

Sermon, *Magnify the Lord*  
The Very Rev. David J. Marshall, All Angels 1.5.25

Today is a unique day. It's the first Sunday of 2025. Happy New Year! It's the second Sunday of Christmas – Merry Christmas! And, today we are celebrating the arrival of the Wise Men and their gifts for the baby Jesus – called the Epiphany. So, Happy Epiphany!

The central story today is the wise men from the east who brought gifts of gold, frankincense and myrrh to Jesus. Those are some odd gifts to give a baby. But, as the old adage goes – if you bless the parents you bless the child. There is a lot that has been written about these gifts and the theological significance of them. I prefer to think of it this way: gold/frankincense/myrrh are the 1<sup>st</sup> century version of the gift card. They are commodities that can be traded in for anything – food, rent, clothing, transportation. If you had a gold bar that was 2,000 years old, does it have value today? You bet. Likewise, frankincense and myrrh are basically non-perishable. They are easy to hide and easy to transport and yet have a huge value – back then, now, and in the future too.

After receiving the gifts, Joseph had a dream that said: LEAVE NOW [reminiscent of the emergency texts we receive for hurricanes and wildfires]. And they did. The holy family fled to Egypt. Joseph left his work and he had two mouths to house and feed. The gifts of the wise men helped them on their journey and to get established. They are practical, valuable and life-changing gifts.

With this new year, on the second Sunday of Christmas, and the celebration of Epiphany, I have a question for you: what gift did you bring to Jesus today?

Every Christmas, we would go to my dad's parent's house in Seattle. After a while, I began to wonder what gifts we could give grandma and grandpa. It became very apparent that my brother and I were the gifts – our presence was the present. That's all they needed to make it a merry Christmas.

In the same way, your gift to Jesus is your presence. You being in worship today, or joining us online (where it says your presence is a gift) [or reading this sermon right now], your gift is your being present. Like the imperishable gifts from the wise men, our bodies are perishable – they have an expiration date – and, in faith, we believe there is an imperishable part of us, our soul. With our souls we greet the Lord this day and show honor to him with our presence, our imperishable presence.

Our opening prayer this morning uses these words: *Cleanse the thoughts of our hearts by the inspiration of your Holy Spirit, that we may perfectly love you, and worthily magnify your holy Name; through Christ our Lord.* How do we “magnify God's holy name”?

The wise men from the east magnified God's holy name by bringing imperishable gifts. Your presence today is magnifying the Lord. The forgiveness and joy we receive today magnifies the Lord. The way that today's service will help carry us through the week magnifies the Lord.

This past week, I received a letter from School Attendance Support. If you recall, we ran the SAS program each week during December collecting different items that are needed to keep students attending school – hygiene products, clean socks, ponchos (the ponchos were the hardest to find but that didn't stop you all from searching; you kept looking until you found them and now those gifts are helping students; right now, today). Without these items, students are less inclined to go to school because they are afraid of being teased or worse, bullied.

Here's a portion of the SAS letter:

*Your very generous donations will help hundreds of low-income students get to school and stay in school for the day. It is hard to imagine that something as simple as a poncho or a clean pair of underwear will impact School attendance; but we have proven that it does. Not only that, but the educators we work with report that students feel more confident and ready for learning with your gifts. On Tuesday our purchasing specialists are tackling the bags and boxes we received from you all they will be organizing them for delivery for the schools. You can imagine how happy the school staff and how happy the students are to receive these gifts.*

Magnify the Lord! We are magnifying God with these gifts. We are magnifying God with our presence.

There's another way to magnify the Lord. We are coming out of and heading into a hectic time. We are not fully recovered from the hurricanes and now people are showing up. If you are feeling hectic, or out of sorts, I invite you into a different way to bring your presence/present to God, and that is to find a time each day to set aside for the Lord. You can read today's psalm, or today's Gospel lesson, or whatever piece of Scripture you like, and, here the vital part, take time to ponder it. In your silence, in your pondering, you are not asking God for anything, you are just sitting with the Lord and pondering. That time is also a way to magnify the Lord.

The Gospel writer, Matthew, went out of his way to explain that the wise men were filled with joy when they gave their gifts to Jesus. Joy is a result of magnifying the Lord. We don't do it to feel joy – like a transaction – we do it because we are following the example of the wise men who brought gifts. But, when we present ourselves as a present to God, we do receive joy. Also, when we magnify the Lord for others, they too feel our joy and peace.

I can't think of a better way to start this year than with magnifying the name of God and, in return, receiving joy. In the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit. Amen.