

**Epiphany**  
**January 2020**  
**Epiphany Gifts by Ron Pietz**

On this feast of the Epiphany we celebrate the visit to the Christ child by the Magi, sometimes called the three kings or the three wise men. However, today's gospel does not really tell us how many Magi there were. It simply says, "Magi from the East arrived in Jerusalem."

So, if the scriptures do not tell us how many there were, why is it that we believe there were three? The answer cannot be found in the scriptures, but rather in the imagination of early Christians. As they reflected on this passage from Matthew, they noted that the Christ child was offered gifts of gold, frankincense, and myrrh. Consequently they concluded that if there were three gifts, there were three givers.

Of course this is not the only possible conclusion. There could have been just two wise men, with one of them bringing two gifts and the other one bringing just one. Or there could have been more than three with some having no gift at all. But the imagination of those early believers was consistent and clear: three gifts meant three givers. And I think that is a smart conclusion for a number of reasons.

The first reason is this: Every person, indeed every one of us, has a gift to offer to God. The early Christians could have imagined that there were ten wise men with many of them bringing nothing at all. But they refused to accept the possibility of a person without a gift to give. This faith flowed from the conviction that God creates all people with certain gifts, certain talents, certain skills. Every person has something to offer.

So, if you are sitting here today and thinking, "I really don't have anything that is worthy of offering to God," you are wrong. Today's gospel reading invites you to think again. If you don't know what your gift is, find it. It's there. You've got one. If you exist, you are gifted. That's simply the way we are created. Find your gift and claim it.

Having a gift or a talent does not necessarily mean having some outstanding skill or ability. For example, the knowledge or skills you have in what you do for a living is a gift. If you are retired, the additional time you have is a gift. Some particular hobby or interest you have is a gift. Your faith and your ability to pray for people who are in need, is a gift. Even the willingness to run the dishwasher or clean tables at a parish dinner is a gift.

So you see, all of us have gifts to offer, no matter how humble.

The second thing we learn from today's gospel is that while everyone has some gifts, no one of us has them all. The early Christians could have imagined that one wise man gave all three gifts to the Christ child. But they rejected that possibility because those first believers knew that gifts are spread throughout the Christian community. No one of us has them all.

I know that is true in my own life. There are some things I do well, and there are other things I do very poorly. And I am sure the same thing is true for you. Humility is being able to acknowledge and accept the truth of both of these facts. And we should not waste our time envying how other

people are gifted. The Magi story tells us: don't be jealous of what other people have. Accept what God has given you and be grateful.

The third lesson in all of this is: Every gift is necessary, each is important - there is no such thing as a second-rate gift. What each of the Magi gave had a purpose and each one was necessary. The gold indicated the Christ child's kingship; the frankincense was a sign of his divinity; and the myrrh, which is a spice used to anoint the dead, foretold his suffering. If any one of those gifts was missing, an incomplete picture of Christ would result.

In the same way, any gift that God has given to us is necessary, every blessing is something that God considers important, and should be used for the good of someone else.

I would like to share a story with you if you still doubt you have something to offer.

- There once was a king who wanted to know which of his three sons was the wisest and best qualified to succeed him as king. So he devised a test.
- He took his oldest son on a daylong hike. But at noon, the king said, "I feel tired. How can we shorten our trip home?" The son replied, "Father, we came by the shortest route possible. We cannot shorten it."
- Later, the King took his second son on the same trip. At noon, he asked the same question. The son replied, "Father we came by the shortest route possible. We cannot shorten it." Finally, the king took his youngest son on the same trip, and at noon said he was tired and asked if there was a shorter route home. The son replied, "Let me think about that. Meanwhile let's start back."
- Soon the son said, "Father tell me about the enjoyable times you had with your friends as you walked along this same road when you were my age. The king began telling story after story. He got so involved in recalling stories that the trip was over in a flash. Suddenly the king realized what his son had done. He said, "My son your gift of loving concern for me not only shortened our trip but gave me the strength to make it."

All of us have the capacity to care for or listen to another person in order to make life's journey more bearable. Maybe the greatest gift we can give to our loved ones is to simply listen to them.

And so the three lessons from today are: Each person has a gift to offer. No one person has all the gifts. And each gift is necessary.

Now, let me add a fourth. Once you realize that you have a gift, once you have identified what your gift is and once you appreciate its importance, don't hide it. Recognize your giftedness and then look for ways that you can give that gift back to God in some way. Don't hide it or keep it for yourself. Be like the three wise men and offer your gift to God.

It is only when every gift is used (when every gift is shared) that the fullness of God's kingdom will emerge and this world will become a better place, the kind of place God created it to be.