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COME SPIRIT!!

Epiphany B-2003 THEME: Drawn to the Life That Makes All Life Complete.

Today's celebration of the Epiphany is one of the oldest feasts in the Church, older even than the celebration of Christmas. The word *epiphany* is from the Greek word that means "to show oneself." The Kingdom of God, the Incarnate Word, the very personification of the gospel, Jesus Christ, is manifested to the world. In the early Church the Epiphany celebrated three miracles: the visit of the Magis, the baptism of the Lord at the Jordan River, and the changing of the water into wine at the wedding feast of Cana. The Magi's visit is seen as the manifestation of Jesus as King of the world, with kings being the first gentiles to see him. The baptism of the Lord, which we'll celebrate next Sunday, was remembered because this was the first revelation of Jesus Christ at the beginning of his public ministry. By the way this aspect of the Epiphany is still celebrated by the Eastern Churches including our Greek Orthodox neighbors. The boy that arises out of Spring Bayou holding the cross represents Christ accepting his mission at his baptism, a mission that leads to the cross. The dove that is released at that point by one of the girls represents the presence of the Holy Spirit. The third miracle which used to be remembered on the Epiphany was the first miracle recorded in the Gospel of John, the changing of water into wine at the wedding feast in Cana, the beginning of the miraculous transformation of the world by the Messiah.

The main focus in the Roman Catholic Church on the Epiphany is the revelation of Jesus to the Gentiles, symbolized by the story of the Magi. These pagan astrologers went beyond searching for the meaning of the strange star they saw.

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They completed their journey by worshiping the one who had been predicted by the Jewish prophet Micah as being born in Bethlehem. Their gifts of gold, frankincense and myrrh were returned to them in unfathomable joy they experienced in the presence of the Lord.

The opening prayer for today's Mass, actually the alternate prayer, integrates the celebration of the Epiphany into our lives:

"Father of Light, unchanging God, today you reveal to all peoples of faith the resplendent fact of the Word Made Flesh. Your light is strong. Your love is near. Draw us beyond the limits this world imposes to the life where your Spirit makes all life complete."

This prayer tells us that we must go beyond the limits of our world to find meaning in our lives, the life where God's Spirit makes all life complete.

This is so different than the message of our society which tries to convince us that there are no limits in the world. We can master the universe by buying all that we need. But we can't buy lasting happiness. We are limited because the world is imperfect and we are imperfect. St. Augustine saw all this clearly when after trying everything the world had to offer he wrote, "Our hearts are made for you, O Lord and shall not rest until they rest in you."

The wise men took a step of faith and were drawn to the Lord. They gave him gifts to recognize who he is and the role he plays in the lives of all believers. Gold is the gift for the King. Jesus is the only one we can allow to direct our lives. Frankincense is the sign of the priest. Jesus is the great high

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priest who bridges the gap between God and man. Myrrh is the perfume used to anoint the dead. Jesus is the sacrificial lamb whose death restored life.

Once the wise men approached the Lord, they were overjoyed. There are three words in Greek to express this joy. Technically, they were greatly, exceedingly, and vehemently joyful. They were beside themselves with happiness for now their own lives were complete. Their happiness was due not as much to what they did as due to the fact that they were giving a sharing of the life of Christ. Herod would remain rich and powerful, but spiritually impoverished for he oppressed the presence of the Lord. The chief priests and the scribes would remain in the Temple debating passages of the Law, but refusing to recognize the fulfillment of the Law in the Christ child. But the wise men were transformed by the presence that makes all life complete.

Our lives can only be complete, meaningful, fulfilled, if we are guided by the Spirit of God. We can only be truly happy, happy with the happiness that does not end after the presents are unwrapped or the football game is won, we can only be truly happy if we share the life of the Spirit. And we can only receive the Spirit if we allow ourselves to be drawn by the Light of Christ.

The word Epiphany means a manifestation or a showing of the presence of the Lord. May we be drawn by the presence of Christ in our world. May we also be manifestations of his presence for others. In all things may we recognize that only Christ can draw us beyond the limits this world imposes to the life where the Spirit makes all life complete.