Today we come together to celebrate the Solemnity of the Epiphany. This is one of the oldest feasts in the Church Calendar. Most probably, the Church celebrated the Epiphany even before it celebrated the Nativity. Our focus today is on the magi. Who were these men, sometimes called kings? We don’t know a whole lot about them.

The main thing that we know is that they were not Jewish. And this is significant. A few days after the birth of the Lord, these gentiles or pagans were summoned to follow a star to Israel where the “One” awaited by the Jewish people was born. They followed the star because they were good men honestly seeking God’s will. It must have been quite a sight when they arrived in Israel. They were foreigners, but not just any foreigner’s. They held positions powerful enough for them to merit an audience with Herod. Herod was troubled by their visit, and with him all of Jerusalem.

Who were these men, and what did they want from the King? They asked to give homage to the newborn king of the Jews. Was there a baby out there somewhere who would replace Herod? The chief priests and scribes could only tell Herod about an ancient prophecy that a ruler would come from Bethlehem. If these three magi, in their own time considered kings, could create such a stir in Jerusalem, imagine what it had to be like when they arrived at the place the Mary and Joseph and the Child were staying. Even more amazing, these rich pagans prostrated themselves before the child and gave him gifts: gold, frankincense and myrrh. Why would rich pagans be interested in the Jewish Messiah?

That the gentiles could be part of God’s plan for His people was beyond the consideration of the Jews. But the mystery, hidden for generations was now revealed: the gentiles were to be co-heirs with the Jews, members of the same body, co-partners in the promise of Jesus Christ, as Paul proclaims in today’s second reading from Ephesians.

Jesus Christ came for all people. None were to be excluded from the grace of God that he would bring. We, Catholics, people whose very name means universal, must be careful that we recognize that all people are called to the grace of God given by Jesus Christ. It is so easy for us to exclude people. In fact, we have been trained by our society to label people into
various groups. We are told that Jews behave this way, Italians that way, the Irish another way and people of color a completely different way.

We decide that a whole group of people, for example gay people, must be immoral and shouldn’t enjoy the gifts of the Church. When asked about gays, Pope Francis said, “Who am I to judge?” He was making the humble statement that it was not up to him to say that a person was immoral just because he or she was different. There are many moral people who are different then we are. We don’t have the right to exclude anyone from worshiping the One true God or receiving the charity of the Church.

Immigration is an important issue in the world today. Our country is a nation of immigrants. If I asked all of you today whose ancestors, or who themselves, had immigrated to this country I think the majority would respond yes. Many immigrants have experienced an unwelcoming attitude on their arrival in our country and in other countries. Today’s feast and Holy Scripture tell us some important things about how we should treat those who are different from ourselves. Migrants and refugees are not pawns on the chessboard of humanity. They are children, women and men who leave or are forced to leave their homes for various reasons, who share a legitimate desire for knowing and having, but above all for being treated with respect.

The extremely wide scope of Christ’s purpose has direct implications for each one of us. This means that we ought to resist any temptation to narrow the access to those in need, whether it is spiritual or material. The aim of the Church is to embrace every single person. The Church is meant for absolutely everyone and we should be very careful to ensure that nothing that we say or do can be interpreted as restricting in any way its universal mission. This reminds us that there is no room for prejudice of any kind within the Church. We need to realize that any distinctions based on class, race or sexual orientation or on anything else have no place in the life of the Christian. We must recognize that all people are equal in the eyes of God and God’s salvation is meant for every person.

May our reflections on this feast of the Epiphany move us to accept God’s unity plan for the world, to celebrate it in this Eucharist and make it a secret no longer.