

SAINT THOMAS CHURCH

Fifth Avenue · New York City

Sunday, January 7, 2024

The Feast of the Epiphany (Transferred)

Solemn Eucharist

11 a.m.

+

A Sermon by

The Rev. Carl Turner, *Rector*

on

Isaiah 60:1-6; Matthew 1:2-12

+

Where your treasure is there will your heart be also.

The prophecy of Isaiah – our first Lesson today – sets the tone of our celebration of Epiphany: “*Arise, shine; for your light has come, and the glory of the Lord has risen upon you.*”

What have the *Sovereign's Sceptre with the Cross* and a torn bright-red polyester bag have in common? They both contain treasures. The Sovereign's Sceptre with the cross – part of the British Crown Jewels – contains the *Cullinan I* Diamond. The Cullinan Diamond is the largest top quality cut diamond in the world and forms the very heart of what is one of the most important pieces of the Royal regalia. By contrast, the torn bright-red bag belonged to my daughter Rachel when she was seven years old and used to contain an assortment of items including some dog-eared playing cards, colouring pencils, candy, and some of the contents of the little wash bag you get on long-haul flights including the socks and that silly folding-toothbrush. But, like the Cullinan Diamond, when Rachel was seven years old, they were treasure and I know, if she had been given the choice back then, which my daughter would have chosen if she was offered a chance to swap them with Queen Elizabeth.

Perhaps we begin to understand why Jesus said that we must become like little children. Can you remember when you were a child and saw the world with child-like eyes? When worms were as important as credit cards? Jesus wants us again and again to re-evaluate what we hold dear as treasure.

Today, we think of the treasures of the Magi. Gold, Frankincense, and Myrrh. If they were kings, as traditional carols have them styled, then that somehow makes their presents to the Christ-child seem a little mean. Would you seriously bring embalming fluid to a baby shower? No, they were not the Kings of our Christmas carols, they are called in the Gospel *Magi*. They were astrologers; they were wise; and, importantly, they were Gentiles; and, as we know, the gifts were of symbolic meaning rather than monetary worth. But in order to give these things to Jesus, they were costly to the Magi; they travelled a long distance to get to Bethlehem; they had to navigate Roman Imperial Power; and they had to deal with the paranoia of King Herod.

What treasure would *you* bring to Jesus? And how hard are you prepared to allow that journey, that pilgrimage to be? Will you think of the things that are of monetary value, or of other things, perhaps even more costly, because they say something about yourself and your relationship with God.

In the middle of the third century, St Laurence, one of Pope Sixtus's deacons, found his faith tested. Laurence, as the Pope's principal deacon, was asked to bring out the treasures of the Church. He assembled

before the Roman procurator the poor and the sick: *“Here are the treasures of the Church,”* he said. The Pope and St. Laurence paid a high price, and were martyred cruelly for their faith.

What are the things that we treasure? And what are the treasures that are buried deep within each one of us that God wants us to truly cherish? As Jesus said, *“Where your treasure is there will your heart be also.”* (Matthew 6:21) Like the Magi, we are called to seek diligently for the Lord and, once we have found him, to worship him and then take word of him to others even if it means going home by a different way.

Speaking on the Feast of the Epiphany in 2012, Pope Benedict XVI said this: *“The journey of the wise men from the East is, for the liturgy, just the beginning of a great procession that continues throughout history. With the Magi, humanity’s pilgrimage to Jesus Christ begins – to the God who was born in a stable, who died on the Cross and who, having risen from the dead, remains with us always, until the consummation of the world.”*

As we receive Holy Communion today and we look at the host in our hands, let us look at that piece of wafer bread with the eyes of the child deep within; it is more precious than the largest of diamonds, for Jesus nourishes us with his very self. This afternoon, at 4pm, we will have the opportunity in the beautiful service of Benediction, to worship him like the Magi. We will come empty-handed...or are we? As we sing in the carol,

*“What can I give Him,
Poor as I am? —
If I were a Shepherd
I would bring a lamb;
If I were a Wise Man
I would do my part, —
Yet what I can I give Him, —
Give my heart.”*

And as the Eucharistic Prayer so eloquently puts it, *“And here we offer and present unto thee, O Lord, our selves, our souls and bodies, to be a reasonable, holy, and living sacrifice unto thee.”*

At the beginning of 2024, with so much tension in our world, and even closer to home, we seek again the Christ Child, make choices about what we hold dear, what we have to offer him, and what our journey home will look like.

Some words of St Clare of Assisi: *“What a great and laudable exchange: to leave the things of time for those of eternity, to choose the things of heaven for the goods of earth, to receive the hundredfold in place of one, and to possess a blessed and eternal life.”*

A very happy New Year my friends.