



HOMILY by Father Robbie Low

The Epiphany of the Lord

What can I give him?

Readings: Isaiah 60: 1-6, Ps 71, Ephesians 3: 2-3, 5-6, Matthew 2: 1-12

In my old parish, in addition to the regular masses, once a month we would have a late morning service aimed at those who didn't come to church, didn't know the Faith but wanted to find out. It was one of our more productive pieces of evangelism. Never less than a hundred in the congregation, often over two hundred came to worship and learn about Jesus.

The Epiphany service was one of the most moving. At the point in the service where the Gospel of the Magi had been read there was a silence.

A solitary tenor voice, Darryl, our converted rock band singer, began the anthem, 'Three Kings from Persian lands afar to Jordan follow the pointing star'. As the haunting music weaves the journey of the Magi, something unusual is to be seen slowly entering the upper sanctuary. It is Mary and Joseph and the baby. But this is no children's nativity. Mary is a fully grown woman and Joseph is her husband. The baby too is no doll.

Each year this honour would go to the youngest baby in our congregation and the parents.

As Mary takes her place in the seat on the sanctuary steps, one becomes aware of a slow and majestic procession, up all three aisles, of the gorgeously robed Magi, played by men from the congregation and drawn by lot. One by one they kneel before the babe in the arms of Mary and, having offered their sumptuous gifts, bow and depart by another way. Simple and maybe it sounds prosaic recounted in mere words but there was more going on than I have been able to describe.

It is true that the new little family would always remember the privilege of their part in the day but the real effect was, I can tell you, on the men who played the Magi.

They were almost always reluctant to dress up – a good sign in my view. They would tell you that they had never acted before/ wouldn't do it well/ would be embarrassed/ weren't worthy/ better to choose somebody else. We rehearsed them, prayed with them and instructed them simply. 'You are coming to kneel before the King of Kings and the gift you bring in your hands and lay at His feet is your life – everything you were and are and will be.' It is difficult to describe the change that came over these ordinary men in the simple act or to quantify the change that came over them in their faith. But every single one of them would come later, quietly, in a private moment and testify to the power of that simple spiritual exercise.

So may I commend it to you because 'You too are coming to kneel before the King of Kings and the gift you bring in your hands and lay at His feet is your life – everything you were and are and will be.'

Here there will be no tenor solo, no solemn procession to the manger, no newborn happy family or royal robes. But we have come and we are coming to Christ. We are to bring the same gifts. We do not have gold, the sign of kingship, but we offer our autonomy, our self rule to His transforming and transfiguring rule. We offer all that we have been blessed with for, as St. Augustine reminds us, 'what do we have that we were not given?'

We have no supply of frankincense but we have the incense of our prayer and priesthood, for, in Christ we are, as Christians, all the royal priesthood of the world, our task to intercede and lead mankind back to reconciliation with the Father.

Few of us have even seen myrrh but we can offer the myrrh of our death. Our daily self examination is to recall us to our mortality and the question of how we have spent the precious gift of this life in His service. Before the Lord of all we offer our living and our dying, knowing that He has known both the life and death of Man and raised us into eternity.

So, let us follow the exhortation of the final verse of the anthem as we come to the Christ child today:

*Thou child of man, lo, to Bethlehem
The Kings are travelling, travel with them!
The star of mercy, the star of grace,
Shall lead thy heart to its resting place.
Gold, incense, myrrh thou canst not bring;
Offer thy heart to the infant King.*