**EXPLORING THE SUNDAY GOSPEL AT HOME**

**CHRISTMAS GIFTS**

**EXPLORING NEXT SUNDAY’S THEME**

***Introducing the Gospel***

*Epiphany (Matthew 2: 1-12)*

Matthew’s Gospel completes the Christmas story with the narrative of the visitors from the East. This is a rich narrative that contains many important images. One of these images is the Christmas gifts. According to the tradition the wise men brought three gifts to the infant Jesus. Each of these gifts is associated traditionally with a special meaning. The gift of gold speaks of Jesus’ kingship. The gift of frankincense speaks of Jesus’ priesthood. The gift of myrrh speaks of Jesus’ death.

The image to stimulate reflection on the significance of Matthew’s powerful image of the gifts of gold, frankincense, and myrrh is *Christmas gifts.*

***Core extract from the Gospel (Matthew 2: 10-11; for reflection throughout the week)***

When the wise men saw that the star had stopped,

they were overwhelmed with joy.

On entering the house,

they saw the child with Mary his mother;

and they knelt down and paid him homage.

Then, opening their treasure-chests,

they offered him gifts of gold, frankincense, and myrrh.

***Gospel prayer (for use throughout the week)***

Lord Jesus Christ,

You accepted the gifts brought by the wise men.

Accept now the gifts we offer to you,

and change us by your presence with us;

for you are our God.

Amen.

**READING NEXT SUNDAY’S GOSPEL**

**Matthew 2: 1-12**

**The Visit of the Wise Men**

In the time of King Herod, after Jesus was born in Bethlehem of Judea, wise men from the East came to Jerusalem, asking, ‘Where is the child who has been born king of the Jews? For we observed his star at its rising, and have come to pay him homage.’ When King Herod heard this, he was frightened, and all Jerusalem with him; and calling together all the chief priests and scribes of the people, he inquired of them where the Messiah was to be born. They told him, ‘In Bethlehem of Judea; for so it has been written by the prophet:
“And you, Bethlehem, in the land of Judah,
   are by no means least among the rulers of Judah;
for from you shall come a ruler
   who is to shepherd my people Israel.” ’

Then Herod secretly called for the wise men and learned from them the exact time when the star had appeared. Then he sent them to Bethlehem, saying, ‘Go and search diligently for the child; and when you have found him, bring me word so that I may also go and pay him homage.’ When they had heard the king, they set out; and there, ahead of them, went the star that they had seen at its rising, until it stopped over the place where the child was. When they saw that the star had stopped, they were overwhelmed with joy. On entering the house, they saw the child with Mary his mother; and they knelt down and paid him homage. Then, opening their treasure-chests, they offered him gifts of gold, frankincense, and myrrh. And having been warned in a dream not to return to Herod, they left for their own country by another road.

**ENGAGING WITH THE THEME**

***Dwelling with the text (Matthew 2: 1-12)***

Begin to explore Matthew’s narrative of the visitors from the East by employing the SIFT approach of Sensing, Intuition, Feeling, and Thinking. You may find that one of these approaches comes easier to you than the others. But it is worth trying all four.

* What details in the passage catch your attention (Sensing)?
* What big ideas in the passage spark in your mind (Intuition)?
* What most touches your heart in the passage (Feeling)?
* What most stretches your mind and makes you think in the passage (Thinking)?

***Thinking and talking***

Identify topics within the passage that can get you thinking and talking. Here are some ideas to get you started.

* What would you say is the most important theme in this narrative?
* What is the significance of the star?
* How do you understand the role of Herod in the narrative?
* What is the significance of the treasure chest and gifts?
* What does this narrative say for us today?

***Using your Bible***

Explore Old Testament passages echoed in the narrative.

* Micah 5: 2
* Numbers 24: 17

Explore Old Testament references to the gifts.

* Psalm 45: 8
* Psalm 72: 10-11, 15
* Song of Songs 3: 6
* Isaiah 60: 6

***Exploring online***

Widen your exploration of Matthew’s account of the gifts brought by the magi to Jesus by looking up some of the following themes and others of your own choosing.

* Gifts of the magi
* Magi in classical art
* Origin of Christmas gifts

***Drawing on experience***

The image to stimulate reflection on Matthew’s account of the three symbolic gifts brough by the magi to Jesus is *Christmas gifts*.Draw on your own experience of Christmas gifts. For example:

* What are your treasured memories of Christmas gifts?
* What is your experience of good practice concerning Christmas gifts?
* How do you connect Christmas gifts with the birth of Jesus?

What have you learned about Christmas gifts?

***Creating and making***

This section offers pointers to some creative activities that may be inspired by Matthew’s account of the three symbolic gifts brought by the magi to Jesus.

* Create a mural telling the story of the presentation of the gifts of the magi to Jesus.
* Create a collage of Christmas gifts today.
* Organise a Christmas gift to support a local welfare project.
* Create a reflection, poem, or prayer on the theme of the gifts of the magi.



**EXPLORING THE SUNDAY GOSPEL AT HOME**

Each week we are inviting people in their homes to look forward to those Sunday services that follow the Revised Common Lectionary Gospel readings. We employ the SIFT approach (Sensing, Intuition, Feeling, and Thinking) to encourage reflection on the Sunday Gospel.

We are suggesting a variety of ways in which people of all ages, and households working together, may engage with the Gospel reading and celebrate that engagement with shared activities.

Our invitation then is for you to share your reflections, prayers and photos of your creative work with the Cathedral by emailing them to smc.lesliefrancis@gmail.com.

These materials have been developed by the Canon Theologian of Liverpool Cathedral working in collaboration with the staff team here at the Cathedral, and with sponsorship and support from the St Mary’s Centre in Wales.



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