



AD POPULUM

VETUS ROMANUS APOSTOLATUS



"Illuminatio Christi ad Gentes"

A PASTORAL EPISTLE TO THE FAITHFUL

Carissimi

The illumination of Christ to the Gentiles, as made manifest on this glorious Feast of the Epiphany, stands as a beacon of divine love and universal invitation. As the Magi from distant lands were led by the star to worship the newborn King, so too are all nations called to recognize and adore the light of the world. The journey of these wise men symbolizes the pathway of every soul towards divine truth, as we are all guided by the light of Christ to find our way in the darkness.

The Magi brought with them gifts of profound symbolism which not only honored the infant Christ but also foreshadowed His mission and Passion for our salvation. These gifts of gold, frankincense, and myrrh, though humble in form, are steeped in deep spiritual significance that foreshadows the redemptive Passion of our Lord.

The Gift of Gold and the Kingship of Christ

Gold, with its shimmering brilliance and captivating allure, has long been regarded as a symbol of royalty and wealth. Its lustrous beauty has captivated the hearts and minds of people throughout history, and it continues to hold a special place in our collective consciousness. In the context of the story of the Magi, the offering of gold to the Christ Child takes on a profound significance.

When the Magi presented their precious gift of gold to the infant Jesus, they were not merely bestowing a material possession upon Him. Rather, they were acknowledging His kingship over all creation. In this act of reverence and homage, they recognized Jesus as the eternal King of Kings, whose dominion extends far beyond the temporal realm. As Jesus Himself declared to Pilate, "My kingdom is not of this world" (John 18:36).

As we contemplate the gold that was presented to the infant Jesus, we are reminded of the profound paradox of His birth. He was born to wear a crown, not one fashioned from the finest gold, but one woven from thorns (John 19:2). This crown of thorns, which He would later endure during His Passion, serves as a poignant reminder of the immense sacrifice He willingly embraced for the salvation of humanity.

Through His suffering and death on the Cross, Christ the King triumphed over sin and death, establishing His everlasting kingdom. The gold offered by the Magi, therefore, serves as a powerful symbol of the ultimate victory that Jesus achieved through His selfless act of love. It represents the triumph of divine grace over the forces of darkness and the inauguration of a new era of redemption and eternal life.

In the grand tapestry of salvation history, the gift of gold from the Magi stands as a testament to the profound truth that Jesus is not a temporal ruler, but the eternal King who reigns over all creation. It reminds us that His kingdom is not of this world, but one that transcends the boundaries of time and space. As we gaze upon the image of the infant Jesus adorned with the precious gift of gold, let us be filled with awe and gratitude for the boundless love and mercy that He has bestowed upon us.

The Gift of Frankincense and the Priesthood of Jesus

Frankincense, an aromatic resin used in worship and prayer, holds a significant symbolic meaning in relation to Jesus and His role as our High Priest. This precious substance, which is often associated with the divine, serves as a representation of the divinity of Jesus. Just as frankincense is lifted to the heavens in smoke during religious rituals, so too does Christ ascend to the Father, acting as our mediator and intercessor.

Drawing upon the biblical reference to Hebrews 4:14-16, we can further understand the connection between frankincense and Jesus as our High Priest. This passage highlights the ability of Jesus to empathize with our weaknesses and temptations, as He Himself was also tempted yet remained sinless. In this way, Jesus becomes the perfect High Priest who can intercede on our behalf before God.

The offering of frankincense by the Magi, as depicted in the biblical account of the Nativity, carries profound symbolism. It foreshadows the ultimate sacrifice that Jesus would make on the Cross, offering Himself as a perfect and pleasing sacrifice to the Father. Just as the fragrant smoke of frankincense rises towards the heavens, so too does Jesus' sacrifice ascend to God, reconciling humanity with the divine.

In his role as the ultimate High Priest, Jesus has the power to transform our imperfect offerings into something pleasing and acceptable to God. Our feeble attempts at worship and prayer, tainted by our human flaws and shortcomings, are made pure and fragrant through the intercession of Jesus. He takes our imperfect offerings and presents them to the Father, sanctifying them with His divine grace.

Therefore, the use of frankincense in religious rituals and the offering of this precious resin by the Magi hold deep theological significance. They serve as reminders of Jesus' divinity, His role as our High Priest, and His ultimate sacrifice on the Cross. Through Jesus, our imperfect offerings are transformed into something beautiful and pleasing to God, allowing us to approach Him with confidence and gratitude.

The Gift of Myrrh and the Suffering Servant

Myrrh, a fragrant resin derived from certain trees, holds significant symbolism in relation to Jesus' humanity and His ultimate sacrifice. This precious gift, traditionally used for anointing and embalming, serves as a foreshadowing of His impending suffering and death. By accepting the gift of myrrh, Jesus willingly embraces His divine mission to endure immense pain and ultimately lay down His life for the salvation of humanity. This act of love, accepting the myrrh, signifies His complete dedication to fulfilling God's plan.

In ancient times, myrrh was commonly employed in the preparation of bodies for burial. Its aromatic properties and preservative qualities made it an essential component in the embalming process. Therefore, the presence of myrrh among the gifts presented to Jesus at His birth carries a profound significance. It serves as a poignant reminder that Jesus, even from the very beginning of His earthly existence, was aware of the destiny that awaited Him.

Furthermore, the anointing with myrrh not only symbolizes Jesus' impending death but also prefigures the anointing of His lifeless body after being taken down from the Cross. Just as myrrh was used to honor and preserve the deceased, the anointing of Jesus' body with myrrh after His crucifixion represents the reverence and respect bestowed upon Him in His final moments. It is a testament to the profound impact His sacrifice would have on humanity and the eternal life that would be made available through His suffering.

Through His passion and death, Jesus not only shared in our sufferings but also offered us a path to eternal life. By embracing the myrrh, Jesus demonstrates His solidarity with humanity, experiencing the full range of human emotions and physical pain. This act of selflessness and sacrifice serves as a

beacon of hope for all who follow Him, reminding us that through our own sufferings and trials, we can find redemption and the promise of everlasting life.

The gift of myrrh holds deep significance in the narrative of Jesus' life and mission. It serves as a powerful symbol of His humanity, His willingness to suffer, and His ultimate sacrifice for the salvation of humanity. The anointing with myrrh not only foreshadows His death but also represents the reverence and respect bestowed upon Him in His final moments. Through His passion and death, Jesus offers us the opportunity to share in His eternal life, providing hope and redemption in the face of suffering.

The Invitation to Offer Our Hearts to God

These gifts, dear faithful, are not just historical artifacts. They are constant reminders of God's invitation to the Israelites—and to us—to turn our hearts back to Him. Just as the Magi offered their treasures, so too are we called to offer our hearts to God.

We are invited to see in the gold, our acknowledgment of Christ's kingship in our lives, to offer Him our loyalty and service. In the frankincense, we are called to recognize Christ as our mediator and to offer our prayers and worship. And in the myrrh, we are reminded of the mortality that Christ shared with us, and to prepare our souls for the life to come through penance and charity.

The Gift of His Love in Christ Upon the Cross

As we celebrate the Epiphany of our Lord, let us meditate on the gift of His boundless love, manifested supremely in His Passion. May the gifts of the Magi lead us to a deeper understanding of the gift of Christ Himself, who out of love for us, endured the Cross and opened the way to salvation.

I exhort you, beloved in Christ, to embrace this season with hearts open to the divine invitation, remembering always that the greatest gift we can offer back to God is a contrite and loving heart, following the example of His Son, our Savior. In Christ's sacrifice upon the Cross, we are given the ultimate gift of love, a love so profound that it encompasses every human experience, from the joys of birth to the sorrows of death.

In conclusion, let us carry forth the Illumination of Christ to those around us. Let this Epiphany be a reminder of our noble calling to be bearers of the divine light, sharing the hope and love of Christ with all we encounter. May we, like the Magi, be ever willing to journey forth in faith, following the star that leads to Jesus, and may we offer our own gifts—our hearts, our love, and our lives—in service to the King of Kings.

May the peace of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Light of the world, be with you all this Epiphany and throughout the New Year.

J. D.

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Jeanne Stein". The signature is written in a cursive, flowing style with a long horizontal flourish underneath.

*Brichtelmestunensis
In Vigilia Epiphaniæ MMXXIV A.D.*