

Epiphany Homily – 150th Celebration

Why all this excitement? Why all this added flair? It's Epiphany and it's the opening of our 150th celebration as a Family of Believers. The two go hand in hand. For as the theme of our special year of celebration states: "We Remember, We Celebrate, We Believe."

In the opening prayer we asked God to lead us to the glory of heaven by the LIGHT OF FAITH. It was by the Light of that famous star of Bethlehem that led the Magi through darkness and dangers to come to an out of the way place to worship in simplicity and joy, to worship at the feet of a child who would one day declare, "I am the light of the world. Whoever follows me will not walk in darkness, but will have the light of life." My friends, life for the Magi was never the same after their discovery. Jesus made all the difference to them, transforming their hearts, calling them out of darkness into his own wonderful light.

It was that LIGHT OF FAITH that led our ancestors here to Red Bud over 150 years ago. As this German settlement became an important station on the stage coach route between Belleville, Kaskaskia, Chester and St. Louis, the town began to grow and businesses were set up to meet the needs of the people. For the Catholic settlers, their faith was also so very much a part of their lives. To live that faith was of utmost importance to them, a task not easy in those early years. It was through prayer and determination that our 5 founding Fathers met with Bishop Henry Junker November 26, 1858. He authorized them to collect funds for the building of a church. On September 28, 1862 Bishop Junker dedicated the Church to the honor of St. John the Baptist.

It was through prayer and determination that they worked to see that the Eucharist, the reception of the Sacraments, and instruction in their faith would always be a vital part of their family's lives. I'm sure they called on the intercession of John the Baptist to guide them through the difficult challenges they faced. With this confidence they worked to witness the Love of the Lord in this new community of Red Bud. A witnessing that took courage then, and has continued to challenge all throughout these 150 years,

a witnessing that would only be fruitful if they remained faithful to their experience of the presence of God with them.

Like the Magi and our ancestors, we are called to search and to discover the presence of Christ in our lives. But is our faith that important to us? Sometimes I think it is not. We get caught up in the whole materialistic culture that we live in, and the practice of and living of our faith takes second fiddle. We so easily we forget that Jesus is being born in us every day. How? He can be known or experienced in the most unusual and varied of ways and places. He can be found in the smile of a child, the laughter of a senior citizen; in the painful expression of a person sick in bed; in the sad tears of a person who has lost a loved one; in the happiness of newly-weds, in the peacefulness of a gentle rain or snow fall, or in the colorful sky at sun set. Whenever we look into the eyes of another person, or focus on the wonder of God's creation, we are gazing into the eyes of Jesus. This encounter again and again should remind us that our calling, by virtue of our baptism is to bring Christ to all we meet.

I hope all of us can see how this has so wonderfully taken place, as we reflect on the history of our parish, for without our ancestors hard work and sacrifices and their determined spirit in handing on the faith, we wouldn't be here today. So we open our 150th year in GRATITUDE, grateful for the priceless treasure which is the presence of Christ witnessed by so many throughout all these years. Our Faith as brought us together to discover the Lord where he truly is – here among us. That my friends, is my hope and prayer as we begin our 150th year. May we be led by the Light of faith to grow ever stronger in our proclaiming that Jesus is Lord of our lives'.

Our ancestors throughout the years had one of two choices to make. They could be messengers of God's light and his good news of salvation, or they could have shut out the light of his love and preferred the darkness of evil. Their choice, although not always easy, and hopefully our choice today as well, is to Let the LIGHT of Christ to Shine. The very simple, but beautiful song many of us learned as children sums it up best. "This little light of mine, I'm going to let it shine, This little light of mine, I'm going to let it shine, let it shine, let it shine let it shine."

Yes, we have reason to celebrate, for our God has called us as St. John the Baptist Parish Family, and given us the task of showing His Son to everyone we meet. May all who come behind us, find us faithful.