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Holy Faith, Santa Fe
6 January 2019

Feast of the Epiphany
Isaiah 60.1-6
Psalm 72.1-7, 10-14
Ephesians 3.1-12
Matthew 2.1-12

In the name of the one, true, and living God: Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. Amen.

Today is the Epiphany of our Lord Jesus Christ, a principal feast of the Church, but one that doesn't usually fall on a Sunday and is overshadowed by Christmas. As always following Christmas by twelve days, the Epiphany, I believe, is the culmination of the Christmas season. It is, after all, the day we celebrate the arrival of the magi or astrologers or wise men or even kings, if you subscribe to the words of the hymn "We three kings of Orient are" [that we just sung], to worship the Holy Infant Jesus, thus completing our nativity scene in the crèche.

But "epiphany" is a strange word. In modern parlance, it means some sort of realization, as in "I've just had an epiphany!" Well, this being the Epiphany of our Lord Jesus Christ doesn't mean that we're celebrating that Jesus just realized something, or something just dawned on Jesus (although the Prayer Book translation of the opening of today's reading of the Third Song of Isaiah that we use at Morning Prayer does state, "Arise, shine for your light has come, and the glory of the Lord has dawned upon you.")! No, a better title for today's celebration is the alternate title from the Prayer Book: the Manifestation of Jesus Christ to the Gentiles, a recognition by people around the world that Jesus is the Christ, the anointed One, the Messiah, the Savior of the world, the Savior for the world.

Today's collect, our opening prayer supports this premise. We prayed: "O God, who by the leading of a star didst manifest thy only-begotten Son to the peoples of the earth..." The star represents the light of Christ coming into the world, presumably high in the sky for all to see. The star hovered over the place where Jesus lay and it guided the magi, the astrologers, the wise men, the kings or whatever you want to call them, to where Jesus was. The visitors who were from the East represent different races from around the world, as depicted on the cover of our service bulletin [and the figurines in our crèche]. Traditionally, the magi are named Melchior from Persia, Caspar from India, and Balthazar from Arabia. While they asked, "Where is the child who has been born king of the Jews?" their presence signifies that Jesus was not born for the Jews alone, but for the whole world. And they knelt down and worshiped Jesus and offered him gifts from around the world: gold as a symbol of kingship on earth, frankincense as a symbol of divinity, and myrrh as a symbol of anointing for death.

Just as the star and the magi were instruments of the manifestation of Jesus as the Christ, the anointed One, the Messiah, the Savior of the world, the Savior for the world, to the Gentiles, so also was St. Paul an instrument of the manifestation of Jesus Christ to the Gentiles. Paul, although a Jew, was called by God to proclaim the Good News of Jesus Christ not only to the Jews but to anyone who would listen to him. In his letter to the non-Jewish community in the city of Ephesus in Asia Minor, Paul writes that he is a prisoner for Christ Jesus on behalf of the Gentiles, assuming that they have heard of the commission of God's grace that was given to him on their behalf. Paul says that God revealed to him the mystery that God had not revealed to anyone earlier that Gentiles are fellow heirs of God's promises to the Jews, members of the same body, and sharers in the promise in Christ Jesus through his Gospel.

Of this Gospel, Paul says he became a minister according to the gift of God's grace that was given him by the working of God's power. Although Paul claims to be the very least of all the saints, God gave him the grace to bring to the Gentiles the good news of the boundless riches of Christ and to bring to light God's plan from the beginning to save the whole world through Jesus, the Messiah and Son of God. Through his letters to the churches he founded and beyond, Paul became the Church's first and greatest theologian in bringing the light of Christ, the life of Christ, and the love of Christ as a gift for all the world's peoples.

Just as the star, the magi, and St. Paul were instruments of the manifestation of Jesus as the Christ, the anointed One, the Messiah, the Savior of the world, the Savior for the world, think about who in your life was God's gift of grace that revealed to you the light of Christ, the life of Christ, the love of Christ. Was it a parent, grandparent, favorite aunt or uncle who spoke to you about the good news of Jesus Christ? Was it a neighbor who shared with you the boundless riches of Jesus Christ? Was it a Sunday School teacher, a priest, or a companion along the way who convinced you that you are an heir of God's promises and a member of Christ's body? If that person is still alive, why don't you take time this Epiphany Season to let them know the impact they had on your life and walk with Christ? If the person is no longer alive, pray for the repose of their soul and thank God for their influence on your life.

And most importantly, just as the star, the magi, St. Paul, and people in your own life were instruments of the manifestation of Jesus as the Christ, the anointed One, the Messiah, the Savior of the world, the Savior for the world, how are you going to be an instrument of manifestation of the light of Christ, the life of Christ, and the love of Christ to this world that sorely needs to hear the Good News of Jesus Christ - this Epiphany, this new year, this week, this day? Amen.