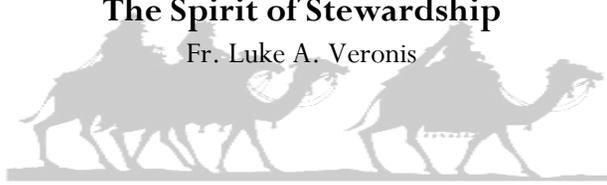


THE GIFTS OF THE MAGI: The Spirit of Stewardship

Fr. Luke A. Veronis



The Gifts of the Magi icon presents the Wise Men offering gifts of gold, frankincense and myrrh to the Christ Child. These wealthy scholars and priests of the East endured numerous dangers, and traveled great distances to offer their treasures to Christ, the newborn king. What a beautiful and meaningful example of stewardship they set for all future generations, helping us to understand the blessing of properly using and sharing God's gifts.

To begin with, the Magi represent a sincere desire to seek after God, searching through science, nature, and their cultural traditions to communicate with their Creator and discover His will for them, even when it was something so unexpected. Imagine their long, arduous journey, possibly a 1500 mile expedition from Persia to Bethlehem, over mountains and deserts, a journey that took many months. Surely on such a trip they faced numerous dangers from nature, from bandits, and from the fear of the unknown.

What faith, determination and sacrifice they must have had. They surely faced questions and skepticism at the start. During their journey, unexpected challenges and discouraging setbacks would have been commonplace. Yet

they persevered. They overcame the difficult trials and tests of their journey, and persisted in their search for God's truth.

When they finally met the Christ Child, they bowed down in worship. They offered Jesus the most precious of their gifts. Although they were the "wise men" of their day, they didn't allow their ego to interfere with their unexpected discovery. Even when the journey surprisingly took them beyond the king's palace in Jerusalem to the insignificant village of Bethlehem, they went forward in faith. Everything seemed so astonishing, and yet in humility they approached the Christ Child to worship Him and offer the best of their gifts – gold, frankincense, and myrrh.

The Story of the Magi is not simply a cute part of Christmas, but it represents central characters who model a path of faith and stewardship worthy of imitation. They offer an example of a sincere search for God using the intellectual gifts they possessed; a willingness to overcome any obstacles or challenging inconveniences in their journey towards God; and the witness of offering the best they had once they encounter the Christ Child.

In connection with this inspiring story of the Magi, we can also reflect on St. John Chrysostom's words, "*The rich man is not the one who has much, but the one who gives much. For what one gives away, he keeps for all eternity.*" Both the Magi and Chrysostom offer a challenging perspective of Christian Stewardship. We are called to understand that all we have in life -

from life itself, to our intellectual abilities and specific talents, as well as to our faith experiences and material possessions – all we have in life is a gift from God, and each of us is called to act as a proper and good steward of these gifts.

Think about how the Magi were conscientious stewards with their knowledge, experience and wisdom, as well as stewards of their time and effort, which culminated in their good stewardship of their treasure. St. John Chrysostom highlights that true wealth comes through sharing what we have first received from God Himself. Ultimately, whatever we have isn't ours! All is God's, and we are simply caretakers of His riches. As we learn to generously give of ourselves, of our time, talents and treasure, we only increase our wealth and make eternal investments.

Christian Stewardship is all about becoming good caretakers of all that God has given us. Think about all that God has given us – our health, our family, our opportunities in life, our intelligence, our talents. God has given each of us special and unique gifts. And through Holy Scripture He teaches us all that we have is a loan. He lends everything to us, and reminds us that one day He will ask us to give a detailed accounting of what we have done with the gifts He has given us. How have we used our time, our talents, and our treasure? Have we used them in a self-centered way or God-glorifying ways? Archbishop Anastasios of Albania has noted that "we find ourselves by offering

ourselves.” Have we learned the blessedness of generously giving to others of all we have?

Everything we have is temporal. We don't know for how long we have it. The fundamental question, though, is how will we use all that we have for the glory of God?

One day, a person complained to his priest that the Church and Christianity is one continual “give, give, give.” To which the priest replied, “Thank you very much for the finest definition of Christianity I have ever heard. Your right, Christianity is all about a constant “give, give, give.” God giving His only Son to the world to show His unconditional love. His Son Jesus giving His life on the cross to forgive our sins and destroy death. Then our Lord's disciples giving all they had to make sure God's Good News of love was preached to all people everywhere. They not only gave away their homes and businesses, but even gave up their lives as martyrs in gratitude to God! And after all that giving of God to the world, yes, God does ask His followers of today to imitate His own generosity by giving – by offering back from all that He ultimately has given each person! So, yes, the Church and Christianity is one continual “give, give, and give,” but from a good and holy perspective!



The Gifts of the Magi and the words of St. John Chrysostom help clarify our understanding of Christian Stewardship and what it means to act as a faithful follower of Jesus Christ.

for reflection...

The God who came to us at Bethlehem continues to come to us today. He comes through the Sacrament of Baptism to bestow upon us His love, to call us His very own. He comes through the Sacrament of Chrismation to fill us with His presence, to make our bodies temples of His Holy Spirit. He comes through repentance and the Sacrament of Confession to cleanse us of sin, to restore in our souls "the peace of God that passes all understanding."

In every liturgy He comes to us as the Word of God, bringing words of eternal life through the Scripture readings and the sermon. Through the Sacrament of Communion He comes to be born again and again in the shabby stables of our hearts. He comes constantly through prayer. He blesses our marriages as He did that in Cana of Galilee. He stands by our sick bed, laying His healing hand upon us through the prayers of the priest. He comes again and again in so many, many ways through the many ministries of His Church. He comes with healing and forgiveness; He comes with strength and guidance. He comes and when He comes, as the Bible says, "the blind see, the lame walk, and the prisoners are set free."

It is by offering our blessings back to God that He will be able to continue His forgiving, healing, liberating, empowering, transfiguring, loving ministry through the Church. For God, Infinite though He be, has chosen to work through us, through our gifts, to continue His saving work in the world today.

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St. John Chrysostom

Stewardship