

**New St. James Presbyterian Church, London, Ontario**  
**Sunday, January 6, 2019**  
**Marg McGugan**

**A Serenity of Love**

*“When they had heard the king, they set out; and there, ahead of them, went the star that they had seen at its rising, until it stopped over the place where the child was. When they saw that the star had stopped, they were overwhelmed with joy.” (Matthew 2:9-10)*

*Let us hear the joy upon the rising of the Holy Star in the Eastern sky as it is observed by the Magi. “There it is again! That bright star is outshining all the galaxies, even the milky way. Its like it has a power all its own. Look for yourselves, its dancing in front of our eyes. Balthasar, do you see it? The oracle of Jacob’s star is here! Melchior get up, for we must pack and follow. Get up I say.*

*Gaspar, you are always the one to rush into everything. We have been waiting a long for this oracle to appear. It is the royal sign that a profound scepter rises out of Israel. Now let us prepare with salutations to God before we depart on our journey.” (Numbers 24:17)*

Gaspar, Melchior, and Balthasar are not desert people or firewalkers or sorcerers; but high priests of the Zoroastrian religion who studied law, mathematics, science and astrology. Their ancestors had studied the galaxies of the skies for centuries and when this long-awaited phenomenon burst open the heavens, they were packing their camels for the long journey across the desert to the land of cedars and pomegranates. They travelled through sand storms and pitch-dark nights, nights so dark they could not see their hand in front of their face; frigid nights and sweltering days. It was the light from this star that guided them through the perils of their journey.

A star was so beautiful, so spectacular, that all the other stars of the sky became a white mist in the atmosphere.

This star was HIS star, a prophetic star told in Isaiah ‘for his light has come and the glory of the Lord has risen upon you’.

Emmanuel has finally come to be among his people on earth, and yet, they do not look up to the heavenly skies to see the epiphany of light. They did not remember that their ancestors tucked the scroll of Isaiah in a massive pottery jar to carry it to the land of Tarshish kings when Israel and Judah were plundered and robbed of its nation. They did not remember the promise of Yahweh who will bear a shoot out of the stump of Jesse. It is the Magi’s knowledge of these stories that has brought them to embrace the celestial light of God.

Oh, holy men of God, you will bring good news of great joy to the nations.

It took these holy men months to finally arrive at the star's destination --- not stationed over the temple in Jerusalem; but over a house inhabited with Joseph's new family at the lower edge of Bethlehem.

This sleepy town arose to an unusual spectacle of camels lumbering down the cobblestone street with priestly men perched high on their backs. It was not unusual to see large caravans travel by the town, but to have one come through the town gates was a spectacle indeed. A spectacle which brought people out of their houses to see the camels outfitted in bright coloured blankets and wooden saddles. The bridle was decked out with bronze bells and braided tassels. The bulging saddle bags were stuffed with vessels and jars and trinkets. And tucked deep inside the saddles, were wonderful gifts for the boy child.

With all the excitement of the neighbours spurring onto the street, Mary must have known something was happening. Something unusual. But where was the angelic host to announce the news.

She sat silently cuddling her son closely to her breast as the shadowy figures stepped through the doorpost; the men were of average built, dressed in white shimmering garments and blossoming turbans and she knew immediately they were visitors from beyond the cedar trees; smelling of earthy vegetation and sweaty animals. Mary tucked the loose band of cloth tightly around Jesus--protecting him from the intrusion of strangers.

Strangers that could appear as soldiers coming to Bethlehem, but no one knew when they would appear or what omen they would bring.

She eyed these men with ambiguity, as they stood and knelt in front of her. There was no danger here, she thought, as she sensed a feeling of dedication and honour from them. No feeling of harm to her family.

Only three of them could squeeze into the tiny house as the rest remained outside in the shadows of the starlight with their ships of the desert snorting and folding their lankly legs beneath them; shifting and shaking the burdensome loads mounded on their backs.

Mary retrieved the reed mats from the corner of the room and placed them before each man, while graciously gesturing to the clay water vessel and cups on the floor as she realized they were in no hurry to leave.

Silence filled the air. No words were spoken since neither party could converse in the other's native language. But words were not needed as the men gave signs of blessings to the young child and his mother.

Melchior and Gaspar and Balthasar retrieved 3 golden chests from their saddle bags with 3 golden keys to unlock their treasures.

The first chest revealed reddish-yellow metal worth its weight in gold, for the King's new crown. The second, a flask, flaunting an aromatic perfume used sparingly on the skin of a prince or a counselor or a king,

The third one revealed itself for what it was...highly prized perfume to prepare the body's burying.

Mary bowed her head in a gesture of gratitude as she knew Joseph could never afford such gifts for his family.

What luxurious gifts to give a child, she thought; but now was not the time to elaborate on her sentiments. She sensed these men had journeyed with love in their hearts. They had come with determination and genteel thoughts to seek Jesus and by following a celestial body they had found what they were seeking.

It was an epiphany of a deity.

But would her son be a king to rule over Judah; or become a high priest of the temple? Or were these outlandish gifts a sign of a bad omen preparing her and Joseph of Jesus' premature death?

Enough she thought; enough. God is with us and she needed to focus on the good intentions of the Magi.

She would treasure all these things in her heart as she hugged her son.

The men drank the water quenching their thirst as laughter filled the room. They were enchanted by this child who smiled and lay so peacefully before them under the roof of this small abode. Balthasar reached out to touch the boy's cheek as he reminisced of his own children, now grown.

The gift of the Magi shone on them all.

Gaspar, Melchior and Balthasar rode back into the desert by another way, avoiding Herod and his homage of massacre. They would return to their Tarshish kings and proclaim what their eyes had seen --- a shoot out of Jesse's stump. They would announce the arrival of the King of the Jews to the exiled Israelites. They had taken their gifts to the new born king, but they too had received something. Something more profound than words can express. It is the gift God gives and God alone.

Do we know what this gift is? I believe that would depend on what it is we are looking for. An expensive gift or perhaps a practical gift. Or maybe a gift given out of love-----

Recently I listened to the story of the Gift of the Magi told by Garrison Keillor and written by O. Henry in 1905. (A Prairie Home Companion).

In the tiny apartment on the Lower East Side,  
The beautiful Della combed her long hair,  
And thought about Christmas and bitterly cried,  
For they had no money, no money to spare.  
So little money, and Christmas was near,  
And Jim worked so hard and for so little pay.  
He'd grown discouraged, her darling, her dear  
She must give him Christmas, she must find a way.  
So, she went to a wig shop and sold them her hair,  
Her beautiful hair that her husband adored,  
Her face was all pale as she sat in the chair,  
And she cried as the barber cut it off short.  
And out in the street, with a scarf on her head,  
And the money in hand, Della searched through the shops,  
And there in a window was the gift she must get:  
A platinum chain Jim could hang on his watch.  
His beautiful watch that his father had owned,  
So handsome and beautiful, just like her Jim.  
And she bought him the chain and gladly went home  
And curled her short hair as she waited for him.  
He opened the door and he saw her hair  
And she ran to his side and tried to explain  
It would grow back so quickly, and she didn't care  
And she gave him the beautiful platinum chain.  
Jim took her gift — how brightly it shone.  
He covered his face and sighed in despair,  
And he told her, "I bought you those tortoise shell combs,  
Tortoiseshell combs for your beautiful hair."  
He had pawned his watch to buy her the combs,  
To buy him the watch chain, she sold her hair.  
The gift of the Magi is love alone  
And the gift of the Magi shone on them there.

Amen.