

THE BABY SHOWER

It was bingo day at the nursing home. Esther had just won cover all, and that meant that she was going to get an extra dessert that night at supper. Now, dessert was apple pie. Never mind that it was sugar free and there was no gluten in the crust; she was looking forward to it!

The bingo game was done, but the boys; the boys lingered at their table: Gus, and Mel, and Bud, and Sam. And there at their table the boys were telling tales and swapping stories. And, as they did that, you know what happened: each new story was more sensational than the last one.

So, finally, Bud turned to Mel and he said: *Mel, tell Sam about our road trip.* Well Mel thought for a moment and he said: *You know, Bud, it's been so very long. I'm not sure I can remember the story. You tell it, Gus.* And, after a little hemming and hawing, Gus finally agreed, and he said: *Well, I'll do my best.*

It was a long time ago, and it was just an ordinary afternoon. We were killing time playing Sheepshead, and then the phone rang. The caller ID said "Unknown Name," but we answered it anyway. The voice on the other end of the phone told us that we had won a trip, a trip to a baby shower. Well, you know, we'd never been to a baby shower before, but the directions seemed simple enough. The directions said just follow our HPS (heavenly positioning system).

Well, Bud, and Mel, and I, we all looked at each other. And finally, Bud said, "You know, what the heck? We don't have anything better to do, so let's go!" So we loaded up the minivan, and we headed out for the shower.

Did it take you long to get there? Sam asked.

Did it take us long?!? Two years! We thought we were never going to get there, and we thought that at least we'd be going to a big fancy city but, as it turns out, we ended up at some Podunkville in the boondocks.

Yeah, said Mel. It was dull! It took us forever, and we even had to ask directions. But we finally found the shower and the kid for whom it was thrown. You know, his parents, they were dirt poor. They were homeless, even. They and their baby, they were camped out in a barn.

So what did you do? asked Sam.

This time, Bud answered. He said: *Well, we put his gifts in his bed...if you could call it that. It was just a manger with a blanket in it. And then we left that place as quick as we could, and we headed straight back home.*

We learned our lesson the hard way that day. Never answer the phone when the Caller ID says "Unknown Name!"

Then Gus became reflective. And he asked: *You know, I wonder. I wonder what that baby ever did with gold, and frankincense and myrrh?*

Mel chimed in. He asked: *I wonder if that kid ever made anything of himself?*

Well, that's how the conversation went on bingo afternoon; the conversation among Sam, and Gus, and Bud, and Mel down at the nursing home...you know, down at *Magi Manor*. In reality, these guys weren't Gus, and Bud, and Mel. They were Gaspar, and Balthazar, and Melchior. And the minivan; well it was really a camel. And the baby shower; it was in Bethlehem. And the baby? You know who that baby was, don't you? It was Jesus!

Three dreamers...three magicians...three kings...three rich vagabonds went to a baby shower in Bethlehem and presented that baby with fabulously expensive and sensationally useless gifts. Then, in a flourish of awkward good-byes, they packed up and left. They got out of there!

If this invitation had been issued to three women instead of to three men, we know what they would have done, don't we? They would have asked directions. They would have arrived on time. They would have helped deliver the baby. They would have cleaned the stable, made a casserole, and brought practical gifts.

Extravagant or expedient...luxurious or necessary: what kind of gifts do you take to baby showers? Now, given the poverty of Joseph and Mary, the gifts that the women would have brought seemed much more appropriate. Yet, given the rumors of royalty about Jesus, the gifts that the men brought seem more worthy.

Remember, this wasn't just any old baby shower. This was a baby shower for Jesus! And those three weren't the only ones invited. We are, too! What gifts will you bring to the shower? What gifts will you bring to Jesus? Will you bring gifts of necessity; gifts to relieve the poverty of God's forgotten children? Or will you bring gifts of luxury, gifts to praise the child whose life is God's gift of love to a hurting world? What gifts will you bring to Jesus?

The wise men teach us to bring gifts for those who have nothing because we have received everything in Bethlehem. And so I can tell you this morning that, as of this week, this church has built two more arks for Heifer International, two hundred dollars more than ten thousand dollars for this year's Living Gift Market. It is something to celebrate...absolutely! The wise men teach us to give for those who have nothing because we have received everything in Bethlehem.

What gifts will you bring to Jesus? Remember Gus, and Mel, and Bud at the Magi Manor. A long time ago, they went on an adventure. And, when they got to where they were going, they were disappointed in the destination. So they offered up their gifts in an awkward rush, and then they hightailed it for home. And, as far as we know, Mel, and Gus, and Bud never crossed paths with Jesus again.

And in this is the pathos of this story. Gus, and Bud, and Mel knelt at the manger...and they went home. They saw Jesus in Bethlehem...and they left Him there.

How will it be for us? Will we do the polite thing? Will we go to the baby shower? Will we eat the dollar sandwiches, and munch on the mints and the nuts, and give our gifts, and then go home? Or will we do the faithful thing? Will we go to the baby shower, and eat the dollar

sandwiches, and munch on the mints and the nuts, and then never leave Jesus' side: trusting Him, and loving Him, and following Him, and serving Him...every day...every day?

Gus, and Bud, and Mel – they got an invitation, and it made for a great adventure. And what a story they have to tell! Yes, it happened a long time ago...and it's a pretty dusty memory for them by now, but it does help to pass the time down at Magi Manor. And their question...their haunting question is this: *What ever became of that boy?*

We have an invitation, too. Our invitation is just the same as theirs: Come to a baby shower! Come to a baby shower for Jesus! So, how will we R.S.V.P.? Will we send our regrets? Or will we come and give our gifts, and go home, and leave the baby in the manger, and find our way back into our old familiar lives? Or will we come, and give our gifts, and stay by Jesus' side...and trust Him...and love Him...and follow Him...and serve Him...every day?

You know, folks, we can find a lot of reasons not to go...and not to give our gifts to Jesus. But there's one reason, one reason to do it that trumps all of the reasons not to. And that reason is simply this: Jesus is life...because Jesus is love.

What gifts will you bring? What gifts will you bring to Jesus? The most important...by far the most important...is the gift of our hearts, and our lives. And, you know, we can give ourselves to Jesus...we can do that because, in Jesus, God has given us the very best gift we'll ever receive.

It's a baby shower. You've all been invited! Will you leave the baby, or will you go with Him? Will you take Him with you? You know, if we don't receive this gift, we don't have anything to give. Give yourself to Jesus! Amen.

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