

Sermon preached by the Priest Pastor  
St Marylebone Parish Church  
Epiphany 2020

What makes a really good gift? I suppose most of us have sent and received a variety of Christmas presents, some really good, some a bit rubbish. Maybe, shock horror, you may have given or received some that will be re-gifted in the future.

You can always tell when you've had one of those.

I think that a really good gift has an element of surprise, and it is bought very much with the person in mind, it is tailored to their interests and reflects things they might have previously admired, or something about them. A really good gift requires a bit of effort in getting it. A good gift says 'I know you, I care for you, I care about you'.

Today, on the first Sunday of a new decade, we are celebrating all kind of gifts.

Because it is Epiphany, we remember how the magi travelled to visit Jesus bearing Gold, Frankincense and Myrrh.

Very inappropriate presents for a new baby.

True, there was the element of surprise and effort in the delivery.

But these gifts were bought definitely with the person in mind.

Highly symbolic and prophetic for the person that the baby Jesus would grow up into.

I recently read a fascinating story from the writings of Marco Polo, the medieval explorer. He visited a city near modern day Tehran, then of course Persia. The residents told him that this was the city where the three wise men had set out from, and they went to worship a prophet, carrying the three gifts.

They wanted to find out whether the prophet was either God, an earthly ruler or a healer. Whichever gift he accepted would show which of them he was.

Marco Polo's legend goes that they went into the child's house, and the child accepted all three. And at that moment was their epiphany.

They realised that he was the True God, the True King and the True Healer.

As they contemplated these gifts for their son, Mary and Joseph must have pondered their meaning, with wonder.

I hope they didn't re-gift them,  
but kept them for Jesus to look at when he grew up – to pick them up  
and think about the purpose for his life.  
And other people would give gifts to Jesus during his life –  
the precious oil to anoint him, the loaves and fishes, hospitality, the tomb.  
So those are the first gifts we are celebrating today.

The second gift is Stella. God has given you the gift of a child,  
Georgina and Paul, and we rejoice with you as you come to give Stella  
the gift of becoming part of God's family, the church.  
Parenthood is an adventure that will take every ounce of your energy, love,  
creativity, patience and gifts. But you are not alone in that adventure,  
and we pray that God's holy spirit will equip you and fill you with joy  
as your daughter grows up to know that he loves her.  
Give her the gift of your prayers, and the gift of encouraging her  
to continue to grow as a member of God's family.  
Because Stella is a gift to us also.

The third gift we are celebrating is the new year, the new decade, 2020.  
Our country has been through a very difficult year,  
and the outcome is uncertain. It's cold outside. For many people,  
wallets are empty. For many others waistlines are wide.  
For some housing, job or health problems weigh down. Australia is on fire,  
and the world seems to be going mad.

But do we view the new year with despair and fatalism? No!  
Because, we believe that despite everything, the world is created by God,  
whose purpose is good and whose nature is love. Romans 8:28:  
We know that all things work together for good for those who love God.  
We in a process of transformation into the new life of Christ  
and we can trust him with the details. God will give us what we need.  
He says to us 'I know you. I care for you, I care about you'.

At the end of this service, we will give Stella a gift. A lighted candle.  
A very inappropriate gift for a baby.  
But highly symbolic of the light of Christ that she has received today.  
Keep it for her as she grows up. Light it on her birthday,  
and the anniversary of her baptism.

And may the light of Christ burn brightly in all our lives throughout this year,  
guiding our steps as we follow him into the adventure of the future.

Amen.