

How time seems to fly. It really doesn't feel like 13 days have passed since our grandchildren came to our house on Christmas Day and opened their under-tree presents.

How do you go about opening Christmas presents? Do you very slowly and carefully feel every inch of the wrapping paper trying to guess what's inside? Or do you simply tear the paper off as quickly as possible to see what it is? Both examples came to the fore as I sat watching Adam and Sophie.

I also saw their faces light up with excited anticipation that this REALLY was the present they had wanted so much only for their faces to dissolve with disappointment that a hot water bottle was not THE present they had hoped for.

And what about my reaction? I mean, I had gone to great lengths to make sure that the present was exactly what the child wanted. Dream on, Terry. At least I now know to leave the important decisions in life to Jane.

But the truth of the matter is that the reaction of the person receiving the gift does colour our view on present giving. And I think it interesting to note that whilst we do not know how Joseph and Mary or indeed the infant Jesus responded to receiving the Magi's gifts, we do know what the Magi felt as they first met Jesus. Awe. They bowed down in awe and worshipped him. That is key. They worshipped him first, and only then, subsequently, offered him their gifts.

And what gifts they were. Gold, fit for a king. Frankincense, a rare and expensive resin used ceremonially in the temple and so special that it was the only incense permitted to be placed on the altar. And here it is now being given to the ultimate priest, the one who would provide direct communion between humankind and God. And Myrrh, a precious oil used in embalming.

Individually they point to who Jesus was, what he came to do and the price he would willingly pay in doing so. It's not too much of an exaggeration to imagine the gifts being symbolically placed at not just the foot of Christ's cot, but also at the foot of his cross too.

Whilst we're talking about talking about gifts, last week Revd Jon shared the fact that the origin of his name means 'God's gift'. I was surprised at that. If you're watching Jon....only joking. Unlike the cabinet secretary who told the prime minister last month that the annual nativity play at No 10 had to be cancelled because he couldn't find 3 wise men.

Back to the Magi's visit. Matthew is quite clear that the Magi were not Jewish, therefore they would be considered gentiles. Their act of worship wonderfully foreshadows the subsequent worship of Jesus by people from all and every nation. Including us today, as we bow down to worship Jesus in our liturgy before receiving God's gift to us of bread and wine.

But the gift giving at communion isn't simply a one-way process because we too can offer a gift in return as we identified in our last 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 can I give him: give my heart.

It is our heart that is the most wonderful gift of all that we can offer. But the reality is that most, if not all of us, have things which lay heavy on our hearts. Things which hinder the manifestation of that awe and wonder experienced by the Magi.

Unlike the Magi or indeed anyone at that time, we know what the future holds for the baby Jesus. So, my prayer at the start of this new year is that we become intentional in making room in our lives to bow down and worship more deeply our Saviour, Jesus Christ.

To make room for us to receive God's love and grace which in turn enables it to flow through us. In other words, to live out what we say each week "Your Kingdom come".

If we can do that, then through God's infinite grace we too, as we sang, will give Jesus the perfect gift - our hearts.

**Terry Ward-Hall, 7 Jan 2023**