

Epiphany 2020

Hendred

Arise, shine; for your light has come!

THE MOST popular Christmas carol, we're told, is Christina Rossetti's *In the bleak midwinter*, sung by congregations to music by Gustav Holst and by choirs to a lovely setting by Harold Darke. It's a very beautiful poem and a very lovely carol:

What can I give him, poor as I am?

If I were a shepherd, I would bring a lamb.

If I were a wise man, I would do my part.

Yet what I can I give him –

Give my heart.

Of course I must give my heart. But I think Christian Rossetti could have gone further. Far more important than what we give the Lord is what he gives us. The Germans are surely wrong to call today *Heilige Drei Koenige*. Today, as the French, the English and the Spanish know, is the Epiphany. God

showing us himself. God appearing in our midst. What is on show is not gifts of gold, frankincense and myrrh but God's love for us. The light of the world.

Arise, shine; for your light has come!

Our gift to God is not just our heart – though, in one sense, that is everything we have to give – but the gift to God of our gold, our frankincense and our myrrh. Thanks to the hymns and carols – ‘We three kings of Orient are’ and so on – we know what gold, frankincense and myrrh mean. Gold is kingship. Frankincense is divinity. Myrrh is suffering. That's what the gifts of the wise men meant. But what about our gifts – our gold, our frankincense and our myrrh?

So let us ask ourselves once more what our gold is, what our frankincense is and what our myrrh is? I can't answer that for you but I can give you a clue. The gold we bring is our money, our time, our talent. God is asking for all of these in response to the gift to us of the baby Jesus, the light of the world. He is asking us to shine. Not to hide our light under a bushel but hold it up for everyone to see. He's asking us to give him of our very best. The frankincense we give is prayer, spirituality and

worship. Taking a full part in the worshipping life of the church. Saying our prayers. Reading the bible. The myrrh is taking up our cross and following Jesus the Saviour of the world. Putting others and their needs in front of us and our own needs. Accepting whatever suffering life gives us and offering it up to God in union with the cross and passion of Jesus.

If we take this seriously – this offering of gold, frankincense and myrrh – then we shall make a lasting impression, in a cruel and difficult world, with its cruel and difficult people, to the honour of a baby and his mother. The lavishness of our gifts – our gold, frankincense and myrrh – will not only, as in Bruegel's painting, point up the squalor of much human life, but also begin to change things for the better. As we do our little bit, each one of us, we shall be living up to the text,

Arise, shine, for your life is come!
