

Christmas Season ends today with the Good News for us in the Gospel about the first Epiphany of Jesus – the first unveiling, the first revelation, the first manifestation, that Jesus is Christ the King, of Israel and all the people of the world. Jesus is Lord.

And this is shown, not to the Temple high priests or the royal court, but to Gentiles, the Magi, who are not Jewish, who come, from all places, Persia – Iran! They don't know anything about the Jewish faith. They learn about Jesus's birth through discovering a new star, which to them meant the birth of someone very special. They follow the star, not knowing exactly to where it will lead.

The Magi's arrival in Jerusalem marks the fulfillment of Isaiah's prophecy in our First Reading. Isaiah prophesies that the Jewish people who lived in exile in Babylon at the time will again return to their country and rebuild Jerusalem. He says it will become a beacon of light for the world because the Light of God dwells there.

And, Isaiah says, God doesn't just show His Light for the benefit of Jerusalem and the Jewish people. God has chosen the Jewish people to bring God's Light to others, so everyone will worship the God of Israel. His salvation isn't limited to the Jewish people; Gentiles, the people who aren't Jewish, are part of God's plan.

What Isaiah didn't know yet is what St. Paul describes in our Second Reading: that God reveals himself in Christ, and Jesus's Light will lead the people of the world to worship the God of Israel. We Gentiles find salvation through Christ. Through Him, we become children of God. The Light of Christ makes all of Humanity one family, all are brothers and sisters, under the loving Providence of the Father of us all. God's mercy has no limits or boundaries; it includes everyone. That's the Good News for us.

As we conclude our Christmas celebration today, let's look back on this whole story of the birth of Christ. It's a great story of faith, hope and love, because Mary and Joseph don't know how the story is going to unfold, or end. They're writing the script as they live. All they had to go on was faith and trust. They never stayed stuck in the darkness around them.

Artists have made the Christmas story appear so romantic; it was anything but. For Mary and Joseph, it was hard living. It looked like things were going wrong: an unwed mother, giving birth in an animal shelter, having to use a feeding trough for a crib, exposure to strangers walking by – shepherds, Magi – wondering: were they a threat, or good people? And right after the Magi leave, they have to flee to Egypt in the middle of the night to escape Herod's death squad. All of their experiences required great faith in God's Providence.

These Christmas stories are all archetypes of our own experiences. We live them. We still see people searching for purpose and meaning, who then turn their lives over to Christ. We have epiphanies of God, through scripture, the eucharist, our parish family; through the love and generosity of family, neighbors, friends, teachers and mentors.

We're not as high profile as Mary and Joseph, but God is involved in our lives just as much as He was in theirs. Like Mary and Joseph, we don't know our future either. We, too, have an important role to play in God's plan. We just don't see how our lives and actions have domino effects for others in the future.

King Herod couldn't stop God's plan from being fulfilled; and God's plan for us will also be fulfilled, even when events like deaths, divorces, financial disasters or injuries appear to thwart it. God never causes these tragedies, but He will always work tremendous good out of them for those who trust Him – even if we don't live to see it. We live in faith, hope and love.

Like Mary and Joseph, we have a journey to continue, and it is uncertain. But we trust in the star of Christ, the Light of Christ, so that as we encounter mean people and evil, Christ's Holy Spirit will steer us clear to our total fulfillment in our resurrection.

Fr. John Ozella – Epiphany – January 7, 2018