

EDUCATION MINISTRIES

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"Then, opening their treasures, they offered him gifts, gold and frankincense and myrrh." Matthew 2:11

Simple Gifts

One of my first jobs while in high school was working at my parish office as an evening secretary. I thoroughly enjoyed the time I spent there and treasure the memories. One that I remember very clearly was how the nativity was displayed on the welcome counter. I vividly recall being a bit perplexed as to why the Wise Men were not set out too. Despite my 9 years of Catholic school at that time, I had never really thought much about how they technically don't have a place in the nativity scene until after Christmas when we celebrate Epiphany. Now, many years later, when I put out our family nativity or the one at preschool, I try to strategically place the Magi at a notable distance from the manger. This simple gesture also helps remind me that the Christmas season doesn't really end on the morning of December 26th. It actually continues on to the celebration of the Epiphany.

As Catholic educators, parents, grandparents, and family friends, it's important for us to pass on to our children not only the importance of the birth of the baby Jesus, but all the other significant parts of this special time in our liturgical year

such as the Feast of the Holy Family, the Solemnity of Mary, and the Epiphany. When our students return from the holiday break, it will almost be the feast of the Epiphany on January 6th. Many activities, songs, and art projects will be dedicated to making gifts to "bring" to Baby Jesus. Several classes will likely pretend to be the Three Kings by "following" handmade stars and wearing crowns as they walk to the playground. Some will wrap a small box to bring as a present to the Christ Child in the church nativity. The stars will most likely have lots of sparkle and the boxes often contain something specific to each child. Sometimes, there are hearts decorated with stickers or markers, handprint cut-outs, or other special things chosen by the student. In previous years, you may have noticed the tiny presents stacked around the nativity in the church. It is a sweet sight because, although simple, the "gifts" are made with sincerity and genuine care. The teachers emphasize with the children that Jesus doesn't need expensive or fancy gifts (although some often have ideas of giving Him a new pet or an electronic device). At other times when asked what they would give Baby

Jesus, the answer involves a blanket, stuffed animal, or a jar of baby food. No matter what the answer, the children are earnest and wholehearted with their ideas. To me, their responses are humbling and wonderful reminders that God truly just asks for our love and to be faithful to His message.

The next time you have the opportunity to speak with a young child consider asking what he/she would bring as a gift to Mary's baby. The answer will likely provide you with a smile and gentle reminder that God doesn't ask for complicated things. As long as we give of our heart and try to live as He asks of us, that is enough. During the celebration of the Epiphany and in this new year ahead, may God help us to remember this and to recognize all that He provides.

On behalf of the preschool, may 2021 bring you many blessings including peace, renewed hoped, and a deepening awareness of God's presence!

Registration for the 21-22 school year will open soon! To learn how to join our amazing preschool, please visit our website at: preschoolatstfrancis.com or contact Shelley Freeman at shelley.freeman@stfrancisraleigh.org