

GIFTS OF SELF
Sermon Series: "The Gifts of the Magi"
December 20, 2015 Fourth Sunday of Advent –Festival Sunday John 1: 1-14
The Church of the Covenant

As I have been preaching about the GIFTS of the MAGI in Advent, I have told you about a former church of mine where we hosted the community in a Christmas extravaganza called "Christmas Hand-in-Hand" that sounds a lot like something we formerly hosted here at The Church of the Covenant called "The Joy of Sharing Christmas". The whole interior of the church was set up as a journey to find the Baby Jesus. For a couple of years I served in the Wise Men's tent which began the whole spiritual quest of finding the Christ Child at Christmas. The Wise Men were seeking the Christ Child. Wise Men and Wise Women always seek the Christ Child. So I would ask—**Where is He who is born KING?** And a second time. And a third. Then the modern day MAGI would begin their spiritual pilgrimage, from room to room, from experience to experience, in order to find the Christ Child at Christmas...But one year the man who always did the Innkeeper's soliloquy came down sick and they asked me to be the Innkeeper at the last minute. I had the Wiseman's part down pat. But had to learn what the Innkeeper had said that night at the last minute. And I think It went something like this...

I wish now I had taken the time to find a place for that nice couple to lay down their weary heads. They had come such a far distance. Unfair, in a way, to require people to travel so far just to be enrolled and just to pay taxes. The Mother was "great with child" and strangely calm and serene in the midst of it, pondering something deep within her heart. The Father worried and looked preoccupied with many thoughts I could not understand. But I saw he was struggling to do the right thing. She was past due in her delivery, even I could see that. But I was too busy myself with too many things. I was distracted. The inn was full. The people were demanding. There was too much to do at this too busy season of the year. You understand, of course. People excitedly talked of the birth of a new King. Some claimed to see a new star in the heavens. There was anxiety everywhere, people were fearful of the Romans and the political situation. The Zealots and bandits were everywhere; the camel caravans always in danger of these terrorists. Maybe I should have made room for them in the inn. Maybe I should have taken time I didn't have to accommodate them and make room for them. Maybe I should have done this a different way. And now I feel bad. I feel like I should have done something, feel like I missed some opportunity, something beautiful and spiritual that could have been that now cannot be. They came to me but I tuned them away. I wonder where they are now? I wonder if they are cold. I wonder if the child has been born? I wonder if they are alright. I wish I had made room for them in the Inn. I wish I had made room for them in my heart. I wish I had done something different. Maybe I will have another chance. Maybe I will see them again. Maybe I will have a second chance.

And then the Innkeeper was to break out of character. He was to address the crowd directly. And he would say –But I never had another chance to receive them ever again. They never came my way ever again. And then he would conclude with a question –"DO YOU HAVE ROOM FOR THE BABY JESUS? Or are you too busy for Him? IS THERE ROOM IN THE INN OF YOUR HEART FOR JESUS BIRTH THIS YEAR? It says in the scripture, "And she gave birth to her first born son and wrapped him in swaddling cloths, and laid him in a manger, because there was no place for them in the inn." (Luke 2: 7) Is there room in the inn of your heart for the Christ Child? Is there room in the inn for Baby Jesus? Is your heart too full of other things to hold even a little child? Is there room in the Inn of your heart for Jesus?????

The Wise Men came from the East following a star and in search of the Christ Child. They brought gifts of gold and frankincense and myrrh. (Matthew 2:11) They opened the treasure chest of their heart and

offered gifts. They bowed down and worshipped the newborn Christ. But the gift they really gave to Him was not gold, nor frankincense, nor myrrh. The gift they gave was their heart. The gifts they gave were themselves. The gifts they gave were the GIFTS OF SELF to the infant Christ Child. Wise Men and Wise Women always do.

So assuming you find Him this year, assuming you want Him to be born in the manger of your heart this year, assuming that you will make enough room in the Inn of your heart for this little child....then how then do you present GIFTS OF SELF to the Christ Child this year? A couple of years ago I heard this story and share it with you again. I was listening to a program on addiction recovery at our church and a young woman, perhaps in her thirties, was sharing about her journey out of addiction and into recovery. She was with her little child staying at the Turning Point here in Washington. They are not allowed to have contact with family members because those family members might draw them back into addiction. So she was alone with her child at Christmas. She was fearful that she would not be able to have even one gift for her little girl that year. Like the original Mary, she was pondering many things in her heart that December. But she received a package, a wrapped Christmas gift, and inside was a gift for her child and also a gift for her. And she said in this seminar that some kind person from some church, she seemed to remember, had put this gift together just for her and her child that Christmas. It was her only gift that year. And in that moment of opening that gift she realized that God loved her. She realized she was going to be OK. She purposed herself to recovery. If God would support her, if God could provide, if Jesus was real and really born into the world, then her little girl would be OK also. She shared that the opening of that gift was the moment she began to believe in God and the moment she began her recovery. Today, she is a drug counselor with a Masters degree, helping other people with addiction. And of course as I was sitting there I knew that the church who brought the gift was our church. And someone from our congregation had packed the gift of life for her that year. Are you too busy? Or is there room in the Inn of your heart for the Christ Child this year????? Where is the Christ Child to be born King? Perhaps at Turning Point where a Mother is struggling with addiction and thoughts of her own little child. Maybe this is a "turning point" for you?????????

So I conclude with this --**Where is HE who is born King of the Jews?** Where is this Christ Child to be born this year? Where is HE who is born? The Bible in the gospel of John puts it this way --*"But to all who received Him, who believed in his name, he gave power to become children of God, who were born, not of blood, nor of the will of the flesh, nor of the will of men...but of God."* (John 1: 12) Maybe you find Him in a baby's cry at Turning Point. Maybe you find Him in the concerns of a young Mother. Maybe you find Him in the GIFT of SELF, in giving yourself away, not in your own self-centered plans of Christmas, but in the mighty plan of God who brings His Son to birth, not in an Inn, but in a manger. Where is HE? Is there room in your heart to receive JESUS this year? Is there room in the Inn of your heart for this Christ Child to be born within? Where is He to be born King? Wise Men and Wise Women still find HIM; through The Gifts of the Magi. Amen and Amen.

*By: The Reverend Dr. Stuart D. Broberg, The Church of the Covenant, Washington, PA
IF THIS HAS BLESSED YOU, PLEASE PASS IT ALONG TO A FRIEND!*