

The Epiphany of Our Lord

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Amazing Grace Lutheran Church - Pastor Chip Wilke

Ephesians 3:1-6

For this reason I, Paul, the prisoner of Christ Jesus for the sake of you Gentiles-- Surely you have heard about the administration of God's grace that was given to me for you, that is, the mystery made known to me by revelation, as I have already written briefly. In reading this, then, you will be able to understand my insight into the mystery of Christ, which was not made known to men in other generations as it has now been revealed by the Spirit to God's holy apostles and prophets. This mystery is that through the gospel the Gentiles are heirs together with Israel, members together of one body, and sharers together in the promise in Christ Jesus. (NIV)

Why are you here this morning? What did you come here to do? What motivated you to get up, get dressed, and make the trip to Amazing Grace today? Did you come because the weather is too bad to do anything else, because there was nothing else on your schedule, because the Bengal's season mercifully has come to an end? Did you come because someone made you? Are you here to be entertained? Did you make the effort to get here because you felt you had to? Has coming to church just become a routine?

Dear friends in Christ, while this morning we are going to talk about a mystery, it is no riddle as to why you have come here this morning. There are no secrets as to why we are here. We recognize what rightly motivates us to be come together at Amazing Grace. We understand exactly what we have come here to do. As God's Word reveals to us again a great mystery it becomes clear that: **It Is No Mystery Why We Are Here.**

Do you enjoy a good mystery? For me, whether it is a novel or movie, there are a few things necessary for it to be a *good* mystery. All the facts can't come out at once. I like it when little by little there is a detail here and a clue there that helps you get closer to the truth. You kind of start to piece it all together and finally in the end it all comes together and you see the big picture. Also, a good mystery has to keep me at least somewhat on track, even though I appreciate a few surprises. But when it is so confusing I can't follow or understand what in the world is going on, then I don't think it is a very good mystery - just a frustrating one.

As Paul uses the word mystery three times in the words of our text, He is writing about a very good mystery. This is the best mystery of all. This is a mystery that Paul acknowledges "*was not made known to men in other generations as it has now been revealed by the Spirit to God's holy apostles and prophets.*" This is the mystery of Christ. The Spirit revealed this mystery to us and is why it is no mystery we are here. Think about how God revealed this mystery bit by bit with a detail here and a clue there over time. In the Garden of Eden, God said a descendant of Eve would crush the devil's head. He would save Adam and Eve from the eternal consequences of their sin. Then over time God revealed this Savior would be a descendant of Abraham, from the line of David, and out of the very tribe of Judah. Through Jeremiah God revealed this Savior would be our righteousness, providing us the holiness we need before God. Through

Isaiah God revealed this Savior would come from humble roots, be born of a virgin, and suffer being pierced for our transgression and crushed for our iniquities. Through the Psalms and other prophets God revealed more. Our Savior would be born in Bethlehem and raised in Nazareth. None of His bones would be broken, but they would cast lots for his clothing. And on and on came another detail here and another clue there.

Then the mystery comes together - in Christ! Watch this Epiphany season as Jesus appears. Listen as more is revealed about Him. Next week come to see Jesus appear at the Jordan to be baptized where God reveals to all Jesus is the Christ - the one Son who pleases God. Listen and learn more throughout Epiphany as our Savior Jesus teaches and performs miracles until the last Sunday in Epiphany. Then before Jesus climbs the hill of shame to pay the price for the sins of the world, watch Jesus appear on the mountain of transfiguration in glory - the glory that is His as true God. There Jesus is again revealed as God's Son and the Christ - the Savior.

Paul had come to know Jesus as the Son of God and his King. Paul, by grace, understood what Jesus' life, death, and resurrection now meant for him. Jesus not only came to save Paul, but He also revealed Himself to Paul. The Spirit revealed this awesome mystery to Paul. He was forgiven. He was saved. Jesus was his Savior. Now God was using Paul to reveal another mystery. It was the reason Paul was in prison. God had given Paul a very specific mission. If you go back to Paul's calling in Acts this is what the Lord Jesus said of Paul: ***"This man is my chosen instrument to carry my name before the Gentiles."*** Paul tells the Gentile Christians in Ephesus ***"surely you have heard about the administration of God's grace that was given to me for you."*** Paul had been carrying out the message of God's grace - His undeserved love in Christ for their benefit.

This whole section of Scripture is emphasizing this very point that the Jews and Gentiles shared the very same blessings - yes very same blessings. ***"This mystery is that through the gospel the Gentiles are heirs together with Israel, members together of one body, and sharers together in the promise in Christ Jesus."*** Why was this so important? This may not be shocking news to us that Jesus is for all of us, but in Paul's day for many Jews and Gentiles this was very shocking. Gentiles are included. They are equals. There is no outer court for them to wait in while the Jews enter the inner temple. In Christ, they form one body. They shared together every promise in Jesus Christ. They were members of one family.

This is the mystery God is revealing through Paul - Jesus is not just the Savior of the Jews. Jesus is the Savior of all nations! Please understand this is not a change in God's plan of salvation. While God had given special promises and blessings to Israel, God's plan always included all people. But now God has made this more clear than ever. We see this truth today as wise men from a foreign land come to recognize Jesus as their King too. We see this here and around the world as people from all nations recognize Jesus as their Savior. The mystery is a mystery no longer. Gentiles are partakers in forgiveness, in life, in salvation, in every blessing found in Christ Jesus. And the same is true for you and for me. The good news of Jesus is for all people.

What makes the mystery of Christ such a great mystery is that it is not vague or murky or too confusing to understand. God makes the gospel clear for all people. It is only a mystery in a sense because it is something that has to be revealed. Thank God He has revealed this mystery to us! He has pointed sinners like you and me to the only true

Light, the Light that gives life to all men. We have see His glory, the glory of the “***One and Only who is at the Father’s side has made him known***” (John 1). When it comes to most mysteries, when people give it away, when they tell us what happens before we figure it out and see it for ourselves, they spoil it for us. But brothers and sisters in Jesus, this mystery is just the opposite. We are spoiling it for someone when we don’t tell them this mystery. Jesus is for all. Jesus is for you. He died on a cross for your sins. He wants you in heaven with Him. This is the good news for everyone.

On this Epiphany celebration as we heard the lessons and sang the songs of what Jesus our King, our Savior, has done and continues to do for us, I pray it reminded us all again why we are here. It is no mystery at all. We have come to worship Him. We have come to praise our God. We have come not because we have been guided here by a miraculous light in the sky, but because we know exactly where Jesus is found. Right here in His Holy Word. Right here in bread and wine. So we are here to listen and bow before our King. We are here to give our gifts, maybe not of incense, gold, and myrrh, but generous offerings used so that others may know of and grow in the mystery of Christ. Whatever is going on in our lives, whatever trials and troubles we are facing right now, it is no mystery why we are here. Because here our King hears and answers all our prayers and guides us even through life’s fiercest storms. We are here because it is no longer any mystery how God feels about us. He loves us. He gave us Jesus, our King, our Savior to save us from our sins and save us for a place with Him in heaven. Throughout this new year may it be no mystery what we are going to do, but let us all gladly, eagerly, say together: We have come to worship Him. Amen.