

The Epiphany - A Feast of Stewardship

By Lance Ousley

The Feast of the Epiphany is a rich opportunity for the Church to respond in this season of giving with a message that travels “by another way” than the surrounding culture. The story of the visit of the Magi to the Christ child found in Matthew 2 is wrought with the imagery of the secular culture and our holy response to that culture. It offers us preaching and teaching points in so many areas of Christian stewardship, as well as an occasion for creative events to form stewards across all generations.

The idea that foreign royalty, whether kings or their priestly magi, have come to pay homage to this poor infant king born in a backwater town a few miles outside Jerusalem shakes up our cultural norms of wealth and power. And this idea shouldn't be glossed over. The message of God's approachable Grace presented to the world as a gift in the incarnate form of a vulnerable child speaks volumes about God's sacrificial desire to be with us.



In the midst of this love-enfleshed we should not forget that the gentile visitors from afar also brought gifts to lay at the feet of the divine Presence. These gifts from secular sources collectively represent the recognition of Jesus' kingship of the world. And this giving gives us a great point to make in what the Church says and how we live it out faithfully by offering our gifts in recognition of Jesus as the king of our lives. The variety of gifts brought suggests that we are to bring our various gifts to Jesus for the good of his Kingdom: our time, our God-given abilities and our financial and material resources.

The Epiphany as the revelation of Jesus to the gentile world gives us the opportunity to design both liturgies and events that seek to shine the light of Christ on the world outside

the Church through Outreach projects and community events. Some churches celebrate the Epiphany with communal gatherings designed to collect goods for the local food pantry tying into Jesus' statement later in the Gospel of Matthew, "Whenever you do this to the least of one of these, you do it unto me" (Mt. 25:41). Others gather cut Christmas trees and garlands for recycling into mulch while using a portion for a Burning of the Greens service. This event is a gift to the community because it keeps the trees out of landfills, making a statement for environmental stewardship.

Other very important gifts we can emphasize at Epiphany are the gifts of ministry we bring to the Christ child. As the Sunday celebration of the Epiphany often falls on the Sunday designated for the Feast of the Baptism of our Lord, the link with our own baptismal gifts can be made and celebrated as gifts for Christ's kingdom. This can be reinforced with by offering an opportunity for designated giving for ministries in our churches in honor of those who serve in those ministries.

The Epiphany also represents our stewardship of the outcast, characterized by the foreign kings' visitation to the Christ child exhibiting Jesus' all encompassing grace. It informs our stewardship of all people inspiring our mission to welcome all into the community of faith and our baptismal promise to respect the dignity of every human being. This can be a strong teaching point and can be utilized for a special event to meet the needs of the homeless or have an interfaith dialog.

So while celebrating the Epiphany do not neglect to mine the depths of this feast of stewardship to shape faithful generosity in our churches for Christ's kingdom! Use your creativity and see what rich gifts you have to bring to the Christ child!