How many of you have received or given gift cards to friends and families during this Christmas? According to statistics[[1]](#footnote-1), Americans spent more than $25 Billion in gift cards during the Christmas season in 2017…that’s $25 billion with the “B”. Annually over $140B worth of Gift Cards were sold. These numbers are astronomical each year as more people choose to give Gift Cards to others instead of hand picking a special gift for someone. Although these Gift Cards may be convenient for some, they are not, however, without any financial consequences and drawbacks. Each year, an estimated more than $46 Billion are left unused on these Gift Cards…that’s money doing down the drain and not being redeemed for goods or services. Some of these Gift Cards also carry an Expiration Date or a monthly maintenance fee if you don’t use it over an extended period of time, its balance will be deducted until it reaches “0”. So we need to be careful and read all the fine prints of these gift cards.

Just the other day, my sister was trying to use a *Target* Gift Card that she received from her friends a couple of years ago. She thought that there was some money left over on the card, but only to be told that the declining balance has reached “0” and her card has expired. So she lost some money on the card because of that.

On the Day of Epiphany, which is officially tomorrow 1/6, we also find ourselves looking for God’s redeeming gift to us. God had made a promise that a special and personal gift would be sent to us, and we were given a series of signs foretelling us of what that gift may look like, its purpose, and where we might find that gift. The Magi from the East had studied these signs and prophesies and they came to the right place at the right time. They, however, did not come empty handed. They brought special gifts with them to pay homage to the special child. These were not just any ordinary gifts or gift cards, but carefully chosen symbolic gifts, for this special extra-ordinary child.

**Epiphany is not about what we have brought to offer, but also what we have received and shared with others. Through Christ, God’s ultimate Redeeming Gift was given to humanity.**

The Magi were determined in their pursuit of the Messiah child, no matter how far or how long their journey may take. Upon their arrival, the Magi bowed down and worshipped the redeeming Gift from God with great joy. The Magi thought that their mission was accomplished…when in fact, it was just the beginning. The 2nd phase of their mission has just begun. Now, they must go back and share with others about what they saw. Essentially this is what the season of Epiphany is all about…that we came, we witnessed and we heard. And then we are charged with a mission, to go and to tell others about what we saw, just as we sang the hymn couple of weeks ago, “*Go, Tell it On the Mountain…that Jesus Christ is born*!”

Although some scholars believed that the Magi actually arrived late and they were not part of the first Christmas, as we formulated on our minds over the years. Mary, Joseph and Jesus had already settled down and found a more permanent place to stay. But regardless of whether they were actually there (or they came later on), the Magi’s determination and faithful pursuit of the Messiah child should not be underminded.

The arrival of the Magi opened a whole new chapter in God’s continuing story of human salvation and redemption. It was a gift card that keeps on giving. The arrival of the Magi signified God’s salvation was no longer **exclusively** for the Jews but **inclusively** for ALL people, even the Gentiles. It was interesting to note that among the first people who called Jesus as “king” were outsiders, foreigners, and worshippers of other gods.[[2]](#footnote-2) This was not by coincidence but a part of God’s orchestrated plan of salvation for ALL people, not just for the Jews. Through the Magi, God was revealing, shining forth to us a glimpse of what God’s Kingdom would fully look like. **For thousands of years, the Jews were the people of the God’s covenant, but from now on, that very same covenant is made known to all those who came to worship. They saw, they heard, and they believed.**

This Epiphany moment signifies that **our salvation no longer rested solely upon the pedigree of our heritage or tradition, or by the obedience of the laws and ritual practices. Our salvation rests solely upon one’s confession of faith through the grace of God.** This is the core of the gospel message as well.

Furthermore, like the Magi, we may often find ourselves wandering out in the wilderness, not knowing where we are, where we are going or what we are looking for. At times **we may be pursuing after our personal dreams and ambitions, instead of embracing God’s humble plan for our future.** We make plans and decisions without consulting God first. We chase after our own ambition, go after the wrong star that lead us away from Bethlehem, instead of towards it.

Perhaps this is part of God’s New Year resolution for us, as we launch ourselves into a sense of renewal vision with 20/20 hindsight. We pray that we fix our eyes and our hearts upon the star that ultimately lead us to the true redeeming gift from God. Be persistent and faithful in abiding in Him, as He abides in us.

As we look forward to the brand-new year ahead of us, some of us may be called upon to make critical decision about our future…about our job situation, about our health, our families or relationships. Some of us may be challenged to let go of certain things that we have been holding on to in our lives, which hindered us from seeing God’s possibilities and unwrapping God’s redeeming gift for us in return.

The Magi showed their resiliency and faithfulness throughout their journey. Not only will they have stories to tell about their journey, about the gifts that they had brought for this Messiah child but more importantly the gift that they were bringing back that no money can buy or no gift card can redeem – that the Messiah child has been born who would redeem us all.

Unlike Santa’s gifts, the gifts that the Magi brought were not what the child needs that would make him temporarily happy. Those gifts were symbolic of who this child would one day become. The gold, the frankincense, and the myrrh symbolically represented this newborn child would soon be the king, the priest, and the anointing sacrifice, that He was destined to on our behalf. These were extra-ordinary gifts to be given for a not-so-ordinary child, who was born in a stable. **These were the perfect gifts for the one and only “perfect” child!**

In the same way, whenever we come before the Messiah child in worship or before this table of communion, we remember who we are and whose we are. Christ is not concerned about what we have to bring. **Christ is more interested in our gifts of persistence, diligence, and faithfulness in pursuing Him**. The best gift that we can offer to Christ is OURSELVES!

Through God’s redeeming gift to humanity, **God has given us the greatest gift that no Gift-card can redeem for us. In exchange, we receive God’s ultimate gift Love, Joy, Peace** and **Hope** so that we may share with others as well.

Throughout this coming New Year, may we diligently seek God and explore new ways of giving ourselves through mission and outreach opportunities, fostering new and amending broken relationships through Christ’s ultimate love for us. May this be **OUR** renew common sense of calling, **OUR** new challenge for mission for God’s people in and around us.

So, where do you see the Epiphany of God happening in your lives today? How may we shine the light of Christ in the lives of others? Or are we still deeply entrenched in this world of darkness and refuse to let God’s light penetrate through the darkness of our sins? Let us continue to make room in our hearts for God’s happening and not to turn him away. *Arise, Shine, for the light of Christ has come and the glory of the LORD has risen upon you*.[[3]](#footnote-3) Thanks be to God. In the name of God the Father, God the Son, and God the Holy Spirit, Amen.

1. *www.finder.com/gift-card-spending* [↑](#footnote-ref-1)
2. Stroble, Kristin, *Connections Year A, Volume 1 p.158* [↑](#footnote-ref-2)
3. *Isaiah 60:1* [↑](#footnote-ref-3)