

## One Arm Longer Than the Other

Over the years, it has become the custom that, when invited to dinner, especially at a friend's or relative's house, we ask "what can I bring?" Maybe we will bring a bottle of wine if the person drinks, or a salad, or even the dessert. We hosted Thanksgiving dinners where people even wanted to bring vegetables. Now, I am pretty convinced that they brought those because they wanted one of their favorites, but it was certainly nice of them to ask as well as bring something to share.

Sometimes, though, we say to people, "Please just bring yourselves. We have invited you to be our guests and want it to be pressure free." We haven't quite figured out if we have reduced or increased the stress level. You see, there is an old Irish saying, "I have come with one arm longer than the other." This translates into, "I am taking what you offer and giving you nothing in return. My receiving arm is longer than my giving arm."

Here we are, at Epiphany, when we celebrate gift giving. The Gospel of Matthew is the only Gospel that tells this story. The Magi arrived and brought gifts of gold, frankincense, and myrrh. We even sang a few verses of "We Three Kings" this morning. Last week, for those of you who came to our "bonus Sunday" service in Southwick, we talked about what we "got" for Christmas and how we received hope, peace, joy, and love from the Incarnation, God becoming a human. Certainly, it seems that we showed up for church with "one arm longer than the other" because we only received gifts.

What would happen, though, if we tried to figure out what we can GIVE this year, in the spirit of the Magi. Our readings and prayers this week all reflect the message in Isaiah as we are called to "Arise! Shine, for our light has come" in the birth of the Savior. Truly, the glory of the

Lord has risen upon us! As we struggle to figure out what to give in return, I'd like to offer three things to consider.

First of all, let us give thanks to God for the gift of this Light!! How awesome is our God who gives us the gift of the only begotten Son? God from God, Light from Light, true God from true God! As we are loved by God, we get to bask in that Light. It is important that we offer our praise for such a marvelous gift!

Secondly, much like those first Hebrew people who wanted to be followers of "The Way," we recognize that some of the first to worship were not Jewish people. These Magi, knowing, or at least suspecting, foul play on Herod's part, followed through with their plans and offered their gifts. We don't know if they did so at the manger, or if this had been some months or even a few years after the birth. The timing is not what matters; it is the fact that it happened is what is of great importance. The Magi remind us that God's salvation, the Incarnation, is available for ANYONE who wants it or needs it. And, sometimes, all of us are in need of God's salvation, aren't we? Again, what a great gift!

Thirdly, I believe that God doesn't ask anything of us as that love is unconditional. However, since we don't want to be people of God with "one arm longer than the other" it is in our human condition that we want to give something in return, to be part of the great Christmas exchange of gifts. So, what do we bring to God? The last stanza of "In The Bleak Midwinter" asks the same question.

*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.*

What offering can we make that will be pleasing to God? (WESTFIELD) The Finance committee will tell you to give money! Our newly formed and yet to be voted on Family Ministries Committee will tell you to be a greeter, help with Church School, be involved! Our World Services/Mission Committee will tell you to actively support one of our local or even global missions that are listed in the monthly Newsletter. Your pastor will tell you to sign up to help with the Monday lunches! The Decorations committee will ask you to stay after church today and help take down the decorations. The Deacons may ask you to be a liturgist!

(SOUTHWICK) The Finance Committee will tell you to give money! Our Property Committee will say to help with the great spring clean-up. The pastor will ask you to help with the Monday lunches at First Congregational Westfield. The Music Committee may ask you to sing in the choir, ring bells, or share any other musical talents you may have. Someone may ask you to sign up for a Coffee Hour Committee.

These are all important things that help us, in the so many different ways, to spread the Gospel message. They are necessary and, sometimes, even fun! But ultimately, the gift that we are all called is summed up in that verse. This year at Epiphany, let us gift that all of us can afford: let us bring our hearts to give to God. Let's not come with "one arm longer than the other." Let our hearts guide our thoughts and actions as we move closer to God in 2025.