

**January 4-5, 2014
Third Sunday of Easter
FEAST OF THE EPIPHANY**

**Nancy C. Ring, Ph.D.
All Saints Church
Syracuse, NY**

God With Us

Happy New Year! New Year's Day has come and gone once again. Although it's now in the past, its freshness lingers with us still. Although January 1 is not our religious New Year, it is the day most of us celebrate as a day of new beginnings. Perhaps this time we will get it right. We hope. It is the virtue of hope that shines through the beautiful first reading of Isaiah. "Your light has come," yet "night still covers the earth and darkness the peoples. Hope, one of the theological virtues is not wishful thinking. It means continuing to work toward a goal even when there seems to be no reason to believe things will change. Isn't that our situation in our world and within our church, today, right now? God's Anointed One, Christ, lives among us, and Christ's radiance shines throughout the world, manifested through those among our human race who bind themselves in love and service to others, feeding the hungry, visiting shut-ins, listening attentively to those with opinions different from theirs. Although the light of Christ shines always, I think we can say that night still covers the earth and darkness the people. It is both ways at the same time.

As Isaiah knew, hope requires a vision of what should be: For Isaiah, the vision was of the nations streaming toward a glorious Jerusalem, God's city. The city where God meets humankind. For us, the vision is of people of different religions and races living together peacefully, the goods of our planet earth shared by all. No one left out. The strong helping the weak. Does the task seem impossible? Hope enables us, strengthens us to work toward these goals even when we know we may never see the results in our lifetime. Jesus manifested hope

when he remained true to his vocation even when he saw that doing so would lead to his death. But in the end, Resurrection triumphed! And, in the end, life will triumph.

Today, we celebrate the Feast of the Epiphany. God's revelation, through the magi, that Christ has come for us all, Jew and non-Jew alike; Christian and non-Christian alike; believer and non-believer. It is significant, I think, that the Magi, the out-siders, recognized and honored the King of the Jews, while Herod the Jew, the inheritor of the promise of the Messiah refused to acknowledge him, and in fact sought to do him harm. That should be a caution to us that, today, we ourselves need to look beyond ourselves, our way of life. We need to keep open to the many revelations of God throughout our world, places and people where the light shines through the darkness, among those with different faiths and different customs. Paul tells us this in the reading from Ephesians when he states that all people, along with the Jews, are inheritor of the promise. The promise is that the Messiah will be born from the line of David and will usher in an era of peace. But we learn in today's readings that although the promise was made to Israel, the promise extends beyond the Jews to us all. And the promise, given to us, extends beyond us to all. Each culture and religion receives and honors that promise in its unique way.

The promise of peace to all is difficult to understand because, obviously, we do not have peace. I think perhaps it means that Christ has revealed to us the way to achieve peace. When we remain true to our beliefs, but are also open to the genuineness and validity of God's manifestation among others; when we bind up the wounds of our community but also bind up the wounds of those outside our community, certainly, peace will have power over conflict. When we, like the magi, listen to the wisdom beyond our borders, we will grow in respect for others, and it is nearly impossible to harm those whom we respect. Respect for others and the inclusion of all humankind makes me wonder if respect and inclusion is not the recipe for peace

The revelation of Jesus to the magi was that he came for all. There is no mention of the magi changing their customs. They acknowledged the new-born king of the Jews, offered him kingly gifts. These wise men were truly wise. They knew a lot, but that is not what made them wise. They had insight that this baby whom they found in humble circumstances was very special, was, in fact, a king, and they did not hesitate to offer him kingly gifts. Somehow, they had been changed, but they kept their own customs and returned to their own country.

Jesus is also the manifestation of God among us. In Jesus, we have the manifestation of what God wants for us all. It is not to imitate the particular actions of Jesus, but deeper than that, to make a part of ourselves the interior attitude of Jesus: to listen with an open mind and heart to the revelations of God, and, by doing that, to know what God wants of us. And once we know our vocation, to remain faithful to it as Jesus did. It does not mean that we never change, but that when we change, it is to deepen our basic orientation to love God above all, and our neighbors as ourselves. During this New Year, may we grasp the message of God's revelation among us through Jesus, the Christ, in an ever deeper way so the radiance of God will overcome the darkness.

Nancy C. Ring