

**Homily for January 7, 2001
Epiphany of the Lord Cycle C**

By Father Charles Bowes

**Isaiah 60:1-6
Ephesians 3:2-3a, 5-6
Matthew 2:1-12**

We do not steal the faith, we share it.

“The Gentiles are co-heirs, members of the same body, and co-partners in the promise,” says St. Paul in chapter three of his letter to the Ephesians.

As St. Paul is no keeper of secrets. He is handed the key to a mystery through revelation in his experience of Jesus the Christ, and promptly gives it away. Revelation is this: the Gentiles and Jews – you and I – are equal heirs to the promise of Christ. Now if this does not sound like groundbreaking news today, consider what it sounded like to the people of that first century to whom St. Paul wrote. It would be as astounding and utterly blasphemous as saying, in our grandparents’ day, that Protestants and Catholics are equally candidates for salvation. Or like saying, in our own day, that Buddhists and Mormons have an equal shot at eternal life as Christians do. Many of us would not be as liberal with such revelation as St. Paul is, when God declares the outsider an insider, where the enemy is a friend, we might well keep that revelation under our hat.

Now these words and actions of St. Paul did not sit well in Jerusalem, for example, where the leaders of

the Christian community were attending synagogue and considered themselves in good standing. The idea that the gospel of Jesus had anything to do with the Romans and Greeks was a highly suspicious notion. God had no saving plan outside Israel. Everyone knew that. The revelation given to Moses and to the ancestors was for the Jews and for no one else.

The message of St. Paul to the Ephesians is three times emphatic: those outside the chosen community are co-heirs, co-members and co-partners. The promise of Christ is not the property of any inside group, but is a missionary word – meant to be spread – most fully realized when it goes out to all the world. Does that sound familiar? It should – it’s the evangelism effort the Pope and the Bishops have been emphasizing in recent years and what we’ve been promoting in this parish. Revelation we have received in Jesus Christ is not for our own edification alone – it is meant to be shared. The proper word for holding on to something that belongs to others is stealing.

This Solemnity of the Epiphany – God’s manifestation to the world – is indeed good news – not just for us, but for all ages. One of us who walked our Earth and lived our life is the revelation of God. A human brother of ours, born of a woman, is God’s very child. And since he is our brother, we too become God’s

children in a new way – all of us – without exception. In his letter to the Galatians, St. Paul writes that we are adopted by God. Think on this. We are not children of God by natural birth, but by God's desire to choose us, to bring us in. As an adopting parent, God wants to share all good and grace with us. After Christmas, God now looks upon each of us, poor humans in his love, and sees the likeness of his only beloved child. The human countenance is forever altered – for all people everywhere.

What is almost shocking – thereby making it an essential part of the Epiphany story – is the fact that those who come to adore Christ are foreigners, untrained in the word of God or in the law. Those “prepared” for the coming of the Messiah are unprepared to surrender to him; those who were unprepared are drawn to him in faith. This makes the comparison between the Magi and Herod all the more poignant. These astrologers inquired of Herod's associates where the Messiah is to be born so they could worship him, when it should have been those schooled in the law who knew well the path to the newborn king. One application is clear. Religious observance or understanding of the law is itself no guarantee that our faith is as strong as it should be or that we truly believe in the presence of God with us.

May our journey to this table be a mirror of the faith of foreigners who journey seeking the presence of God already in our midst.

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