



CALLED TO BE GOLD, FRANKINCENSE AND MYRRH!

There is a famous Far Side cartoon featuring the magi that ran in newspapers during Christmas time a number of years ago. In the cartoon the three magi are taking a hiatus, sitting at the counter in a very western looking bar. The gifts for the Christ child rest on the bar counter. A rather large and obviously drunk cowpoke looking for a fight stands behind the three and says, "0 yeah? Sounds more like three wise guys to me."

Wise men or wise guys, all are welcome to come forward and worship the newborn king-even the drunk cowpoke. It's the rather exotic gifts on the bar counter that might have intrigued the intoxicated cowboy. It has been said that, if they had been three wise women rather than wise men, they would have brought more practical gifts. Yet the gifts that drew the attention of the cowboy in the Far Side cartoon and made the three magi very uncomfortable in that place are really all about us. And what challenges they offer us in our life in Christ!

Gold. Of all three of the gifts, gold is the one we are most familiar with and the least exotic of the three, although the most expensive. Obviously it refers to Christ's kingship. What is the gold we offer along with these mysterious visitors from the East? Perhaps it reflects the way God sees us more than the way we see ourselves. For God sees us as the gold God created us to be-that gold that gets tarnished when we fail to act as creatures created in the image and likeness of God, God's gold mined by the cross of Christ. Yes, we are God's gold, mined with the cross of Christ. Some say that purgatory is that place where our gold is tested by fire, to burn away that which falls short of being the gold God created us to be. The point is not so much that we can see the face of God, but that God may see us as the golden creation we are.

Frankincense. "Frankincense" gets its name because it was brought to Europe by the Franks during the crusades. It comes from the sap of a tree that grows in Oman and Yemen. The sap is cut from the tree and allowed to harden. The sap dries on the trees and then is collected. Frankincense has been used throughout history for medicinal purposes. In the first century it was thought of as a cure for various poisonings. Other eastern cultures have used frankincense to treat a wide variety of illnesses. Worshipers of the newborn king are called to be medicinal in our dealings with the people we meet in our day-to-day world. We may not cure physical illness, but we can assist in the curing of spiritual sickness by the way we treat others. May our lives as well as our prayers rise like incense.

Myrrh. Myrrh may be the most exotic of the three and, some would think, the least practical for a newborn child. Like frankincense it comes from the dried sap of a number of trees. Myrrh was used until about the 15th century as a penitential incense in funerals and cremations. Today myrrh is used in some healing ointments but most often in mouthwashes, gargles and toothpastes. We, too, serve the same purpose as myrrh in our Christian lives. We must be healing ointment in our world. Mother Teresa would emphasize that being Christ in the world doesn't mean saving the whole world (Christ has already done that), but to be Christ present in our small part of it. As Cardinal Newman would have it, when others see us, may they not see us but Christ shining through us. Then we are truly balm for the world, the balm that is Christ.

We can be the gifts of the magi, gifts for the Christ child, only because of the Lord's presence in our lives. The best place to start is to consume the one whose gifts we are-Christ Jesus. Let us approach the altar of the Eucharist so that we might be transformed Sunday after Sunday, little by little, into Christ.

Magi from the East arrived, saying, "Where is the newborn King of the Jews?".....Matthew 2:1-12

