

**Homily for the Epiphany of the Lord
St. Francis of Assisi Parish – Belchertown, MA
January 7, 2018**



Scripture Readings: [Isaiah 60:1-6](#) ✠ [Psalm 72](#) ✠ [Ephesians 3:2-3a, 5-6](#) ✠ [Matthew 2:1-12](#)

Most of us would agree that the most difficult part of Christmas shopping is deciding on the perfect gift for each person on our list, what best expresses our love and care for each person, what will bring delight and joy to those we love? Once we know the gift, the trek to the mall is considerably easier.

So what were the Magi thinking in the gifts they brought to the Christ Child on that first day of Epiphany? Did they just wrap up what they happened to have with them in their baggage? Were their gifts the expected offerings given to a king — or someone perceived as a king — given with as much thought as a bottle of wine or a Christmas fruitcake?

Or do the three gifts express something special about this Child that these men of learning had come to realize?

First, the gift of gold: Well, they say you can never go wrong with money. But, in antiquity, gold was more than currency. Gold, then the most valuable metal on earth, was a symbol of divinity. It was the ultimate gift, the perfect offering to royalty. This Child, who would be betrayed for silver, came to transform our perspective of wealth, to treasure again the things of God: compassion, forgiveness and peace are the currency of the realm of the newborn King.

The gift of frankincense: Frankincense comes from a small tree found only in

Arabia and parts of northern Africa. The hardened resin of the plant was widely used as a medicine for many ailments: it was applied to stop bleeding and to heal wounds; it was used as an antidote for poisons and as a soothing salve for bruises, ulcerations and paralyzed limbs. This Child came to restore and heal not just the physical ailments of those He would meet on his Gospel journey, but to heal humankind of our fears and doubts, to bridge the chasms that separate us from one another and from God.

And the gift of myrrh: Myrrh was an expensive extract from the resin of the myrrh tree. It, too, was used as a medicine but, more significantly, it was used in embalming the dead. Only the very wealthy and members of royalty were embalmed; myrrh, therefore, was a gift reserved for kings. This Child came to recreate us in the life of God: His death was be the defeat of death, His cross will be His — and our — glory.

The three gifts of the Magi are a Gospel unto themselves: they honor the Child who is Himself a gift from the God whose love is beyond our comprehension, whose goodness knows neither limit or condition. May we carry these gifts with us in the year ahead as we follow Christ the Morning Star on the journey to Jerusalem and beyond. ✠

