Close your eyes and imagine something with me. Imagine yourself as an adolescent. That’s an age when being accepted is really important. It’s a time when we often feel very insecure.

A joyous event is happening at the home of one of the other students at your school. You hear rumors about this event and you even hear that the event may be ongoing. Lots of people in school have an invitation to the event, but you don’t have one.

One of your friends has an invitation so you hint around and finally you receive an oral invitation to stop by from the host. But you don’t know where he lives and before you can ask, he’s out of sight.

Finally you get the address from your friend and you go to the event. The music is strange and you can’t figure out where you should sit. Everyone else there is wearing odd clothes and yours don’t fit in. And everyone there is doing rituals that you don’t understand. They all have books that they read from with unusual language. They sit and stand at odd intervals and you can’t seem to get the rhythm right. They all know each other but you know only a few people. You feel out of place, like you’re not wanted and shouldn’t be here, despite having finally gotten an invitation.

Open your eyes. The event was described as being joyous and ongoing. Did it seem joyous to you in your imagination? How likely would you be to go back to that event regularly even if your friends went? What would make you come back or keep you away?

The Wise Men were invited to a joyous event. They were outsiders because they weren’t Jews and weren’t even likely believers in God. They hadn’t grown up with the traditions of Judaism. Rather, they were men of science who studied the movement of the stars and heavenly bodies. They could easily have been left out of this joyous event – the coming of God in the world.

Yet God provided an invitation to them that spoke their language – one that they would recognize. God invited Mary into this event through an angel; Joseph through a dream and the shepherds through a chorus of angels. God invited the Wise Men through a star. God extended the invitation to each participant in the way they would recognize. God also used the star to guide the Wise Men to the right place so that they could be assured of arriving there.

The Wise Men knew, from their background that the star meant that a king was to be born and so they brought with them gifts that, in their culture, signified the worship of a king. When they arrived at the place where Jesus lay, they worshiped Jesus in a way that was familiar to them from their culture. Once they had done that, they were open to receiving word from God through dreams and they took another Way home. I don’t think that phrase going home by another way means just geographically. I think it means they went home by the Way of Jesus. Their lives were transformed.

The feast of Epiphany celebrates the coming of Jesus being made known to the Gentiles – those outside of the traditional faith community. We are called and charged as Christians to make Jesus known to those outside of our faith community. For us to really do that, we need to invite and engage these outsiders in ways that are meaningful to them realizing that this may be different from what would be meaningful to us. We need to be sure to provide good guidance as to how they can find their way. And we need to be open that their method of bringing their gifts in worship to Jesus may be different than what we’re used to.

We’ve done some of these things in our community – through worship bulletins that are friendly even for people who don’t know the prayer book and through creating services that are not exactly like those we are used to in church. We’ve created experiences (MOPS) where those who are outside of our faith community can engage with Jesus without necessarily having to take the difficult step of first encountering Jesus in an environment that may seem unwelcoming to them.

I believe that we’re called to continue to invite people into a relationship with Jesus through ways uniquely personal to them. Because we are so much of a family and so comfortable with each other and with our traditions, we often don’t realize an outsider might really struggle to feel a part of us and, if they struggle to feel a part of us, they might not have the opportunity to love Jesus and each other the way we do.

Even as adults, we’re all people struggling to find meaning in the world. We’re all people struggling to be loved and to know love. We’re all people struggling to know the God who is love. Our challenge and call as a Christian community is to reach out to all those struggling in our community regardless of how different they may be from us. Sometimes that may mean inviting folks in different ways and into an experience that may be out of our comfort zone but makes them feel welcome. That may mean recognizing that their traditions of worship may be different from ours.

Our challenge and call is to be the star for all who seek God so that all who seek God will find God. Our call is to be the star so that all who accept the invitation to this joyous place will return home by another Way.