

Pastor's Column

Gifts of the Magi

Today we celebrate the Feast of the Epiphany. This day celebrates the manifestation of the infant Jesus as the one given by God not just to and for the Jews, but for the entire human race. The celebration of Epiphany actually predates the celebration of Christmas by several hundred years.

The astrologers who have traveled from the East are non-Jews and the “intelligentsia” of that day and time. Yet, they find their way to Bethlehem and to the “babe wrapped in swaddling clothes” and along with poor Jewish shepherds, worship the One sent by God.

These “Wise Men” offer gifts of gold, frankincense, and myrrh, gifts that already in this infancy narrative (Matthew 2) foretell who this Jesus is, and what will happen to him.

GOLD is the gift given to royalty. He is King and God!

The Hebrew word for incense is derived from a verb meaning “to cause to smoke” and is used to denote the smoke from a sacrifice burnt on the altar (1 Samuel 2:15-16; Psalms 66:15). There were two types of incense; one consisted entirely of frankincense (Leviticus 2:1, 15) and was used in conjunction with certain meal offerings. The incense of FRANKINCENSE, together with a handful of fine flour mixed with oil, was offered on the outer altar of the sanctuary.

Frankincense was also an ingredient of the offering of the showbread (Leviticus 24:7). This Jesus will be sacrificed and will be offered up on our behalf and is bread for us!

The use of scents and ointments was very necessary in the primitive hygienic conditions of the ancient world. In private life, perfumes and spices were used as ingredients in perfumed oils,

ointments, and powders for cosmetic purposes, to protect the skin from the heat of the sun and the dry air, and in medicine. No less important was the role they played in the religious rituals of the ancient Near East.

MYRRH was one of the most important perfumes in biblical times. It was used in the preparation of the oil with which kings were anointed (Exodus 30:23-24). It was a precious gift and much used by women (Proverbs 7:17; Esther 2:12; Song of Songs 4:14). Together with aloe it was used in preparing Jesus' body for burial (John 19:39).

Myrrh is extracted by means of incisions in the bark of a small tree that grows in tropical Africa and Arabia.

This Jesus who is King, God, and “Bread For Us” will be sacrificed and will die for us!

On this Feast of the Epiphany, we celebrate the manifestation of Jesus to the world as God's gift of love to us. In the life, death, and resurrection of Jesus, God shows us how completely we are loved: “In this way the love of God was revealed to us: God sent his only Son into the world so that we might have life through him. In this is love: not that we have loved God, but that he loved us and sent his Son as expiation for our sins. Beloved, if God so loved us, we also must love one another.” (1 John 4:9-11)

The gift given to us is meant to be shared with others! Happy Epiphany!

F. Mike