

HOMILY

The Epiphany of the Lord, January 7, 2018

I have the rare distinction of having gone to grade school, high school and college on the same street. Just a few blocks from each other. Grade school – high school – college, all within a mile of each other. Not that this is any big deal; it's just unusual.

I had never really thought about it until many years later at a company meeting. All the attendees were asked to stand and introduce themselves; share their name, what they did, and then mention one unique fact about themselves.

That's when it came to me. Many of us that went to that grade school together also went to the same high school; not all us, but definitely more than half.

And some of us that went to that high school went onto the same college; not many, but a few.

But, very, very few of us went to all three.

The transition from grade school to high school was a little scary – what with different students, harder classes, different teachers. Those first few days were a bit overwhelming. But then, day by day, week by week, it got easier.

I made new friends; I got to know the routine; it became like a new home where I felt I belonged.

The transition from high school to college was very scary. The few students I did know were in different programs, so I rarely saw them.

The text books were so heavy, the classes were definitely harder, and the professors were, well professors, with PhD's.

I felt like I was in over my head. Then, like high school, I made new friends, I made my own routine and, by the end of the first year I was pretty comfortable; I belonged there.

These transitions took time. Each started out as an unknown, scary; I felt like an outsider.

Who has ever felt like an outsider? Most of us have been coming to St. Paul's for many years; some of us are newer; some of us are visitors today.

Who has been a St. Paul's parishioner since forever?

Deacon Nick went to grade school here and is still here – many, many, (pause) many years later.

Who has only been here only a short time?

How many of you are visiting us today for the first time?

To you I say, "Welcome."

Whether you are new today or were new so long ago you can't remember being new, each of us belongs here; all of us are welcome here.

If you are new or just visiting, please don't be shy; introduce yourself and say, "Hi," to someone near you.

I've had the pleasure of several visitors stopping by to greet me after Mass and letting me know they are visiting and how much they loved our mass or our church building or our community; that is a direct reflection on you who are not-so-new.

If you are a parishioner and see someone you haven't seen before, don't be shy; introduce yourself and say, "Welcome."

And the next time you are visiting another parish for Mass, don't be shy. Introduce yourself; remember, we are all part of the same family.

The magi in today's gospel were not shy at all; in fact, they traveled a long way to say, "Hi" to Jesus, pay him homage and bring him gifts. I'm sure they were welcomed warmly by the holy family.

But how did that come to be? How were these magi from so far away invited to share in the joy of the birth of our Lord?

The Gospel story tells us they knew scripture.

When Herod asks them where the Christ was to be born, they answered, "In Bethlehem of Judea;" and then they quote the prophet: "And you, Bethlehem, land of Judah, are by no means least among the rulers of Judah; since from you shall come a ruler, who is to shepherd my people Israel."

What we don't know and what scripture doesn't tell us is how they came to believe.

What we do know, and what is important in reflecting on today's readings, is that they were not Jews. In fact, they were Gentiles, the first Christian Gentiles.

Less important is how they became Christian.

What is critical to today's message is that they ARE Christian.

Each of us came to be Christian by different paths. No one among us has the same story as you or me.

We have heard that Israel is God's chosen people, Jerusalem.

Yet, with Jesus becoming the New Covenant, we all become one as the chosen people of God; God's holy family, the body of Christ in the New Jerusalem.

The first reading declares with great joy the light of the chosen ones, being a beacon of light for all the world to see; the light we are all called to join and follow: "Rise up in splendor, Jerusalem! Your light has come."

Our Responsorial Psalm cries out, "Every nation on Earth will adore You, Lord," and, "The kings of Tarshish and the Isles shall offer gifts."

In his letter to the Ephesians, Paul describes how the Mystery was withheld from previous generations outside the nation of Israel, but is now revealed to all, "that the Gentiles are coheirs, members of the same body, and copartners in the promise in Christ Jesus through the gospel."

This entire Mass today cries out how we are all chosen and called to be one; one with Christ and one with one another, from the songs we sing, prayers we pray and readings we proclaim.

Whether we are new, like the magi, or established, like the Israelites, we are all chosen and called. Whether we came from a short distance like I did from grade school through college, or a very long distance, like the magi, we are all chosen and called.

And, as the chosen ones of God, we are all called to be one with one another.

This means we are welcoming, inviting, encouraging, sharing, loving, caring.

In today's busy and bustling world, we all too often get caught up in our own struggles. It's easy to do, what with money problems, family problems, work problems, the weather – it's too cold or too hot, our cars and homes always needing something fixed, we always need to remember to look outside ourselves and look to Jesus.

He, who is present in the Word proclaimed and in the Eucharist shared.

Whether we came a short distance or traveled a long way to get here, and especially since we are all still on that journey, we are to welcome each other, the stranger, the hungry, the lonely, the hopeless, those in pain; we are to look outside ourselves and see Christ in each other.

We are to forget our petty differences, our minor disagreements and look together towards the New Jerusalem, the New City of Peace.

Not just in Heaven but both in Heaven and on Earth here right now.

May the Peace of Christ be with you all.