

Gifts of the Magi

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One November while researching information for a Christmas program, I settled on the Gospel of Matthew and the Nativity of Jesus. The story of the Three Magi or Wise Men, bearing gifts after the birth of Jesus, or more precisely three spiritual gifts:

Gold, symbol of kingship on earth, has always implied wealth

Frankincense, as a symbol of deity, is used in perfumes and incense

Myrrh, embalming oil as a symbol of death, is used in perfumes, incense and lotions

The Gospel of Matthew only says the Magi came from the east¹ but Western Christianity (consisting of the Latin Church, Catholic Church, and Protestant denominations) has traditionally believed the three Magi were: Melchior, King of Persia; Caspar, King of India; Balthazar, King of Arabia.²

There are several versions of the Magi story, but my research came from *Gifts of the Magi*,³ an article about a young man whose father and grandfather had been Masons, and he wanted to know what Freemasonry had to offer him. By the way the setting was 1934, young men of today ask the same question. And the answer is as relevant today as it was in 1934. This is a précis of the original Short Talk Bulletin article, *Gifts of the Magi*.

Freemasonry offers nothing—the petitioner requests; the Lodge may or may not give. But, the question is entirely legitimate; any thoughtful young man would like to know something about the Craft and he should receive a satisfying answer.

The first gift of Freemasonry is that of standing in the community. To pass the investigation of a competent committee, and the secret and unanimous ballot of a Lodge, is to be stamped with the earmark of a good character. Freemasons have an enviable reputation. To become one is to share in that reputation, since acceptance as Freemason marks recognition of character by men well thought of in the community.

The young man who becomes a Freemason has the privilege of giving charity and relief to those less fortunate, in a way which is beautiful, because it is secret and unselfish. The young Mason has also the privilege of receiving charity and relief for himself, should he need it.

¹ Matthew 2:1-9, NIV

² Encyclopedia Britannica Online

³ *Short Talk Bulletin*, Author Unknown, Masonic Service Association of North America, Vol. XII, August 1934

The Freemason has opportunities for service: service in friendships, service to the ill, service to brethren in trouble, service to the Lodge. Nor care that the service to be rendered may not be great. As all know who have lived, service to others generates the greatest happiness. He who lives for himself alone, lives miserably. He lives somewhat for others finds that peace which passeth understanding.

The Ancient Craft gives her sons a liberal education in the difficult art of character building. World activities are founded upon ramifications of character. We have faith in the character of the doctor, our lawyer and the judge in the court. Character is the foundation of our civilization. Freemasonry offers such opportunities for the development and the increase of the stature of character as can be found nowhere else in like amount. Many men build as cathedrals were built, the part nearest the ground finished first; but that part which soars towards heaven, the turrets and spires, forever incomplete. Beecher's simile (a noted 19th century New England family active in religion, civil rights and social reform) need not apply to Freemasonry; he who does not finish his turret and his spire of character in the Fraternity fails because he will not, not because he cannot.

To the Freemason the Lodge offers the gift of intelligent patriotism. Not the one hundred per cent American, America first and the devil take the hindmost patriotism of the demagogue, but the real patriotism of genuine love of country, which comes to those who genuinely try to make their country lovable. The history of Freemasonry in America is inextricably intermingled with the stirring events and the deathless deeds of literally hundreds of Masonic patriots without whose devotion the United States might not have been a nation—the pages filled with the immortal names of great men in our history who have known and loved and used the Ancient Craft for the betterment of the nation.

Freemasonry gives to her sons the gentle gift of fellowship. Our friends are those we know well, who love us, perhaps, as much because of our faults as in spite of them. Those with whom we fellowship may see only once, and yet, because of our common bond, we know them as men who might become friends, did opportunity offer; it is to be hoped that they felt thus of us. The spirit of fellowship in a Lodge cannot elsewhere be found. We come to the tiled door a stranger; when passed within we are not among strangers, but brethren.

A great gift of the Fraternity is that of a home in a strange place. The Mason is never homesick is a truism. In practically any town in the land – in fact, thousands of towns world-wide – are Freemasons and Freemasons Lodges. Come to any Lodge a stranger and knock on the door. If the knocker can prove that he is a member a royal welcome awaits, warming to the heart, easing the pain of loneliness, comforting to him who is far from those he loves and knows. Many a Mason has been stranded in a strange place—and been speeded to his destination by brotherly hands. Many a man in a town he does not know has entered it a stranger and departed with new

friends upon his list. The Mystic Tie is a real tie, too strong for breaking, be the strain put upon it never so great. A gift of the Fraternity which it is good to take from the box of memory and muse upon is that of kinship with the old. To do as all good brothers and fellows have done who have passed this tiled door before is inspiring to all but the most practical minded.

To kneel where George Washington knelt; to take the obligation which was sacred to Benjamin Franklin; to sit, in fancy, with the first Grand Master in London; to be initiated with Elias Ashmole; to look over the shoulder of the unknown priest whose careful penmanship lives to this day on our Regius poem; to gather with Athelstan and the great Assembly in York a thousand years ago be spiritually one of a long line of brethren who have knelt at this Altar, taken these vows, lived this life and loved these teachings - that is a gift all Freemasons may have for the taking, and which none take but value.

A companion gift is the kinship with the present day. Millions of men in this nation have taken the Masonic obligations, and who hail the new brother, as he may hail them, with that dearest of titles given by man to men—Brother! Anciently it was written *Laborare est orare* - to labor is to pray. He who accepts the responsibilities of Masonic membership will learn to pray by unselfish labor; labor on committees, labor on Fellowcraft teams, perhaps labor in conferring degrees. Labors of love all bring their own reward. Not the least of her gifts is this opportunity the Ancient Craft puts before her sons that they may work for the common good.

One of Freemasonry's most precious gifts to those who seek her light is her emphasis on religion. Freemasonry is not a religion—Freemasonry is religion, which, without the qualifying article, is quite a different matter. A Religion is a method or mode of worship of God as conceived in that system. Religion, with no qualifying article, is knowledge of, obedience to, dependence on and utter belief in Deity. For a thousand reasons men may wish to become Freemasons, the great reason why men remain Freemasons is their devotement to the principles and teachings of the Order and its focus on non-doctrinal, non-sectarian, non-dogmatic teaching of religious truths which neither conflict not interfere with the tenets and practices of any religion, but buttress and uphold the teachings of the Church.

In Lodge, emphasis is everywhere upon an Unseen Presence.

- Lodges are erected to God.
- Freemasons open and close Lodges with Prayer.
- A candidate receives the benefit of Lodge prayer and later must pray for himself. The number three is everywhere in Lodge - three degrees, three stations, three principal officers, three Great Lights, three Lesser Lights, three steps on the Masters Carpet, three pillars . . . and three is the numerical equivalent of the triangle, most ancient symbol of Deity.

Gifts of the Magi were tangible and of high value—the Gifts of Freemasonry transcends gold, frankincense and myrrh; they are gifts of spiritual satisfaction, of knowledge gained, and of understanding won tangible. The young man petitions a Lodge, is passed by the committee, receives a favorable ballot of his fellows, and lives thereafter with the proud privilege of wearing a Masonic apron and saying to those who ask: “I am a Master Mason”.

Then he has that precious heritage reserved for Master Masons—to be laid to rest with the tears of his brethren, the white apron of initiation the only decoration on his bier, the solemn words of the comforting Masonic service in the ears of his relatives and friends, and at the end, peace under the Sprig of Acacia of immortal hope.

For many pleasures of this life man has invented names: glory of music, loveliness of painting, beauty of sculpture, satisfactions of the body, and happiness of unselfishness. For Master Masons it is a Key leading to a door, beyond which stretches the path to knowledge of those unknown, unnamed joys which only the possessors understand. In Freemasonry, as in the Great Light, it is said, “Ask and ye shall receive; Seek and ye shall find; Knock, and it shall be opened unto you.”

“He, who asks, seeks and knocks in Freemasonry, will receive gifts as beautiful as they are indescribable, as desirable as they are imponderable. To the young man who asks what Freemasonry has to offer, say to him. If you expect little and give much, you will receive far more than the tongue may tell; but ask of Freemasonry what you will - and it shall be given to you, even the gifts of the Magi. But ask of her nothing, unless you come with a heart open first to give.”

FOR THAT, AND THAT ONLY, IS BROTHERHOOD!

