One of the things that I think we can all relate to with respect to the Magi is that like them, all of us are searchers. And also like them, we sometimes don't know what it is we are searching for right away, and it takes time to gradually understand where we are going, and where our focus needs to be in life.

A number of years ago, a teacher by the name of Hugh Chapman thought life had called him in one direction, the field of banking.

He recalls that his career as a banker was financially rewarding, but the thing of it is is that he was never quite content with the work. And so after only 4 years on the job, Hugh started to look at the teaching career of his wife, Julie. But to make a move to that career at this point in his life would seem to require a lot. In his words, it seemed to take more faith than he possessed.

But God continued to speak to him through an odd feeling of longing. He'd find himself watching Julie as she graded papers smiling until late at night.

Then one winter evening, he found her fretting over a student's worsening academic performance. "Baxter began the year doing so well, but now his work has dropped to nearly nothing," she remarked.

The next evening as he got home, he asked his wife if she would drive him to Baxter's home.

Reluctantly, Hugh and Julie began their journey. Baxter's home was at least 20 miles from where they lived and hard to find in the dark. They turned off the highway then rumbled down a county roadway onto a narrow dirt path.

Before them stood an old run-down trailer house, unlit and barely visible in the mid-winter darkness. In what might have been called a front yard, which was really only a cleared spot in the woods, four elementary-aged children busily gathered firewood. One poured kerosene into a lantern and another was petting a mangy old dog. A chubby kid in overalls hurried toward the car and enthusiastically greeted Julie. "My mom's not home yet, Mrs. Chapman, so you can't come in. But we can visit out here."

Julie and the young man chatted for ten minutes, but there was no need to go inside. She had seen what she had come to see. On the quiet drive home, Julie batted back a tear. “His work was good in the early fall when the days were longer. But now, in the dark, he can’t see to do his homework.”

As they drove through the Arkansas night, Hugh realized he had discovered what God was calling him to do.

By the end of the month, he said his farewell to his friends a the bank. Then for the next two and a half years, they struggled to make ends meet while Hugh went back to school.

Eventually the perseverance paid off, and Hugh was offered his first teaching contract. After his first day, he proudly brought forth his new class roster for Julie to see. There among the list of the 7th graders was a name that they both recognized: Baxter. He had found the strength to hang on and had finally made it into junior high. And so had Hugh.

Baxter and Hugh became friends. Hugh recalls he was a big friendly kid with a permanently fixed smile, and though his ability was well below many of his classmates, he always tried his best.

Then something strange happened. It was nearing Christmastime and Hugh assigned an essay: “What Christmas Means to Me.”

Baxter surprised Hugh with his composition. In large block-printed letters and with a jumble of spelling and punctuation errors, the sincerity of his work shone through.

He wrote:

Some wise men heard that a new king would be born in Bethlehem, and they made their way through the woods to find him and they followed a star and they came to a barn where the baby was already born. And when they saw him, they knew it was Jesus, and they bowed down and worshipped Him, because they knew the new baby lying in a manger would be the King of all kings.

When Hugh paused as he was reading it, Baxter pointed out there was more on the back.

The wise men were amazed at all they had seen that night, and while they were walking back to their homes, they talked about all the great things they had seen. Then when they got about halfway home, one of the wise men turned to the others and said, “Hey, do you know what? This ought to be a holiday.” And from then on, it was.

Baxter smiled his simple friendly smile.

“Baxter, do you believe that? Do you believe that Jesus is the Son of God and that He was sent here to be our Savior?”

Baxter seemed uncomfortable and shifted his weight from one foot to another. “I’m not sure Mr. Chapman. I go to church sometimes, and that’s what they say. But how can you know something like that for sure?”

Hugh responded, “You have to have faith that it’s true, Bax,” pointing to his chest. “And when you have faith, you’ll know because you’ll feel it deep inside your heart.”

As Baxter walked away that day, Hugh had a new feeling of purpose, one that he had not known before that moment. And from his own heart, he knew that he was exactly where God intended for him to be.

Six weeks later, shortly after Christmas vacation, Baxter approached Hugh’s desk. This time he held a small New Testament, open to a well-marked page with a single underlined verse: “For God so loved the world that He gave his only begotten Son, that whosoever believes in Him, should not perish but have everlasting life.”

Excitedly he whispered, “They gave this to me at church, Mr. Chapman. They say I can keep it for my own.”

Though he shook Baxter’s hand, Hugh recalls there was no way he could express the happiness he felt. More than a decade past, and while Baxter he would later learn tragically lost his life in a car accident the memory of

Baxter never left him, and he closes his story by reflecting that driving along the windy country roads, he remembers a boy named Baxter who through his faith, found the courage to exchange for a broken-down trailer house for a mansion on high. Hugh knows that he will meet up with him again in the company of the King of Kings.

What both Hugh and Baxter found was their mission and calling in life. For Hugh, he had his faith in God, but he sensed God was calling him somewhere deeper and leading him to another place. And for Baxter, he sensed that God existed and loved him, but he wasn't sure just how to find God until his teacher came into his life. But because each followed the promptings of the Spirit, both found their way to God in Jesus Christ.

That is what this feast that we celebrate today is all about - and the challenge for us as we think about this feast is to ask ourselves are we following the light of Christ?

Our first reading is all about the light - "rise up in splendor, Jerusalem! Your light has come, the glory of the Lord shines upon you." Isaiah writes of all the nations flowing towards Jerusalem to proclaim the praises of the Lord.

And this is because of Jesus. What they are looking for, they will find in Jesus. They may not know it fully at first, but they will eventually. The light shining on Israel is meant to be a light to the whole world.

So, what does it mean for us? It means that our eyes need to be focused on God, that we need to discern our mission, all the while putting in the time it takes to get to our final destination.

With respect to God, it takes time to understand who God is. Baxter had a bit of an understanding of God, but he needed to have that deepened by going to church and actually reading the Bible. The Magi get to Bethlehem, but they need a bit of help to get there. They have their own knowledge of astronomy, but that got them to Jerusalem. They needed Herod who told them to go to Bethlehem. Herod needed the chief priests and scribes who studied the scriptures and then knew that Bethlehem was where the Savior was to be born. So, you can see the interconnection. Baxter needed his teacher Hugh, he needed his church, and the support of others. That's true for us too. So many people are searching for meaning in their lives; hence so many these days say I'm spiritual but not religious. But only God will fulfill all of our deepest desires, through Jesus Christ. So, for us, we need

to take the time to understand God - but like the Magi, we can't do it on our own. Even the Magi are not one but 3. So, we need others to give us assistance to pray with us and help us discern where we are going. We need the guidance of the Church to help us understand what God has revealed to us, for we can't just rely on our own interpretation of the Bible. That's part of it, but the Church has had 2000 years to wrestle with God's word and also gives us Tradition, the moral teachings handed down to us over the centuries. So first and foremost, hopefully we try to know God by seeking Him out, and understanding Him through prayer, coming to Mass, and growing in our faith.

Secondly, what is our mission? The magi were not just meant to stare at the skies but had a mission to find Christ. To quote the Blues Brothers, "we are all on a mission from God." Hugh's mission wasn't to be a banker, but to be a teacher. God has a funny way of surprising us, and it's important that we always be open to what He may be telling us.

Finally, it's important to never forget that everything takes time. Did you note the peculiar detail that the magi entered the house of Mary and Joseph? What's the story there, aren't they at the manger? Well, that might

be the case for our nativity scenes at home, but Mary and Joseph were in the area for some time before going to Nazareth, perhaps several years. We don't know how long it took the Magi to get to the Holy Family, but they obviously didn't fly there. I heard one commentator say 2 years. But if you think about it, they had to discern what the stars were saying, and get further information, and then they got there. For Hugh, it was mid-life before he became a teacher and found his true vocation. For Baxter, it took time for him too to figure out who God was and that he was a very important part of the story and loved by God. Even in my life, I took a winding road. I thought about different careers. As a teenager, I even questioned my Catholic faith for a time, even looking at other Protestant churches. But through it all, people around me were patient, and most importantly, God was too. The point is we have to be patient - we aren't going to understand all the faith entails right away. We may struggle with Church teachings. And others around us may struggle too in seeing the importance of Mass, or prayer. It can be tempting to just walk away from faith or ignore parts of it, or to give up on people - but with a bit of patience we just might be surprised at what happens in our lives and in the lives of others as grace is truly amazing, it just takes time to learn how to cooperate with it.

As you look at the 3 Magi, you notice that they each have a different appearance. According to Saint Irenaeus, one is often old with white hair, full of the wisdom of years; another is beardless and younger, symbolizing youth; another looks middle aged, a man of action. Eventually by the year 1400, artists used another interpretation of Irenaeus, that one had his skin darker in color, a tradition developing out of Northern Europe. This shows us that God came for all people - and people respond to that in different ways, taking different paths to find their way to God. Like them, may we be seekers, and remember that there is a goal to our searching. Jesus, the light of the world, is the fulfillment of all human hope. Understanding who He is, and all that God reveals, and what He wants us to do with the gifts He has given us though, well that takes time. A good thing to think about as we start Ordinary Time this week. The journey may be long, but we have so many gifts we can give to God, gifts more wonderful than gold, frankincense and myrrh, gifts that have the power to transform a soul like the gift Hugh gave to Baxter and his other students, but more importantly once we find our path and the way to Him, He has something far greater to give to us in return - eternal life in paradise. What a great gift it is - let's never fear the length or difficulty of the journey, knowing that He and others journey with us each and every step of the way, and daily keep our eyes

fixed on the goal, knowing that Jesus Christ, no longer the little infant but Christ the King of the Universe for all eternity is truly the light of the world, and the fulfillment of every longing of our heart.