

Today is the Feast of the Epiphany. It is an ancient feast of the Christian Church and it is a principal feast for many Christians. Like Christmas, the date is fixed. We always celebrate the Epiphany on January 6. Depending on how you do the counting, and the Church has never been of common mind on this, the Epiphany is either the twelfth day of Christmas or the day after the twelve days of Christmas, which would be the first day after the Christmas season. It doesn't matter. Any way you count it, the Epiphany is the fulfillment of Christmas, the realization and completion of God's intent, in coming into this world, to share in our humanity and make himself fully known.

Epiphany means "manifestation" or "revelation." The Epiphany emphasizes God's revelation of himself, in Christ, to the Gentiles. The theme comes to us in the story of the Magi, the "Wise Men" from the East, following the new star, bearing gifts for the newborn king. The story carries a powerful symbolic theme: Christ is the light to enlighten the nations, reaching out to bring all humanity into the family of God.

Saint Matthew's story tells us that the Magi followed the Lord's star. It was the brightest of stars, a sign of great significance, and the Magi followed it in order to visit the baby Jesus. This fulfilled Isaiah's promise, made 750 years before the birth of Christ, that the coming messiah would be a "light to enlighten the nations, the glory of his people Israel." In our reading from Isaiah this morning, the prophet reminded us that Israel's light is in the world, and the glory of the Lord has risen upon us. And, though spiritual darkness once covered the earth, Israel's light is in the glory of her Lord, and the nations shall gather to this light. The star symbolically represents the light of Christ, lighting the way of grace, truth and peace. The wise men represent the Gentile world at large, called to join Israel in worshiping the one true God, through God's only Son, Jesus Christ. The gifts that they bear represent the gifts that we offer to Jesus, gifts of ourselves - gifts of love, obedience and discipleship.

Surely, in Jesus, God is the Father of all people: of all races and all social classes. God will not permit himself to be contained within a single culture or a single race. Nothing contains God. God is universal in embracing humanity. It is no small thing that the Gentile world swiftly accepted Saint Paul's message of salvation through Jesus Christ. Saint Paul was the Lord's instrument in reaching out to the Gentile world, and the Gentiles rallied to Paul's message of salvation, because the message was that of God's perfect love, through the birth, death and resurrection of Jesus Christ. It was the "Good News" humanity longed for. It is no small thing that because Paul carried the message to the Gentiles, you and I are Christians today.

It never ceases to amaze me that Christianity transcends all cultural barriers, all the artificial boundaries that restrict understanding and acceptance of one another. One does not have to be Semitic, or European to find meaning in the story of Jesus. People of all cultures readily embrace the good news of Jesus Christ. Polynesians, Africans, Chinese, Japanese and Koreans; it just doesn't matter. Christ is not just Christ of the West. He is

the Christ of the East and the West, the North and the South. Christianity is truly the global religion. God's message is universal, and the message is this: "God so loved the world that he sent his only begotten son, that whosoever believes in him shall not perish but have eternal life." The news just does not get any better. Saint Paul said, in his Letter to the Galatians, "There is no longer Jew or Greek, there is no longer slave or free, there is no longer male and female; for all of you are one in Christ Jesus. And if you belong to Christ, then you are Abraham's offspring, heirs according to the promise."

The message of unity in Jesus should be a message of peace to a troubled world. Perhaps the day will come when we can be one in Jesus and share the joy of making him known.

*Amen.*