

They offered him gifts...

The feast of the Epiphany marks the visit of the three wise men from the East to visit the infant Jesus. It is important because it signifies that this new-born Messiah is the Messiah for all people – Gentiles as well as Jews.

The wise men (magi) are usually portrayed as kings, contrasting their own power and wealth against the power of a vulnerable new-born infant born in circumstances of poverty. Knowing they are in the presence of one who is greater than they are, they do two things: **they present gifts and pay homage.**

When they (*three wise men from the East*) had heard the king (*Herod*), they set out; and there, ahead of them, went the star that they had seen at its rising, until it stopped over the place where the child was. When they saw that the star had stopped, they were overwhelmed with joy. On entering the house, they saw the child with Mary his mother; and they knelt down and paid him homage. Then, opening their treasure chests, they offered him gifts of gold, frankincense, and myrrh.

Matthew 2: 9-11



Adoration of the Magi, 1894, tapestry, Morris & Co. Designers Edward Byrne-Jones, William Morris, John Henry Dearle. Art Gallery of South Australia

We all have gifts within us. As Mercy Associates and Mercy Friends, these are the gifts we draw on as we strive to bring God's mercy into the lives of those around us. In a society that values wealth and success over personal virtues and religious faith, it's easy to feel we are not gifted, that we have little to offer to the world with

its seemingly intractable problems. But Catherine McAuley knew otherwise, she knew that it's the gift of our own person, our presence, our engagement with the other, that matters most:

“There are three things the poor prize more highly than gold though they cost the donor nothing. Among these are the kind word, the gentle, compassionate look and the patient hearing of their sorrows.”

These gifts of **the kind word, the gentle, compassionate look and the patient hearing of their sorrows** provide such a contrast to the gifts the wise men offered to the infant Jesus. **These are gifts from the heart. They are gifts of mercy**, something we all have the capacity to offer.

The Institute Leadership Team included the following in their Christmas message:



At the first Christmas a gift of mercy and hope came into the world. This gift lives on today through us. What will our gift to the world be this Christmas?

Thinking about the words of Catherine McAuley, and the responses of many in the community to the horrific terrorism against the Jewish community in Sydney during Hanukkah, we witnessed encouraging examples of Catherine's words. In their grief and horror, the Jewish community were 'poor'. This account of contact between Archbishop Costelloe and Emeritus Rabbi David Freilich describes an extraordinary encounter of deep engagement between two people of deep, yet different, faiths.



To ponder:

Archbishop Costelloe's '*kind word, gentle, compassionate look and patient hearing of their sorrows*' made a profound impact on Rabbi Freilich, relieving the isolation experienced by the local Jewish community.

Ponder times when you have offered this gift of presence and gentle care to another person.

What impact did your action have on them?

And what impact did it have on you?

A gentle embrace at a moment of sheer despair has given Rabbi David Freilich hope that Perth's Jewish community is not grieving alone. He was brought to tears again when recalling the moment he broke down in the arms of Catholic archbishop Timothy Costelloe.

'It was very emotional,' Rabbi Freilich said. 'To know that we actually had friends (because) in the last two years, to be quite frank with you, it's been terrible. We felt alone, we felt abandoned. And just to have that support just uplifted our spirits.'

The former Emeritus Chief Rabbi of WA shared the message Archbishop Costelloe sent him only hours after the Bondi attack as evidence that different faiths can unite in the aftermath.

The Archbishop wrote: 'I am filled with horror at the terrible events which have unfolded in Sydney. Please be assured that I and all the Catholic community join you in solidarity, in prayer for those whose lives have been lost and those who have been injured. We hold you and your community in profound esteem as our older brothers and sisters in our faith in the God of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob. May the God of peace bring you peace in the midst of your horror and distress.'

Rabbi Freilich said Muslim leaders had also reached out. 'They wanted to come and see us and we are arranging a time. There should be no divisions between us. We're all citizens of this world... We're all Australians.'

The West Australian, 26 Dec 2025, p. 7 (photo and text)



As you look forward to what 2026 might bring, ponder the gift that you are. It's the gifts that are not material, but of the heart, that matter to other people. When we treat others as human by seeking to connect with them, engage with them, we are treating them as Jesus did, as Catherine did. Catherine said we should be **'shining lamps'**, people who bring light where there is darkness, especially in our day-to-day life.

What opportunities might be around you to offer *'kind word, gentle, compassionate look and patient hearing of their sorrows'* to people in need?



Influence

If you are a stone
thrown by the sure
Hand of Kindness into a pool,
you may not know the full extent
nor ever glimpse your widest ripples
as they circle and spread
and find themselves
lapping the feet
of one or two or three
unknown to you on a far shore.
You may not know the circles you make
and the water you grace
but make them you will
and grace you have been
by the hand of the One
who gave you to the water.

Mary Wickham RSM, [Being the Bird](#)



THE WORK OF CHRISTMAS

When the song of the angels is stilled,
when the star in the sky is gone,
when the kings and princes are home,
when the shepherds are back with the flocks,
then the work of Christmas begins:
to find the lost,
to heal those broken in spirit,
to feed the hungry,
to release the oppressed,
to rebuild the nations,
to bring peace among all peoples,
to make a little music with the heart...
And to radiate the Light of Christ,
every day, in every way,
in all that we do and in all that we say.
Then the work of Christmas begins.

Howard Thurman, adapted, MIA, Facebook

Sit quietly with these thoughts. Listen for the gentle whisperings of the Holy Spirit.

God of all people and God of all creation,

Thank you for the revelation of your Son in the infant Jesus,

thank you for the gift of a New Year,

thank you for the gift of my life, my gifts.

Guide me to be sensitive to moments in my life where a **kind word, gentle, compassionate look and patient hearing of their sorrows** will be life-giving for those in my presence.

Remind me that you are with me always...