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Holy Faith, Santa Fe
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Christmas II -Year A
Jeremiah 31.7-14
Psalm 84
Ephesians 1.3-6, 15-19a
Matthew 2.1-12

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

Tuesday 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. We will celebrate the Feast of the Epiphany on Tuesday at the Taizé Healing Eucharist, but of the several Gospels appointed for today, we can choose to hear the same Gospel appointed for the Epiphany. 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" 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, the Epiphany of our Lord Jesus Christ doesn't mean that that Jesus just realized something, or something just dawned on Jesus. The Epiphany is also known as 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-King, the Savior of the world, the Savior for the world.

Today's readings support this premise. The magi, the astrologers, the wise men, the kings or whatever you want to call them, were guided by a star to where Jesus was. The visitors who were from the East represent different races from around the world, as

depicted by the figurines in our crèche. Traditionally, the magi are named Melchior from Persia, Gaspar 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. The particular gifts the magi present to the infant Jesus are symbolic of the identities Jesus will manifest in his life – as the Messiah-King, as the Christ – the divinely anointed one, and as the Savior of the world, the Savior for the world, through his crucifixion and resurrection.

Since offering two forums on the theological poetry of Advent hymns and incorporating the lyrics of carols in my Christmas sermon, I am on a kick of using words of hymns to point to larger truths. So listen carefully to the words of the hymn, “We three kings of Orient are,” and hear how they not only manifest Jesus’ identity, but also capture defining events in Jesus’ life:

Melchior brings gold from Persia to crown Jesus the Messiah-King: “Born a king on Bethlehem’s plain, gold I bring to crown him again, King for ever, ceasing never, over us all to reign.” Gaspar brings frankincense from India to worship Jesus as divine, the anointed one: “Frankincense to offer have I: incense owns a Deity nigh; prayer and praising, gladly raising, worship him, God Most High.”

Balthazar brings myrrh from Arabia to anoint Jesus for his death, by which he becomes the Savior of the world, the Savior for the world: “Myrrh is mine; its bitter perfume breathes a life of gathering gloom; sorrowing, sighing, bleeding, dying, sealed in the cold-stone tomb.”

But Jesus doesn't remain sealed in the stone-cold tomb. The hymn's last stanza continues: "Glorious now behold him arise, King and God and Sacrifice; heaven sings alleluia: alleluia the earth replies." By Jesus rising from the grave and triumphing over death, we are able to make our song even at the grave: Alleluia! Alleluia! Alleluia!

And the hymn's refrain brings us back to the star: that star of wonder whose light led the magi, and guides us, to "thy perfect light," the light of Christ.

Just as the star and the magi were instruments of the manifestation of Jesus as the Christ, the anointed One, the Messiah-King, 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 "[God] destined us for adoption as his children through Jesus Christ, according to the good pleasure of his will, to the praise of his glorious grace that he freely bestowed on us in the Beloved." Paul prays on behalf of the Ephesians "that the God of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Father of glory, may give you a spirit of wisdom and revelation as you come to know him, so that, with the eyes of your heart enlightened, you may know what is the hope to which he has called you, what are the riches of his glorious inheritance among the saints, and what is the immeasurable greatness of his power for us who believe." 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-King, 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 glorious grace bestowed on you in Jesus Christ? Was it a Sunday School teacher, a priest, or a companion along the way who convinced you of the hope to which Christ has called you, the riches of his glorious inheritance, and the immeasurable greatness of his power? If that person is still alive, why don't you take time in this new year 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-King, 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 new year, this week, this day? Amen.