acknowledge the community you have built for us. Through Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen.

Now let the words of our mouths, and the meditations of our hearts be acceptable in your sight, O Lord, our Rock and our Redeemer. Amen.

Sermon:

Our scripture reading for today comes from the New Revised Standard Version Bible. Our reading is from Matthew chapter 2, verses 1 through 12.

In the time of King Herod, after Jesus was born in Bethlehem of Judea, wise men from the East came to Jerusalem, asking, "Where is the child who has been born king of the Jews? For we observed his star at its rising, and have come to pay him homage." When King Herod heard this, he was frightened, and all Jerusalem with him; and calling together all the chief priests and scribes of the people, he inquired of them where the Messiah was to be born. They told him, "In Bethlehem of Judea; for so it has been written by the prophet: 'And you, Bethlehem, in the land of Judah, are by no means least among the rulers of Judah; for from you shall come a ruler who is to shepherd my people Israel.'" Then Herod secretly called for the wise men and learned from them the exact time when the star had appeared. Then he sent them to Bethlehem, saying, "Go and search diligently for the child; and when you have found him, bring me word so that I may also go and pay him homage." When they had heard the king, they set out; and there, ahead of them, went the star that they had seen at its rising, until it stopped over the place where the child was. When they saw that the star had stopped, they were overwhelmed with joy. On entering the house, they saw the child with Mary his mother; and they knelt down and paid him homage. Then, opening their treasure chests, they offered him gifts of gold, frankincense, and myrrh. And having been warned in a dream not to return to Herod, they left for their own country by another road.
(Matthew 2:1-12 NRSV*)

This is the word of God for the people of God. Thanks be to God.

So, as we are moving ahead and coming really to the close of the Christmas season with Epiphany, we look today at the visit of the three wisemen. And focusing in on the reading for today was tricky because there's always a lot going on in the story. And so, there's a lot of things to see. But in this series about Christmas gifts, I wanted to look at the gift that they gave of acknowledgment. And I think it's important to recognize it because there's something to be said for the entire trip they made. That we often think about the physical gifts that they gave. And, you know, it appears in song it is the entire reason that we talk about "three" is because of the three gifts. We don't have anything to say that there were only three wisemen, but it's convenient when we discuss it. What I was thinking about as I was reading our scripture for this week, is that they traveled really long way on a great chance. Because they were looking to pay homage to a newborn king. When they bring the gifts they the first thing that they do is they kneel down and they pay homage, and then they open their chests and they offer him gifts

of gold, frankincense, and myrrh. All gifts fitting for a king. And it's because they want to convey the honor and the understanding that they followed this star, and they traveled all this way so that they could pay homage to this newborn leader.

It's interesting because it opened up this idea being that of one of the gifts that we can give is the acknowledgment of others and their role in our lives. I think it's an important thing for us to think about as we come away from Christmas, because we think about all the gifts that we give and all the things that we do. But I think in this crazy year that we've had, coming into a brand new year, I think it's important for us to acknowledge the people in our lives that help us to be the followers of Christ that we aim to be. And it's important because when we acknowledge the way that we influence each other, it gives us a greater understanding of our relationship to each other and a greater understanding of our relationship to Christ. Because if we aren't willing to acknowledge each other and we aren't willing to acknowledge the things that influence us, it's hard for us to acknowledge the full extent that God plays in our lives. For me, it's this concept that these guys traveled a great distance and who knows how long. We don't know exactly when they showed up. Just that they observed the star at its rising and they traveled to pay him homage. They want to be able to go and say we know who you are, and we acknowledge the role that you will play. And we want to give you gifts that recognize who you are. And that says a lot to me. Because we can give gifts of all sorts of kinds, and it may not mean anything. But in this case, I think it's what those gifts represent for these visitors, coming to see the newborn king of the Jews, to see Christ. That they want to be able to go and honor him by recognizing who he is, and what he means.

I think it's important that we be able to do the same thing, not only in the way that we recognize the role that Christ plays in our lives, but by recognizing those around us that help us to serve Christ better. That we have those people that give us the emotional support that we need, the physical support that we need, the spiritual support that we need. That we have people in our lives that listen when we need to be heard. That we have people that we can lean on. That we have people that we can talk to. But if we don't acknowledge them as that, we can take advantage of it and lose it. And when we lose those connections, we lose a connection with Christ because it's through each other that we truly experience Christ in our lives. And so, when we give that gift of acknowledgement, we're also recognizing the importance other people play in our lives. And at the same time, we recognize the importance of God at the center of all of it. Because we can claim to recognize Christ all we want, but if we cannot recognize the people that God has put into our lives to help us, we're missing part of that picture. Some might say Christ has always got to be the focus, has got to be the center. And yes, that is true, but if we let that become too center focused we miss everything around it that connects us to Christ. If we focus everything on recognizing Christ alone, then we don't recognize the people that give us the spiritual support we need to be able to keep our faith strong and healthy. If we don't recognize the people that are a support to us in a time of need, then we fail to recognize the way that Christ would expect us to act. It's when we reflect Christ,

and we see Christ reflected in others that we get the full picture. And that comes from recognizing the role that others play and it comes from recognizing how we are put together as a community, especially after a year that has been very isolating in so many ways. We start a new year with a new hope. And I think it's important that if we are going to start with a new hope that we also start with a gesture of recognizing the people that have helped us to get through this last year. Send a card. Say thank you. Give someone a call and mention to them how important they have been in your life, and that you are thankful to God that they are in your life. Acknowledge the gift that they give to you by giving them the gift of recognition. Because it is important for each and every one of us to recognize and be recognized, to acknowledge and be acknowledged. That we are part of God's creation, that we are part of that family in Christ. That when we acknowledge each other in love and compassion and mercy, we are acknowledging the role that Christ plays in our life, to help us to be people of love and compassion and mercy. Because it helps us to be the people who are grateful for all that we have. A people who are thankful for all that has been done for us. It helps us to be people who are stronger in our faith because we recognize each other and the role that we play. And we recognize Christ's role in all of it.

So, in this new year, instead of looking back on all the things that could have been and worrying about all the things that still may not be, what a stop to recognize and think those around us that have helped. From up close or from a distance. Family. Friends. The person that you always see at the store that is always willing to help you get the things you need. The person who delivers your mail. Anyone in your life that makes a difference in some way. Acknowledge the difference that they make. And you'll find that it's easier to see Christ in action in the world around us when you do. And with that our faith grows, because we recognize all the little things and all the big things. We help people to recognize when they think maybe no one else notices, that we acknowledge their value. And I think that's the key. Those wise men showed up to recognize the value of the life that had been born into this world. The potential. The greatness. So, they did something to show it. Let us be a people of action that we may honor the people in our lives that have helped us to be better disciples of Christ. Let us acknowledge the people that have helped us to grow in a deeper relationship with God the Father. Let us show how the spirit connects us and helps us to grow together. So that we may be of the body of Christ, redeemed by the blood, and that we may remember his birth into this world to give us hope. To bring us together in love. And let us acknowledge that gift by giving each other the gifts of love and hope. May we begin this year by taking that step, that we may grow even closer together and closer to Christ. May this be a year of hope and joy for us all. Amen.

Prayer of Confession and Pardon: Almighty and all-loving God, through your Son Jesus Christ you have reconciled the world to yourself. Help us now to be reconciled with one another, that again we might dwell in the warmth of your love. Inspire us with your Holy Spirit to put aside the cloak of pride and put on Christ, that we might forgive and be forgiven; through Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen.

Offering: If you are so moved to make an offering, you may send it to the church treasurer, or you may send it to the PO Box listed below. We are still the church, and the church still needs your support to keep doing all the important work that we do.

Lord's Prayer

Dismissal with Blessing: May the God of hope fill you with all joy and peace in believing, so that you may abound in hope by the power of the Holy Spirit. Amen.

Prayer List

Rev Charliam Renner	Bishop Frank Beard	Our Conference	Our Healthcare Workers
Angie Veach	Diane Washburn	Eric Veach	Cathy Devall
Brock McMorris	Ed & Verna Titus	Hayden Kanizer	Henry Catey
Jake Kiser	Laura Eubank Allison	Cindy Cisney	Patti Corder & Crew
Nancy Hoke	Don Wells	Tricia Adkins	Ronnie & Elaine Carlen
Don Stewart	Anne Winkler Heinrichs		Michael & Makenzie Reynolds
Ronnie Winstead	John Millsap	Annie McMorris	Dwight Parsons
Trinity Powers	Richard Durham	Kathy Hanks	Nora Werner & Family
Wayne Carrell	Gary & Mary Winterrowd	Family of Lois Woolever	Mary White
Nick Nichols	Leo Smith	Bonnie Hite	Greg Williams
Eloise Buffenmeyer	Martha Roberts	Charlie & Charlotte Baxter	Paul Schulte
Kim Hennes	Residents of the Greenup Nursing Center		

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Our Current Series – Gifts of Christmas

Our series for the Christmas season is all about the gifts we give and receive.

December 27th – *Blessings* – How can we bless others with our words?

January 3rd – *Acknowledgement* – What does it say when we acknowledge others?

January 10th – *The Spirit* – The Holy Spirit is a gift we both give and receive.