

Sunday Sermon

Fr Ambrose Young
Entrance of the Theotokos Skete



Sunday before Christmas, December 18, 2011

In the Name of the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit. Amen.

The best gift at Christmas is Christ Himself!

In a sense, He and His mother invite us to be their guests in the cave of Bethlehem.

Here's my challenge to you: take ten minutes this Christmas—when everyone else is gone or asleep and the house is quiet—and just sit and think about Christ and His coming to us—and to YOU—in Bethlehem two thousand years ago. I promise you that if you do this, you will receive an unexpected grace.

Of course, we are quite aware that Christ came to earth, born of a Virgin, in order to give Himself and His very life, for us sinners. And He continues to do this whenever we receive the Eucharist. We know that we must receive Him in our hearts and souls as fully and completely as possible. We also know that the shepherds will come to give Him their adoration, and the Three Wise Men will arrive to offer gifts of gold, frankincense, and myrrh.

But this is basically all head knowledge and of little value unless it changes us.

So, THE QUESTION NOW IS: WHAT DO WE OFFER THE CHRIST CHILD, HE HAVING GIVEN SO MUCH TO US? WHAT ARE OUR GIFTS? OR DO WE EVEN HAVE ANY?

These are not just some simpering, sentimental “christmasy” questions I’m asking. We must never forget that the plan of salvation involves a very real collaboration between God and us. It is what St. Paul called a “synergy”—whereby God (on the one hand) and all of creation, including of course ourselves (on the other hand), come together and unite to form something ineffable, unspeakable wonderful and beautiful.

We already understand how God has given to us His only-begotten Son. That's His part. So what is ours?

Well, the divine services for Nativity Eve give us part of the answer. Those hymns make it quite clear that we frail human beings have, first, offered one of us, one just like us, to be the Lord's mother—and that, of course, is the Blessed Virgin Mary, the Theotokos. In addition, the earth itself offers the shelter of a cave on that cold winter night. The animal kingdom offers the



company and warmth of the stable. The heavens themselves offer the angelic hosts, who came to sing and announce the good tidings to the shepherds keeping watch over their flocks on that holy night. And in the skies a celestial body—a special creation—the Star of Bethlehem offers itself to the Incarnation of the Son of God.



The adoration of the three wise men from the East is, however, of very special importance, according to the teachings of the Holy Father so the Church. And so, on this last Sunday before the this year's Feast of the Nativity, I want to dwell on these three men and their curious gifts, which tell us a great deal about what you and I should be preparing to offer the newborn Lord in one week.

First, the coming of these mysterious figures to Bethlehem to worship this King of Kings, reminds us that Jesus is *our* King of Kings, too. And how to we show respect, love, and adoration to this King of Kings? By obedience, of course, to His commandments, and by reverence and respect shown to the Church which He established here on earth.

The divine services for Christmas Eve explain that the gift of gold this Wise Men offer is the outward sign of their devotion to Him as King of all creation, as well as Ruler of the Kingdom which is to come. The gift of frankincense shows us that as God, Jesus is to be worshipped, for incense is always used (at least in the ancient world) for worship. Myrrh of course was used to prepare a body for burial, so this is a foretelling of the fact that this Jesus of Nazareth, still an infant in swaddling clothes, will one day be a sacrifice unto death for the salvation of us sinners.

So, you and I must offer the Lord the gold of our hearts and efforts through obedience to His commandments. And we must offer Him the frankincense of our minds and our bodies in worship.

And, finally, we give Christ the myrrh of our repentance, our sorrow for our sins—which crucified Him most terribly—and our sincere commitment to turn away from those sins.

These, then, brothers and sisters, are the gifts we must bring this year and every year, in imitation of the Magi, to Christ the Lord, on the occasion of His birth, His Incarnation.

[And please remember what I said at the outset of this homily:](#)

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