

I speak to you in the name of God; Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. Amen. Please be seated.

This morning on this second Sunday after Christmas, we prepare to shift our focus from the birth of the Christ-child to the feast of Epiphany which will happen tomorrow. In the Eastern Christian tradition, Epiphany is also known as the day of Theophany which means an event in which God reveals himself to mankind in a very overt, yet still mysterious, way. In the Eastern Christian tradition, it is a day to celebrate the arrival of the kings who brought the gifts of gold, frankincense, and myrrh. But it is also a feast to celebrate the baptism of Jesus and the miracle at the wedding of Cana. In Western Christian tradition, the tradition with which the Anglican Church is aligned, our focus is on the Magi, the three kings. But we also recognize Epiphany as the time in which God made himself known to the Gentiles, the non-Jewish people. The kings were not of the Jewish faith. And yet, God made himself known to them through the Christ-child. It was through this event of the Epiphany, that we first recognize that Jesus came into the world for all people.

The idea that Jesus was born for all people is echoed in our readings for this morning. We have a message of God calling people of various backgrounds and experiences to come together into a single community in order to realize God's purposes. In our passage from Jeremiah, also known as the "Book of Compassion", Jerusalem has been destroyed and the Jewish community is devastated. As they prepare to enter into a time of exile, Jeremiah reassures them that there is hope and possibility for return. He tells them that God has not abandoned them, but remains with them and that He will call them to return for a time of great rejoicing as a community. In our passage from Ephesians, we again have a message of unity; unity in Christ. Paul tells the people that God has "destined us for adoption as his children through Jesus Christ". He goes on to say that, as Christians, we have been forgiven our sins and can experience redemption through the grace of Christ by the Eucharist. In the final sentence, Paul declares: "In him you also, when you had heard the word of truth, the gospel of your salvation, and had believed in him, were marked with the seal of the promised Holy Spirit; this is the pledge of our inheritance toward

redemption as God's own people, to the praise of his glory." When we consider that the people of Ephesus, like the people of other newly forming Christian communities, were from a wide range of non-Jewish backgrounds, we know that we are hearing a message of invitation and inclusion. God is the God of all people for all time.

Our Gospel passage from John is a familiar one, but that does not take away from its power. It is a piece of poetry as well as a text about the mystery of God, the mystery of creation, the mystery of God coming to live among us in human form, and the mystery of God's love. It also contains echoes of the first chapter of Genesis when we hear about the creation of the world. In these first 18 verses of John's Gospel, we have a summary of many key moments and events beginning with the creation of the world, followed by a series of statements that begin to reveal the enormous importance of these events. We hear of Christ entering the world but then being rejected by his own community and ultimately being crucified by the Romans at the urging of the Jewish leadership. On the heels of this statement about the rejections of Jesus we hear verse number 10, beginning with the all-important word "but": "But to all who received him, who believed in his name, he gave power to become children of God, who were born, not of blood or of the will of the flesh or of the will of man, but of God." It is in that word, "but", that we find the hope that we still hold fast to today. In the very same way that the early Christians of some 2000 years ago were able to receive Christ into their lives in person, we can access that same "power to become children of God." When we hear that all important "but", it has the same illuminating effect as the earlier statement in verse 5 in which we hear, "The light shines in the darkness, and the darkness did not overtake it."

John paints a very vivid and majestic image of Jesus radiating power and energy. He acknowledges that God gave Moses the law – the 10 commandments. But he goes on to say that Jesus is the source of all grace and of all truth. While Moses saw the burning bush and other manifestations of God's presence and existence, he did not actually see God. The Christ-child who grew into manhood and had a 3-year ministry and who was ultimately crucified is the only form in which humankind has ever seen God. It is only when we die and pass into eternal life that we will see God, just as we are reminded in 1 Corinthians 13,

verse 12: “For now we see only a reflection, as in a mirror, but then we will see face to face. Now I know only in part; then I will know fully, even as I have been fully known.”

While there are 7 major Christian denominations around the world, there are many more minor denominations. In 1980, the British researcher David Barrett was able to identify almost 21,000 Christian denominations worldwide and that number has grown substantially over the past 45 years. Today’s readings remind us that God is God and that he is the God of all people; regardless of the specific traditions that we may use in our worship and study. All Christians are united through the sacraments of baptism and the eucharist, and all Christian denominations include some form of ministry. It is from this common ground that we can hear the message of God calling us together to live out and make real His purposes in this world. As we enter into the Feast of Epiphany, this is a key moment in the Christian year to reflect on the power of shared ministry across the globe and what we can do as a collective in the year ahead. We join with the Magi, the three kings, to worship the Christ-child and to reflect on the amazing and awesome power of God as the ultimate Creator. Amen.