**Incense Owns a Deity Nigh**

**By Rev. Sheryl Stewart**

**Epiphany Sunday**

Isaiah 60: 1-6 Ephesians 3: 1-12 Matthew 2: 1-12

**Summary: Prayer and praising, all are raising; worship Him, God on high!**

The magi were learned and important people, and we tend to think of them as kings, thanks to the Carol. Although I represent the magus with frankincense this Sunday, the magi are usually thought of as men. I have to say, although sexist, that is probably accurate; even though the magi seek an infant Savior, not one of them brings diapers!

Of course, that would do awful damage to the carol! “Diapers to offer have I, Huggies will keep my Deity dry. Cuddles and kisses, all of you misses; worship the Child Divine!” No, it just doesn’t have the same ring!

Seriously though, the gifts in the carol have symbolic significance, each one of them compact sermons in themselves. Jim has the gold of the Word of God, better than all the purest, finest gold on Earth. Don will officiate during Holy Communion, which is all about myrrh. Jesus was born to die – not simply to be fully human – but to bring all who are human into eternal life. “Myrrh is mine, its bitter perfume, breathes a life of gathering gloom: suffering, sighing, bleeding, dying, sealed in the stone-cold tomb.” Whew! Thank God, the last verse of “We Three Kings” is all about the resurrection!

I have frankincense, since in reflecting on the Word of God, I confess (or “own”) that God is near. I’ve always loved the way Danny puts it in every prayer he offers when we begin our Sunday Bible studies. Depending on who is preaching, he will say, “And please be with Rev.– and here he will name the preacher of the day – as she, or he, brings you your message.” It is not my message, nor is it even brought, primarily, to you. I bring God’s message to God.

The Bible itself, at least in the visions in the book of Revelation, shows worship by the elders. They hold harps and bowls of incense. the incense in the bowls are filled with prayer. The delicious scent of burnt offerings, the priestly sacrifice common in Jesus’ day, was said to please God. So, it should not surprise us that the prayers which the sacrifices represent give God joy in the new covenant.

So often, we think of sacrifice as something at least mildly unpleasant, as if we must give up something, we’d rather keep for ourselves. Instead, think of the prayers and praise of worship as lovely perfume. This odor of devotion rises to God yet also clings to us and follows wherever we go, evidence that our God is near.

No longer do our iniquities make a separation between us and our God so that He does not hear. Jesus intercedes for us in honesty and righteousness. His Name, Emmanuel, means “God with us,” the same as saying, “God is nigh.” Our prayers and Jesus’ prayers mingle, pleasing God and making a witness to all the world. This is the odor which God owns, and which owns God.

At the end of our worship today, we’ll sing: “We’ve a story to tell the nations.” In fact, we **are** a story which God tells the nations! Let us ensure that our God speaks clearly through our lives.