

CONNECT! SUNDAY REFLECTION

The Epiphany of the Lord | For Sunday, January 6th, 2019

Give Your Best Gifts to Christ

Written by Br. John Marmion-Villa, BSC

Isaiah 60:1-6

Ephesians 3:2-3a, 5-6

Matthew 2:1-12



I remember it like it was yesterday: I was sitting in a college conference room with about 250 other young people for a week-long summer retreat. Each day, the staff had put on a comedic skit that had a recurring set of characters: they were pirates in search of their treasure. With each episode, these young adults, dressed in outlandish costumes, acted the part of wandering pirates who find their treasure. In their excitement, they bring their find to the captain and are excited to open up the box to show him what they've found: gold, fame and popularity, wealth and security. The captain deciphers that what was presented is not the treasure they were looking for.

But on the fourth day, when the pirates open their treasure before the captain, they held up a large wooden crucifix! The worship team was cued in at just the right moment: this was the greatest treasure to behold! After 21 years of growing up Catholic, I had finally found the treasure of the crucified Jesus who died on the cross for me. I sang my heart out like never before! I got it ... or so I thought.

Fast forward 25 years. This notion of "finding the treasure" has been a key element in my spiritual journey ... probably yours, too. But somewhere along the way, something changed. It went from trying to find the treasure "out there" to trying to find the treasure "in here" — meaning, in my heart.

I have often reflected on the gifts that the magi brought to the Christ Child. They probably had been looking for this Christ Child longer than I have! And as soon as they got an inkling that their lifelong search might not have been an extended effort in futility, they set out on their journey across the desert. In essence, they brought the very best of what they have — their years of dedicated study and research and gifts befitting the long-awaited Messiah — to give to the infant.

But oftentimes, the very best of what I have to offer this same Christ Child is not always noteworthy. Instead of gold to offer a king, I have aspirations of self-promotion at the expense of others. Instead of frankincense to offer the priest, I have the selfishness of appeasing my desire for pleasure and comfort. Instead of myrrh to offer the prophet, I have negative and sarcastic

speech and thought patterns. None of these seem appropriate for the baby.

The consumerist in me thinks that I need to find a great online sale for the perfect gift for that special someone. The humanist in me thinks that I have to attend the best Christmas party where the food and merriment are in abundance. The skeptic in me wants to live vicariously through someone else's journey instead of going on the journey myself — kind of like King Herod. These seem more appropriate gifts to give, right?

In reality, while I know that my treasure chest (my heart) is not ideal, it is what I have. I wish it were another way, but it is not. I am reminded that Jesus' birth is part of a divine plan of redemption, or as St. Athanasius describes it, the rebirth and recreation of the soul in the image of God ("On the Incarnation," 14). In one sense, the warped treasure chest that I have is the initial reason that there's a Christ Child in the first place! There's a marvelous exchange about to happen. If I can only learn to open my treasure chest to this Child, I can receive more than I offer: my tattered human life for his unfathomable divine life!

It can sound like religious rhetoric that so many of us have heard time and again. It all sounds too good to be true ... until that "aha!" moment when you suddenly realize in your heart what your ears have heard for years: this helpless and innocent infant is the King, the fulfillment of all our human desires and aspirations. Then, worship is the only proper response ... just like the magi who opened their treasures and did him homage.

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PRAYER

Lord Jesus, Word Incarnate,
I believe that you are God, begotten of God.
I do not behold your divinity,
but because your Father has told me,
"This is my beloved Son,"
I believe it.
And because I believe it,
I wish to submit myself to you entirely —
body, soul, judgements, will, heart, feelings, imagination,
all my energies.
I wish you to be my leader,
your Gospel to be my light,
your will to be my guide.
I wish to think of you alone
because you are Infallible Truth.
I wish not to act outside of you
because you are the one way of going to the Father;
not to seek my joy outside your will
because you are the very source of life.
Possess me entirely,
through your Spirit,
for the glory of your Father. Amen.

—*from Bl. Columba Marmion*