

## *The Epiphany of the Lord*

The certificate says I was born at Baptist Memorial Hospital in New Orleans, Louisiana, inconveniencing my parents at 2:22 a.m., on January 8, 1953; so, yes, your math is correct, this weekend I am completing my 70th circle around the sun. I was baptized three days later, so this week is also my 70th anniversary as a Christian. I thank God for all the blessings I have received, not least the joy of serving all of you at the Cathedral of the Immaculate Conception.

I thought about becoming a priest when I was very little. Even as a child, I realized God had blessed me in many ways, and I wanted to say thanks. Priesthood made the most sense to me, and it still does. There are other ways to thank God for blessings. Each of you has done the same by seeking the purpose of your life and committing yourself to it. You too have discovered that if you do what God wants you to do, you have great joy, even if it involves sacrifice—perhaps especially if it involves sacrifice. You may be especially grateful for your parents, your spouse, and your children. You could never repay God for your blessings, but you do something—even if it is inadequate—to say thanks.

The magi brought gifts inadequate to the gift they received. Gold, frankincense and myrrh are insufficient treasures, so upon approaching the child and his mother Mary the magi “prostrated themselves and did him homage.” They possessed remarkable understanding of this infant. They traveled a great distance to find him just for the purpose of giving gifts and paying homage.

Their actions fulfill the prophecy of today’s responsorial psalm, which praises God, who possesses good judgment and exercises justice for the afflicted. The psalm prophesies a future king who will bring enduring justice and peace. It foresees the actions of other rulers: Kings of Tarshish, Sheba and Seba shall pay him tribute; “all kings shall fall prostrate, all nations shall serve him.” As we sang today, “Lord, every nation on earth will adore you.” These magi, then, represent a fraction of the kings whom Psalm 72 envisions will give honor and praise to the King of peace, eventually made flesh, we believe, in Jesus Christ.

On the day of your baptism, you too become kings and queens, members of royalty who assist God in governing the world with justice. We are also among those who pay tribute to Christ the King of us all.

If you think back over the days since your birth, you can remember times when you, like the magi, traveled a great distance because you heard of something wonderful at some destination. You may have paid for the travel, given up your time, and handed over some of your greatest treasures to someone who made that long journey worthwhile. At times this has been a physical journey. At other times, staying in place, we make an interior journey: we become more present as we hand over our time, our treasure, our very lives to another. When we do, our gift usually feels inadequate to the gift we have received. Even in human relationships—we can never equally return the love someone gave us. But we accomplish much when we become present to someone else, giving the treasure of our attention. That someone else could be another human being, or it could be God. We can never fully repay what we have received, but we can give the gift of ourselves, a gift that says thanks.

*Sunday, January 8, 2023*