

Sharing the Good News

from the pen of the Mission Interpreter



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Gifts

The Season of Epiphany. The meaning of the word *epiphany* is “appearance” or “manifestation” and celebrates the appearance of God among us in the person of Jesus. This is, of course, closely tied to the celebration of Christmas. We in the ELCA* observe Epiphany on the twelfth day of Christmas, January 6, as the revelation of Christ to the nations, represented by the visit of the Magi who followed the star and brought gifts to the baby Jesus. Epiphany Season then runs from January 6 until the Sunday before Ash Wednesday. During the season of Epiphany we become better acquainted with the early life of Jesus: His baptism, His first miracle, the choosing of disciples. So, we have moved on into a new church year. But does that mean Christmas is over, put away until December? What about the cheer and good will? What about those presents that so recently were wrapped in pretty paper under the tree? Are they forgotten? What are we doing with them?

Ah, yes, presents. So what did you get for Christmas—*last year*--not just a couple weeks ago. That question was posed by a pastor in a children’s sermon on the Sunday after Christmas. He got varying answers. It’s a tough question for kids, caught up in the excitement of their new toys and other special things. It is, perhaps, an even tougher question for adults. Some gifts stand out in our minds, some create frustration or confusion, others are forgotten as soon as the wrapping paper is discarded. The value of a gift and our appreciation for it are probably best determined by how well we remember not only what we received, but from whom, and by what we did with it.

The pastor went on to show the children some things he’d received, told them from whom, and what he had done with them. First, he’d gotten an unusual money clip from an acquaintance who’d been in Thailand. He had looked it over, commented on how unusual it was, and after Christmas had placed it in a dresser drawer where it got lost under a pile of socks. He hadn’t thought about it again until he was making up the children’s sermon. Second, from one of his confirmation students he’d gotten a necktie with cartoon characters on it. It was funny, and he appreciated the thought, but there weren’t a lot of places to wear it, so over the course of the year, he’d probably worn it only a few times. A third gift that he got was from his son, a new wallet, something he really needed because his old one was pretty worn. He’d promptly loaded the new wallet with credit cards, driver’s license, insurance cards, and some cash. He carried it every day because it contained his identification and other things he needed regularly, and he always remembered from whom he’d gotten that wallet.

The most important gift of all time is, of course, the center of Christmas, the baby Jesus. As Christians we have all received him as Savior through baptism, and the gift is from God. So how do we regard *this* gift? Is it like the money clip, a bit unusual, but tossed into a drawer and forgotten? Maybe we treat this gift like the tie, fun to have around once in awhile, but not really needed. Or is Jesus like the wallet, important to have with us every day, where we carry our identification, and each time we use it we remember the giver?

The tree is down, the ornaments put away, the colored lights gone. So where is the “peace on earth” good will to men?” Ah, the Spirit of Christmas remains with us. We do move on as we must, but the gift moves on with us if we use it and remember the giver. Just as the Child grew, so will we as we follow His story and live our lives in Him during **the Season of Epiphany**.

- *Catholic, Anglican, Episcopal, Presbyterian and Methodist Churches also observe Epiphany Season.*

Children’s sermon told by Rev. Jerald Borgie, retired ELCA pastor

