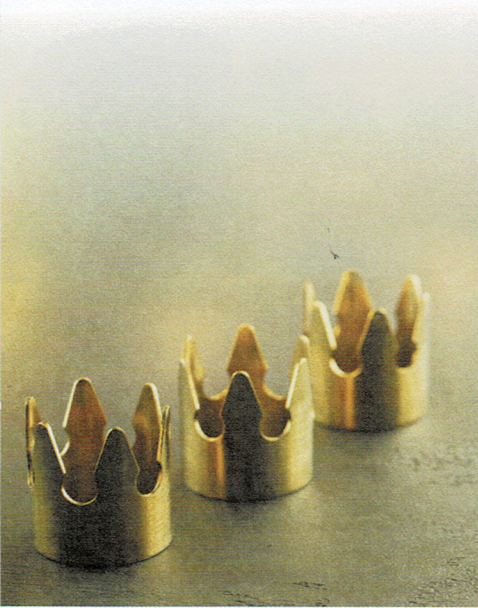


SUNDAY PLUS

What can I give him?

The gift of perseverance

By Seonaid Alder



He who has a tongue does not get lost in the forest." Perhaps this Zambian proverb applied to the Magi as they arrived in Jerusalem and began looking for the king to whom the star was leading them. As they headed towards the palace, did they wonder why they were asking Herod about the birth of a new king, of whom he was unaware? A reigning monarch only wants to know about their own choice of successor. Surely the Magi realised that Herod wouldn't like their news and would lie about wanting to pay homage to the newborn king.

Perhaps the Magi knew more about stars and symbols than politics! They had done the right thing in asking where Jesus had been born but the wrong thing if they wanted to guarantee his safety. Their highly symbolic gifts of gold, frankincense and myrrh were not the usual presents for a new baby – even for one who was a king. (An amusing cartoon suggests that their wives sneaked in afterwards and gave Mary and Joseph food and a bundle of nappies.)

As we celebrate the Epiphany, what could we offer the baby Jesus? It's easy to say that we bring ourselves and that in giving of ourselves we have given everything - but it's much more difficult in practice. It's so simple to make enthusiastic, grand gestures in the beginning and, little by little, chip away at the gift until there's not much left. Perhaps we could ask Jesus for the gift of perseverance?

Seonaid Alder is a retired secondary school teacher.

Holiness doesn't mean doing extraordinary things but doing ordinary things with love and faith.

Pope Francis

Gifts

By Camilla Harrison

Wedding invitations often ask for our "presence" and not our "presents", a pun in which there is both generosity and wisdom. Isaiah describes the time of glorious light for God's people, telling of the gifts of gold and incense, which are there again at the manger, but these are secondary to the joy of the beloved's presence.

Church marriage courses ask young couples to think about "love language". How do they show love? Through action, touch, words or gifts

of time? At the heart of it is, of course, a loving presence in their lives together.

Being mindful and fully present with God in his created world, seeing him in the glory of creation, tending it with reverence, connecting with God through prayer and our human love of each other – spending time in journeying towards him, as the Magi did. Perhaps these are the gifts we can offer.

Camilla Harrison was the head of an RE department at a comprehensive school for twenty years and the writer of two of the Family Walks series of books.



Jubilee 2025

The Jubilee Churches

The Jubilee Churches are eleven churches in Rome which, in addition to the major basilicas, are to be gathering points for pilgrims, where various activities in a range of languages will help people deepen their understanding of the Holy Year. These churches will also offer pilgrims the chance to receive the sacrament of reconciliation and provide space for prayer.

The Jubilee Churches might be unfamiliar to many pilgrims, but they all offer a unique link to the history of the Church. St Prisca's, for example, is one of Rome's oldest sites of Christian worship and honours a martyr whom St Paul baptised at the age of 13. The sixteenth - century church of Santa Maria del Suffragio was built to pray for the souls of people who had died, whereas that of Santa Maria in Monserrato was a hospice for pilgrims who arrived in Rome and had nowhere to stay.

Jesus, I don't have gifts of gold, frankincense and myrrh to offer you, but I can give you my heart. Take it and fill it with love for you and everyone I meet. ✚ Amen.