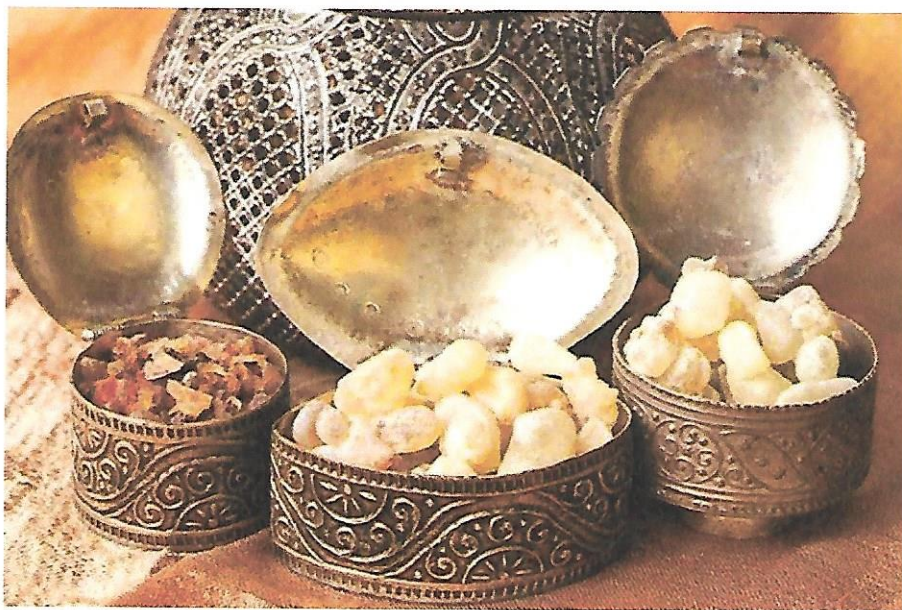


SUNDAY PLUS

Love is...

Love is meant to be shared



Sr Janet Fearn FMDM

Gold. Frankincense. Myrrh. The Magi gave the Infant Jesus precious, deeply symbolic gifts.


A cartoon shows their wives quietly following along afterwards and presenting Mary and Joseph with a pile of nappies, enough home-cooked food to keep them going for a couple of days and a supply of infant milk formula. Their cartoonist-imagined offerings made sense and were considerably more practical than those of their husbands.

Mary and Joseph didn't keep Jesus to themselves in Bethlehem or their little home in Nazareth: they shared him. They allowed him to grow and develop as any other little boy – which is why people saw him as "one of us" when Jesus began his ministry. God shared Jesus, first through the incarnation and then "officially" at his baptism in the Jordan.

We've just celebrated Christmas and perhaps some of us are wondering what to do with incredibly thoughtful but unsuitable presents. Most of us will possibly hold on to them, perhaps for years, out of loving respect for the donor. In some cultures, where there is no concept of personal ownership, it is customary to pass them on to someone who can make more use of the gift – and there is no hint of disrespect.

Is there something to be said for copying the generosity of God, Mary and Joseph in their willingness to share Jesus? Is there also an argument for holding on to him, through thick and thin? Jesus was and is God's gift of love to us. Love is meant to be shared!

Sr Janet Fearn is a Franciscan Missionary of the Divine Motherhood.

Help me, Lord, in this New Year, to listen to your voice and to go wherever you lead me. Break open my heart to pay attention to your words.  Amen.

Love lights the darkness

By Lucy Russell

Mother Teresa said, "I know God will not give me anything I can't handle. I just wish he didn't trust me so much." He has placed a great deal of trust in me recently. It has been one thing after another. But what has become abundantly clear is that this trust is shared. When Dad died at the beginning of Advent, the outpouring of love from colleagues and friends was overwhelming.

"Don't you think," my headteacher asked me, "we're trusted with these challenges because God knows we've got the support network to cope with them?" That couldn't be truer. My husband arriving home from the school where we both teach, the day after Dad died, with a week's worth of food shopping from the head and deputy head, was unforgettably beautiful. Love is the light that shines so brightly that others can find their way out of the darkness.

Dr Lucy Russell is the author of Who Do You Say You Are?, available from Redemptorist Publications, www.rpbooks.co.uk

Feast of the week



The Baptism of the Lord

The Gospel of [the baptism of Jesus] shows us the scene with which Jesus' public life begins: he, who is the Son of God and the Messiah, goes to the banks of the Jordan river to be baptised by John the Baptist. After about thirty years of hidden life, Jesus does not present himself with a miracle, or by rising to the podium to teach. He queues up with the people who were going to receive baptism from John... This is a beautiful attitude: with a bare soul and bare feet. And Jesus shares the plight of us sinners, he descends towards us; he descends into the river and into the wounded history of humanity. He immerses himself in our waters to heal them and he immerses himself with us, in our midst. He does not rise up above us, but rather comes down towards us with a bare soul, with bare feet, like the people. He does not go on his own, nor with a selected, privileged group. No: he goes with the people. He belongs to those people and he goes with them to be baptised, with those humble people.

Pope Francis

Today: Isaiah 42:1-4, 6-7 Acts 10:34-38 Matthew 3:13-17 (S): Isaiah 60:1-6 Ephesians 3:2-3, 5-6 Matthew 2:1-12	Monday: Hebrews 1:1-6 Mark 1:14-20 (S): Isaiah 42:1-4, 6-7 or Acts 10:34-38 Matthew 3:13-17	Tuesday: Hebrews 2:5-12 Mark 1:21-28	Wednesday: Hebrews 2:14-18 Mark 1:29-39	Thursday: Hebrews 3:7-14 Mark 1:40-45	Friday: Hebrews 4:1-5, 11 Mark 2:1-12	Saturday: Hebrews 4:12-16 Mark 2:13-17	Next Sunday: Isaiah 49:3, 5-6 1 Corinthians 1:1-3 John 1:29-34
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