



# EPIPHANY 2013 NEWSLETTER

*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 I can I give Him, give my heart.*

*In the Bleak Midwinter, Christina G. Rossetti, 1872*

Epiphany is a time to think about gifts...those we have been given and those we need to share with others.

In the context of Christian faith, our thoughts in this season naturally turn to the Magi - three mystical men from Persia - and the gifts they brought to the infant Christ child whose birth they had foreseen: gold in recognition of him as the heavenly king they believed him to be: frankincense<sup>1</sup> as a symbol of his divinity; and myrrh<sup>2</sup> to embalm him when he died.

In our own lives, this is a time to pause and consider the gifts for which we are most thankful: the love of friends

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<sup>1</sup> Frankincense in its form as incense is understood to be the symbol for the Divine name which could not be spoken (Malachi 1:11; Song of Solomon 1:3; Revelation 5:8, 8:3); as well as an emblem of prayer (Psalm 141:2; Luke 1:10). When burnt it emits a fragrant odor and was one of the consecrated incenses (*HaKetoret*) described in the Hebrew Bible and Talmud used in *Ketoret* ceremonies. The *ketoret* was an important component of the Temple service in Jerusalem. It is mentioned in the Hebrew Bible book of Exodus 30:34, where it is named *levonah* (*lebonah* in the Biblical Hebrew), meaning “white” in Hebrew. The frankincense of the Jews is also called Olibanum (from the Arabic *al-lubbān*). Old Testament references report it in trade from Sheba (Isaiah 60:6; Jeremiah 6:20). Frankincense is mentioned in the Song of Solomon (Song of Solomon 4:14). It was offered on a specialized incense altar in the time when the Tabernacle was located in the First and Second Jerusalem Temples.

<sup>2</sup> Myrrh, in the form of oil, is used to prepare the sacramental chrism used by many churches to perform the sacraments of chrismation and unction, and the ancient world used it in the embalming process. Along with Frankincense, Myrrh was also an ingredient of *Ketoret*, (*see above*). Myrrh, mixed with frankincense, is sometimes offered as incense during Christian liturgical celebrations in traditional Anglican and Roman Catholic Churches.

and family; good health, our own and that of those we care about - or the restoration to health after an illness or injury: the fortitude born of our faith that has sustained us in whatever the year has brought us; a sense of gratitude for, and wonder at the joys and blessings we have been given during the year...the small ones, the big ones, the unexpected ones and the ones not always appreciated at the moment we first receive them.

The unexpected joys and blessings are the ones that, upon reflection, create in us the “aha” moments we also associate with the deeper meaning of Epiphany - however we want to acknowledge it - a manifestation, a “striking appearance,” an intimate sense of God’s presence in our lives, a spiritual awakening to Divine action in the world.

As your Rector, I am mindful of, and deeply grateful for the many gifts I have been given this year:

Foremost for your trust and support in calling me to be your Rector, offering me the great gift of service to God and you, God’s people in this wonderful and unique community of faith that is St. John’s;



For the progress we have made in extending, ever more widely, our welcome especially...

For those who have responded to our welcome by becoming part of our worshipping community,

For each new child, each young member of our congregation who is the sign and hope of our future,

For the dedication of JJ Robinson in helping our youngest parishioners to grasp the basics of our faith in creative and innovative ways,

For Dick Reese, and Peter Harrison who has agreed to take the helm as Dick “retires,” and all the greeters who make St. John’s welcome a reality at our door,



and

For the response to the Parson’s Table on the first Wednesday of every month that puts flesh on the bones of our belief in radical hospitality;

For our growing sense of commitment as a Church to serve not just one another but the broader community in the Litchfield Hills and beyond, especially...

For Veronique Dulack, who guided the committee responsible for outreach in a year of transition,

For Kate Harrison and MB Witt, who, together with Quintin and Spencer Campbell, made the Thanksgiving Pie project for the Town's baskets happen by baking 20 apple pies and presenting them in creatively-decorated boxes,

For Marlene Smith who, once again, provided the Angel Tree, decorating it with the messages from all the cherubs who sent us their Christmas wishes, and

For everyone who contributed so generously to the Angel Tree, the Back-to-School Backpacks and participated in the Living Nativity;

For the deepening sense of the spiritual roots which inform our faith, inspire our lives and enrich our worship, especially...

For the Monday Morning After group and our wide-ranging, occasionally provocative, always thoughtful and educational, and - for me personally - restorative discussions,

For people's response to our educational adult forums and the Advent and Lenten programs,

For growing participation in Morning and Evening Prayers and the Great Vigils of Easter and Christmas Eve;

For the beauty of our worship in a traditional yet dynamic liturgy that always strives for a balance between Word and

music, offering us the possibility of transcendence, a glimpse of the Divine, especially...

For the dedication of the Choir that week after week lifts our souls with their song,

For Alan Murchie, Organist and Choirmaster, whose own artistry and breadth of knowledge has reinvigorated St. John's deep commitment to music as part of its mission,

For the budding Children's Chorus and the innovation of Pop-Up Concerts,



For the Altar Guild, particularly the leadership of Caroline Reid Sorell, which serves behind the scenes to insure that all the elements of the service are prepared with care so the service proceeds seamlessly and gracefully,

For the Chalice Bearers and Readers for their faithful service, and particularly for Jonathan Hall as Crucifer and Laura Daly as Liturgical Assistant, both of whom combine their membership in the Choir and their service at the Altar with devotion;

For each of you and the significant growth in your involvement in the life and work of the Church...

With your energy and enormous effort on the Food Fair and Bazaar, great successes on so many levels that are important to the Church - strengthening a sense of community within the parish, contributing to the financial well-being of the Church, and reaching out to the wider community,



With your amazing work on the Spring and Fall Clean Up Days which have been a huge factor in achieving important economies in our budget...as well as taking care of this beautiful campus which has been given into our care,



With your participation in the life of the parish - Mardi Gras, Quiet Days and Soup Suppers during Lent, Blessing of the Animals, Robert Burns Nights during the bleak mid-winter, Clam Bakes in the mid-summer, and especially...

For a dedicated and hard-working Vestry whose advice and support has been invaluable to me throughout the year,

For the pledges each of you have made from \$200 to \$10,000 for 2012 and 2013, with every pledge - regardless of the amount - representing an important and tangible recognition of our collective and individual obligation of stewardship, an expression of gratitude to those who have preceded us in this place and to God for our many blessings,

For the work of the staff - Isobel, Sarah and Jorge - who support and facilitate everything we do, and without whom much of what I am grateful for would not be possible, and finally...

For the love, perspective, encouragement and devotion of my husband, Robert Wessely, without whom I could not do this work.

In all of this I am keenly aware of God's grace and infinite blessings, for which I am thankful beyond measure or adequate expression.

As we begin 2013, my prayer is for the wisdom to discern what God's wishes us to be and do as St. John's, for the strength to continue encouraging us together to accomplish that mission, for a renewed determination to follow a disciplined spiritual practice, for the courage always to be truthful however inconvenient the truth might be, and, most of all, for the patience to take pleasure in - and be grateful for - our progress and growth each day, in all the small ways.

I hope that the wisdom and faith expressed so simply yet perfectly in Christina Rossetti's poem, *In the Bleak Midwinter*, stays with each of us and informs all that we do in the year ahead...a sense that God is with us; that he asks only for our belief in his promise that all humankind can be restored to unity in and with the Divine, by the power of the Holy Spirit, made real and present to us in the incarnate birth of his Son:

*In the bleak midwinter,  
Frosty wind made moan,  
Earth stood hard as iron,  
Water like a stone;  
Snow had fallen, snow on snow,  
Snow on snow,  
In the bleak midwinter  
Long ago.*

*Our God, Heaven cannot hold Him  
Nor earth sustain;  
Heaven and earth shall flee away  
When He comes to reign:  
In the bleak midwinter  
A stable-place sufficed  
The Lord God Almighty,  
Jesus Christ.*

*Enough for Him, whom cherubim  
Worship night and day,  
A breastful of milk  
And a mangerful of hay;  
Enough for Him, whom angels  
Fall down before,  
The ox and ass and camel  
Which adore.*

*Angels and archangels  
May have gathered there,  
Cherubim and seraphim  
Thronged the air,  
But His mother only,  
In her maiden bliss,  
Worshipped the Beloved  
With a kiss.*

*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 I can I give Him,  
Give my heart.*