

6th January 2022

Gifts

“Vous savez bien que l’amour, c’est avant tout le don de soi!”
“You know very well that love is, above all, the gift of oneself!”

Jean Anouilh, Ardèle

Have you ever been the recipient of an unexpected gift? My father-in-law, a minister from the 1940s onwards, talked of clergy receiving gifts of a rolled-up umbrella or a pair of black gloves. Which of us in ministry hasn't been handed a book-token or gift-voucher? I once watched in astonishment while a “whip-round” was organised at a family gathering after a funeral – a gift for the church in recognition of my kindness.

I still have the inscribed copy of the *Book of Common Order* I was given at my Licensing in 1973. A copy of the collected works of C S Lewis was a welcome gift in recognition of my year as Moderator of Edinburgh Presbytery. I have a wonderful autoharp, given as a gift simply because I admired it in someone's home. I was once given a frozen chicken – yes, a frozen chicken – as a “thank you” for conducting a wedding! All these gifts had meaning. They might have been unexpected and, in some cases, quite bizarre. But they all conveyed something more than the gifts themselves.

Today is the Feast of Epiphany, which, in the Christian calendar, traditionally marks the arrival of the Magi – the Wise Men or Three Kings – at Bethlehem with gifts for Jesus. These gifts were unexpected – gold, frankincense and myrrh. But they also had meaning. Gold was the symbol of royalty. This was a gift for the King of kings. Frankincense was an incense used in temple rituals. This was a gift for Christ, the priest. Myrrh was used in embalming, and it symbolised suffering, death and the afterlife. This was a gift for the Son of God, whose sacrifice would conquer death itself.

What gift might you receive today, and what meaning will it convey? But, more importantly, what gift might you *offer* today, and what will it communicate? Will it say, with Jean Anouilh, “You know very well that love is, above all, the gift of oneself!”?

A prayer for today

*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.*

Christina Rossetti