

Today is the Feast of the Epiphany when celebrate the final component of the Christmas story—the arrival of the Magi bearing gifts for the Christ child.

And that “Christmas” season begins roughly after school starts. Well, maybe the day after Halloween—if we’re lucky. It seems like in all the weeks -- months-- leading up to any Christmas season in the last few years-- a common theme on talk shows and in the media was that we all need to put the Christ back in Christmas. I guess it's OK if we shove each other aside for a bargain, shop on a day previously set aside for giving thanks, but if anyone dares to write Merry Xmas anymore, they have gone too far.

I actually write Xmas all the time. So do many of my seminary friends. We also abbreviate Christian as Xn. I guess we are taking the 'Christ' out of the words. Except that we’re really not.

X is the old abbreviation for Christ. As in Christus. Some of you may be familiar with this symbol on the front of your bulletin this week. It’s the Chi and Rho in the Greek alphabet.



It stands for Christus Rex—Christ the King, the first two letters of each word. This large X is an ancient symbol for Christ. Some scholars think it even predated the cross symbol.

Christ—the little baby born during this season a couple of thousand years ago, was symbolized by an X. Christus. X.

So I use this ancient symbol of Christ somewhat defiantly. I like old symbols. They are important. They have strength.

And if we don’t use them they get usurped into other things.

Like: X-ray. X-box. X-men.

For those of you are unfamiliar with some of those terms:

An Xray: A beam of energy particles that shine into a person to show what they are like on the inside.

X-box. A gaming cube for video games and sports. It can feed your quest for fitness, or your quest for another world.

X-men. Mutants to some, heroes to others. Each has unique powers, which can be used for good or for evil.....

You know, I have one of those brains that likes to see connections everywhere. I can sometimes tie the weirdest things together.

Christ's birth was heralded by a star. The Magi followed the star. It shone so brightly that it enabled wise men to find the place where Mary had the baby. Its intense beams of light shone over the crib, and the holy child. A Christ ray. An X-ray.

Legend states that Christ's bed was a feeding trough for the animals. We hear it called a manger in the Christmas story. A manger was a place they put the hay, so the animals could eat.

Christ was born a human being, but he wasn't born to wealth or privilege. He was born to parents so poor that they had to lay him in whatever was available -- a container for the sleeping baby—some say it might have been made of stone, some say it would probably be made of wood-- like a feedbox.

So this baby who would become food for the world, was born in a food box. Apropos. And ironic. What was born and gently laid in that box was the Word that created every star and world, every experience, every love, every journey, every adventure. All of it lay in a box. A Christ box—the original X-box.

This baby, whose birth we celebrate during Christmas and Epiphany, carries the potential of all the universes. All that potential is inside this child. In time, the man this child grows into will tell us—more than once—that this power from God is in us, too. Sometimes we believe it. More often, we don't. From the moment he can speak he will tell us that the kingdom of God is within us. In no time at all he will declare that—everything he can do, *we can do—and more!*

This baby, whose birth we celebrate, will soon say that the maker of All That Is lives inside us, and we live in Him. He will describe our enormous potential, with gifts unique to each of us; and he will tell us that each one of us has the ability to help bring about a better world.

And he will ask us to follow him. To become Christ's people. X's men. X-men. And we too can change the world.

Maybe there is something special in that letter, the letter X- when used as a prefix. Maybe that letter changes everything it touches. X-rays-- which let us see inside ourselves, X-boxes-- which bring us larger than life adventures, and X-men-- people who can shape and change the world. And Xmas. That holy night when a baby was born. A baby who would become light to the world, bread for our journey, that child who will lead kings and poets and all of us into all manner of adventures if we follow him. That Christ who will show us that his power is in us—and we can use it for good or for evil-- but we are *supposed* to change the world -- into a world full of journeys, a world where justice is fought for, a world where we quest for love.

And here's another thing: on a treasure map X marks the spot. X = Treasure. That kind of says it all.

So don't be afraid of the X. Use it proudly. Because we are X's people. And--for the last time this season Merry Xmas and blessed Epiphany. Amen.