
The Gift You Didn't Know You Were Giving

A Meditation by the Rev. Canon George Maxwell
The Feast of the Epiphany, Year A

Epiphany is not about having a spiritual “aha” moment.

It is not about suddenly understanding who Jesus is, or finally getting the theology right, or seeing the whole picture clearly.

Epiphany is about realizing, often only after the fact, that God has already been there, meeting us in the middle of our lives, long before we knew what to call it.

That is why the Magi matter.

They do not show up because they are especially holy. They do not arrive because they have insider knowledge. They come because something in their ordinary work, watching the sky and doing what they always do, interrupts them. A light appears that does not fit. And instead of ignoring it, they allow it to disturb their lives.

They follow it. Only later do they begin to understand what they have encountered.

That is Epiphany.

This is why I keep coming back, on this feast day, to that familiar short story by [O. Henry](#), *The Gift of the Magi*.

You know the story.

Jim and Della are young. They are broke. And they love each other deeply. They do not have much, but what they do have matters. Jim has his watch. Della has her hair. Each of them wants to give the other something that says, “You matter more to me than anything else.”

So Della sells her hair.

And Jim sells his watch.

When they exchange gifts, everything collapses. The gifts do not work. They cannot be used. The logic falls apart.

And yet the love does not.

That is what O. Henry wants us to see. The gift was never the object. The gift was the giving of the self.

That is exactly what Epiphany is about.

The Magi bring gifts that do not solve the obvious problems of a newborn child in a dangerous world. Gold does not protect you from Herod. Frankincense does not keep you warm at night. Myrrh does not help when the baby cries.

Still, the gifts matter.

They matter because the gifts are not about fixing the situation. They are about recognizing who is present.

God does not meet us in outcomes. God meets us in encounter, in relationship, in the place where love is being given and received.

That is what happens here.

The Magi do not come to Jesus with a plan. They come with openness. They do not control the moment. They receive it. They kneel because something in this child claims them, even though they do not yet understand what that means.

That is where God shows up.

God shows up in self-giving love that risks disappointment.

Jim and Della do not know how their gifts will be received. They do not know how things will turn out. They only know that love asks something of them. And so they give, even though it makes them vulnerable.

That is faith.

Faith is not believing the right things so that God will show up later. Faith is discovering that God was already present in the very act of giving.

Epiphany tells us that God is revealed when love risks itself anyway.

That unsettles us.

We live in a culture obsessed with results. We want faith to work. We want generosity to pay off. We want love to be efficient and rewarded.

Epiphany gently refuses that logic. The Magi go home by another road, not because they have figured everything out, but because encountering Christ has rearranged their lives. They do not leave smarter. They leave changed.

That is what happens when God meets us.

We do not walk away with answers. We walk away different.

Epiphany invites us to look back on our own lives and ask a dangerous question.

Where have I already given myself away?

Where have I loved without knowing where it would lead?

Where have I offered something that felt foolish, risky, or wasted?

And could it be that this is where God was being revealed?

Jim and Della did not know they were being wise.

The Magi did not know they were worshiping God.

They only knew that love required a response.

That may be the best news Epiphany has to offer.

God does not wait for us to get it right.

God does not require us to understand first.

God meets us in the giving itself.

In the hair cut away.

In the watch sold.

In the journey taken without guarantees.

Epiphany does not ask us to shine like stars.

It asks us to follow the light we are given.

And to trust that, somehow, in the midst of our imperfect and costly love, God is already there, receiving the gift.

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