

[Spirituality](#)



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January 11, 2018

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For our reflection today, I want to call your special attention once more to the second lesson. In the translation of the Scriptures that I have, this lesson proclaims, "This is the good news." Paul says, "This is the good news." What is he talking about? Just before that he had written, "You may have heard of the graces God bestowed on me for your sake. By a revelation he gave me the knowledge of God's mysterious design, as I have explained in a few words. On reading them you will have some idea how I understand the mystery of Christ."

The Epiphany of the Lord

[January 7, 2018](#)

Isaiah 60:1-6

Psalms 72

Ephesians 3:2-3a, 5-6

Matthew 2:1-12

Then he goes on to say; "This mystery was not made known to past generations but only now." And here it is: "Now the non-Jewish people share the inheritance; in Christ Jesus the non-Jews are incorporated and are to enjoy the promise. This is the good news." That's what we celebrate today, this good news that God entered into human history, not just for the chosen people who had been preparing the way over centuries, but for everyone.

If you notice the first lesson, it's a beautiful lesson about the restoration of the temple and the restoration of the chosen people and their city, Jerusalem. It talks about how "nations will come to your light and rulers to the brightness of your dawn. Lift up your eyes round about and see: they are all gathered and come to you." For the chosen people, the Jews, God was identified as being in the sacred place in the temple and only the chosen people would have access to that temple.

But then Isaiah goes on to say, "Lift up your eyes around about and see: they are all gathered and come to you, your sons and daughters from afar. This sight will make your face radiant, your heart throbbing. A flood of camels will cover you, caravans from Midian and Ephah. Those from Sheba will come, bringing with them gold and

incense." In other words, all people are now flocking in this vision of Isaiah to Jerusalem, to find God. But now Paul says that the good news is that God is not in a place, in a temple, God lives in every human person.

That's the good news: God has entered into human history to become part of our human family. It's a marvelous gift that we have, but we don't really seem to understand that gift and what it should mean about breaking down barriers. In one of Paul's other letters to the church in Galatia he says, "No longer is there Jew or Greek, slave or free, rich or poor, male or female; everyone is one in Christ." We are all equal; we are all the same in Christ, every person. Yet, in our world we fail to appreciate this gift that the coming of Jesus should be for us.

We still separate ourselves according to our ethnic groups, according to our nationalities, according to our language, according to our culture, and we find the world divided. We find so often the world at war, people fighting one another in this human family where all should be one in Christ following out the commandment of Jesus: "Love the Lord your God with your whole mind, your heart, your soul and all your strength, and love your neighbor as yourself." Every human person is our neighbor. We're all alive in Christ Jesus.

Some of you perhaps saw on the night after Christmas, on public television, a movie called "[The Sultan and the Saint](#)." It's about St. Francis of Assisi. It's something that happened in the 13th century, the time of St. Francis. The church itself under the pope had sent an army into the Middle East waging war against the Muslims. Francis knew that was against this teaching we're talking about today. The Muslims are part of the human family; they're our brothers and sisters. We should not be going to war against them.

So Francis with one other brother sets out from Assisi where he lived, down through Italy, across the Mediterranean, over to North Africa, through Egypt and went to find the sultan, the head of the Muslim armies. He traveled unarmed with one person, and he traveled through the Muslim armies finding his way to the sultan. At first they were puzzled. What's he doing? Who is he? But he sat down and over a matter of days, he and the sultan agreed they should not be waging war against each other — Muslims against Christians.

They were ready to make peace. It could have happened except that the pope refused to accept a resolution of the conflict. So the Christian armies continued to

wage war in the Holy Land until at that point they defeated the Muslim army. It was a tragedy and it went against the teachings of Jesus and the Gospel. We're doing the same thing today. We go to war so readily. We make divisions among people. We tell certain people they're not welcome to be part of our human family, or at least to come into our nation.

Pope Francis chose his name after Francis of Assisi because he wanted to show through his time as pope that it was important to return to the style and the teachings of Francis of Assisi who went out among the poor, who tried to draw people together, who tried to make peace. Francis has done that. A couple of years ago he went to the Central African Republic where the Muslims were fighting the Christians. Francis helped to bring about a resolution of that conflict and they stopped the war.

Francis has also made efforts more recently in Myanmar, going to try to rescue the people who are being driven out of that country because they say, "You don't belong here." It's one human family; we're not supposed to do that to one another. Pope Francis is trying to teach us that, St. Francis taught us that, and the message of today's Gospel teaches us the same thing. The Gospel tells us how these magi were people who studied the stars, astrologers. In fact, Jewish people were forbidden to have anything to do with astrologers because they were pagans.

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But they came and in Matthew's Gospel, they're welcomed into the home of Jesus by Mary and Joseph. They come to bring their gifts to the Son of God. Matthew wrote this Gospel in the late AD 80s, perhaps early AD 90s. It was a time when there was a great struggle within the church because non-Jews, uncircumcised people were outnumbering the Jews in the Christian community. That was a hard thing for many of the early Christians to accept. They thought that everyone had to become a Jew first and then become a Christian. St. Paul began to change all of that through his teachings.

So what we're learning in the Gospel today is that Matthew was trying to show the people of the community at Jerusalem, the Christian people, followers of Jesus that outsiders need to be welcomed. Circumcision and being a Jew is no longer required. All of us, every person is a son or daughter of God, part of the human family. We

need to learn that lesson, reach out to one another, and break down those barriers. Pope Francis says we need to build bridges, not dividing partitions or walls, but build bridges to one another through love, try to grasp the great truth of today's Gospel: we are one human family; everyone is a son or daughter of God. As Paul says, "This is the good news." It's time we began to live the good news, and carry it out to bring harmony, peace into our world.

[Homily given Jan. 6, 2018, at St. Philomena, Detroit, Michigan. The transcripts of Bishop Thomas Gumbleton's homilies are [posted weekly](#) to NCRonline.org. [Sign up here](#) to receive an email alert when the latest homily is posted.]