**The Epiphany of the Lord January 8, 2023 Dcn. Frank Olmsted**

**Isaiah 60.1-6 Ephesians 3.2—3a, 5—6 Matthew 2.1-12**

**St. Cletus Parish 9:30 and 11:30 masses**

**A blessed Epiphany to everyone! We remember the coming of the magi from the East to pay homage to the newborn Savior of the world. In Eastern Rite Catholic churches and Orthodox churches it is on the Epiphany that people exchange Christmas gifts in imitation of the magi who brought gold, frankincense, and myrrh to the Holy Family.**

**Isaiah reminded us that “darkness covers the earth and thick clouds cover the peoples; but upon you the Lord shines . . . Nations shall walk by your light. To the church at Ephesus St. Paul wrote that “gentiles are co-heirs, members of the same body” of Christ, the Church. Matthew’s gospel records the birth of the savior being revealed to the magi, religious thinkers from the East, who concluded that they must act on what they discerned about this Jewish messiah, and thus made the long journey to Bethlehem. The magi mark the beginning of a theme that Matthew will repeat often in his gospel, that God has come into the world so that His Kingdom may be revealed to all nations, and that His salvation is to be offered to all people. That is why Matthew included the story of the magi from a land of gentiles to acknowledge a Jewish messiah. Matthew wrote his gospel to a Jewish audience who awaited a messiah, but a Jewish messiah who would bring salvation to a Jewish nation. Matthew was saying, “Look folks, God has become incarnate in Jesus to save us, but the first people to accept his divine origin were foreigners, not those from among the chosen people of Israel. Can this possibly mean anything other than God wishes his message to be revealed to the entire world, and that God invites all people to his eternal Kingdom?” How could the God who creates all peoples not want all people to share in His eternal Kingdom? Paul laid it out pretty clearly, “gentiles are co-heirs,” not hopeless outsiders or johnny-come-latelies for whom it is too late.**

**The revelation of the messiah and salvation to all of us is like a great book you read, or a terrific film you saw, or a spectacular historic site you visited. You may have been completely taken by what you read or saw. It may have overwhelmed you. You don’t keep it to yourself. You cannot keep it to yourself. You have to tell others about it, encourage them to read the book, or watch the film, or visit the historic site. Perhaps you share with others a few quotes from the book, or a You Tube clip from the film, or photos of the historic spot. It made such an impression on you that you must share it with others. Epiphany is a story we love to revisit each year at Christmastime. We must remember that the most important part of the story of the magi’s journey to Bethlehem is that Matthew uses it to throw down a gauntlet to each one of us. Matthew gives us the same mandate he was given by Christ. Announce the gospel to the world, to the whole world; to Jews and gentiles; to the interested and to the bored; to those who are open and may listen and to those who are close minded and may be hostile; to those are excited about the faith and to those who are lazy in the faith they were given. Bring the gospel to those who have forgotten it or never heard about it. Announce the gospel to the whole world. Matthew ended his gospel with Jesus telling everyone to “Go, therefore, and baptize all nations.”**

**Three days ago the Church celebrated the Mass of Resurrection for Pope Benedict XVI. A theme that is prevalent in so many of Benedict’s seventy books is that at the heart of Christian faith is not a law, or rules, or even a way of life, but a particular individual person, Jesus of Nazareth. We are invited to a one-on-one relationship with this person who is human and divine and who came into the world to the people of Matthew’s time, and will also come to the people of this generation through the relationships that we have and make with the people we know, work with, and meet in the many venues of the contemporary vineyards into which God calls us. The possibility of a large harvest for the Lord is always there, but only if the people are invited and encouraged by the good example of faith and practice they see in us and in the gift of the Kingdom we are willing to share with them.**

**Pope Benedict wrote that God loves us, and calls out to us, and wants us to be in his presence for all eternity, “not because we are especially good, particularly virtuous, or of any great merit . . . He loves us not because we are good, but because He is good. He loves us though we have nothing to offer him; he loves us even in the ragged raiment of the prodigal son who is no longer wearing anything lovable” (Credo for Today: What Christians Believe, p. 10).**

**To this we are called, and the story of magi reminds us that we are called to invite others who may not be just like us, or who like us, may not be especially good, particularly virtuous, or of any great merit. Modern culture is a tough venue for a sincere Christian to play. On good days the gospel of Jesus is simply ignored or tolerated. Often it is actively attacked, disparaged and marginalized by those who are threatened by its challenge to be better than they are, to live lives in service to others, and to be other-focused not self-absorbed. It may not be pretty, but that’s the stage we’ve got, and maybe that’s the stage we’ve created by not being pro-active Christians and by being lazy in our practice of the faith.**

**Sixty years ago the Second Vatican Council began, a council which would throw open the doors and windows of the Catholic Church to invite the whole world anew to hear the message and challenge of Jesus Christ. A very young priest was called to the council to be a theological advisor to the bishops. He ended up being instrumental in shaping and writing several of the key documents of Vatican II. When Pope Benedict died on December 31, 2022, the last living member of Vatican II was gone. Like so much in the Council emphasized, Pope Benedict viewed Christianity at its core as relational—relationship to a person, Jesus Christ. What an appropriate time to again take up the challenge to invite the world, one person at a time, building one relationship at a time, bringing one person at a time to see the gift that the magi were directed to by the light of a bright star in the darkness of the late night sky of the world, carrying that gift which is the Christ of that Bethlehem manger, who is the fulness of light and the most important of all relationships we will ever be called to. In the end, Pope Benedict insisted, “one cannot truly love Jesus or follow his teachings without taking his place in the family of faith that Jesus called into being,” the Church. Taking one’s place in the family of faith means inviting others to do the same. Today!**