

## *The Epiphany of the Lord*

The long trek of the magi was impressive, but they never had to deal with a snowstorm like you did to get here tonight. And their skies were clear enough to see stars.

You probably navigated other challenges to celebrate Christmas this year: lots of events scheduled, tense conversations at work or at home, communicating with distant friends, and buying presents for those you love—hoping that they'll love what you bought.

The giving of gifts was likely inspired by the original Epiphany. Matthew doesn't give us all the details we'd like to have: When the magi saw the star, how did they know it indicated that a newborn king of the Jews had been born? Why did they want to give him homage, when they were not Jewish? Which of them suggested they should bring gifts? And how did they decide which three gifts were the best? Did the Holy Family like the presents, or, when they got back to Nazareth, did they regift them to someone else? We don't know.

Matthew says the magi sought the king of the Jews, but they must have intuited he was more than that. Otherwise, they wouldn't have bothered to go. Somehow this king made a difference in their lives. They traveled a long distance at great inconvenience with costly presents to demonstrate that belief.

Matthew does not call these visitors kings. Nor does he tell us how many there were—he just says there were three gifts. Yet, every year, we imagine them singing “We Three Kings from Orient.” We call them kings because of today's responsorial, verses taken from Psalm 72. We heard these lines from the Old Testament: “The kings of Tarshish and the islands shall pay him tribute. The kings of Sheba and Saba shall bring him gifts. Before him all kings shall fall prostrate.” Christians regard those verses as a prophecy for what Matthew reports. The magi came from far away to pay tribute to a special king; they brought gifts. They prostrated themselves before the infant—all actions that fulfill prophetic verses from Psalm 72.

As our refrain, we sang, “Lord, every nation on earth will adore you.” The magi were the trailblazers: the first of people from other nations to recognize that Jesus is their king.

When we give gifts, we may do it for the reason the magi did: to pay tribute to someone. Or we may do it because our love inside is so strong we feel compelled to demonstrate it on the outside. Sometimes, though, we give gifts because we want something in return, and we expect the recipient to pay us back in some way. It's disappointing if they don't.

God has already given us the great gift of life and the greatest gift of his Son. We have no way to repay these. Yet, moved by love, we offer gifts of tribute to God and service to others. At least, we should do that. Sometimes we don't make much effort. We see the star of the goodness of God but we don't travel even a short distance to show our love. As the new year begins, even as a snowfall reveals our limitations, God has layered our lives with gift upon gift. Let us bring the gift of our lives and pay tribute.