**The Epiphany of the Lord**

Is 60: 1-6; Eph 3: 2-3a, 5-6; Mt 2: 1-12

January 7/8, 2012

Today, we celebrate the Epiphany of the Lord, the revelation to the world by the coming of the Magi to worship the Christ child that *God is the God of all the nations.* The Epiphany is a revelation to the Gentiles – to the foreigners of that time and ours – that God is God to every nation under the heavens, from the sunrise to the sunset, indeed the God of the entire universe. As St. Paul said in our second reading, the Gentiles are now co-heirs with the Jewish people of all God’s promises.

The God who first revealed himself to the Israelites now reveals himself to everyone. The Epiphany of the Lord is not just a personal revelation of God to each of us individually, but it is a public epiphany to the entire world, to all lands, cultures and peoples. It is like a sudden burst of light that illuminates and stuns the world. It is a star shining forth of God’s plan for the whole world. As the prophet Isaiah said, "The Gentiles, who were in darkness, have seen a great light, and upon those who lived in a land of gloom, a light has shown." (Isaiah 9: 1)

The Jews, generation after generation after generation, had been taught to avoid foreigners, to remain separated from them and pure. They had all sorts of rules they had to follow in order to not become contaminated by them and their ways.

So, you can imagine how Joseph and Mary must have smiled at Christmas to see the shepherds come to welcome the newborn King. The shepherds were like them. They were poor like Joseph and Mary. They were Jews like Joseph and Mary. They spoke the same language. They had the same culture. They followed the same laws. They ate the same foods. They acted and thought like them.

Now, turn the page. A few days later, three foreigners show up. We call them the Magi or the Wise Men. You can imagine how uncomfortable Joseph and Mary must have felt, perhaps even reluctant to see them. The Magi looked different than Mary and Joseph. They spoke a different language. They ate different foods. They worshipped differently. They had a different religion. They thought differently. They dressed differently. They were from a different culture and land.

Surely, Joseph and Mary must have faced a dilemma: Should they welcome these strangers into their midst? Should they accept the gifts they had to offer? Should they exclude them and send them away?

As many of you know, I studied in Rome in the late 1970s. My time there taught me many things. I saw and studied with people from all over the world. They talked different from me. They ate differently than me. They acted differently than me. They prayed differently than me. They thought differently than me. Yet, one thing for sure was impressed upon me, i.e., we were all members of the Catholic Church. None of us were better than the other. I learned that we as a Church would be so much poorer if we did not accept men and women from all cultures, languages, races. I realized how rich of a Church we were, for we all brought gifts to be given to Christ and the Church.

You know, the first real controversy in the Church had to do with this very thing. The Church had to deal with a big question: Should all converts to Christianity be required to follow the Mosaic Law, accept the Jewish culture, and speak the Hebrew language, before they could be called Christians?

Many in the Church at that time argued that the Gentiles had to become Jewish, like them, before they could become Christians. They said the men would have to be circumcised, that all would have to follow the Jewish diet and follow the Jewish laws if they were to be accepted into the Church.

On the other side, St. Paul and others argued that the Church could directly accept strangers into their midst, foreigners who did not adhere to the Jewish culture or practices. So there was a big division within the Church and the First Ecumenical Council in Jerusalem was convened by St. Peter. It was decided that the Church would accept foreigners and they didn’t have to look and act Jewish, that all Christians didn’t have to be the same.

My friends, we are facing the same question today in the Church. Will we accept those from other cultures, languages, customs and countries into our parish and diocese, or are we going to demand that they look and speak and act and think like us before we accept them? Will we accept the many gifts they bear to be given to us, or will we say “no” to them and their gifts? Will we come together as one Church or remain separate?

This is a very concrete question in many of the parishes in this diocese. More and more we will face it.

*Minnesota is the home to the nation’s largest Hmong population.*

*Minnesota has the nation’s second largest population of Tibetans.*

*Minnesota’s families speak over 103 languages and dialects.*

*In 2008, sixteen thousand people came to Minnesota as immigrants for the same reasons our ancestors came: jobs, land, equality, family reunification.*

*In any given year, 25-50% of Minnesota’s immigrants are refugees from persecution.*

The Epiphany of the Lord is a public revelation to the entire world that God is God for all men and women, not just those who are like us. St. Paul has said that in the Church all are one.

The Magi, the Wise Men, who come to do homage to the Christ child bore gifts. They persevered in their quest, their journey. They were travellers, migrants really. They came to give, not take. They came to worship, not contaminate.

My friends, the same can be said of most of the immigrants in our midst today.

Let us not refuse them, or their gifts.