

Sermon Draft

Text: Ephesians 3:1–12

Sermon: Epiphany 2018

Today we celebrate “The Epiphany of Our Lord.” The celebration of Epiphany comes from the ancient Christian festival, observed on the date of January 6, to remind the Church of the mysteries revealed and the gifts of the Savior.

For the human race, understanding the plan of God has always been the great struggle, a mystery. But now at the right time, the Great Mystery God kept hidden has been revealed to us in His Son.

God the Father utilized direct promises through the Old Testament prophets, live action and movements to faraway lands by the patriarchs, Abraham, Joseph, and Jacob, and symbols and visual aids like the temple and its sacrifices to give clues to the ultimate mystery, the salvation of the human race. Yet, for the world, the work and will of the Father was still a mystery. For many, the traditions and the message of a Savior were mysteries that were hidden.

Paul says in our text: *When you read this “you can perceive my insight into the mystery of Christ, which was not made known to the sons of men in other generations”* (vs. 4–5).

This story was written by and carried out in the life of the Israelites and the Jewish people. In fact, the promise of a Savior was directly connected to the genealogy of David. Therefore, women of the line of David must have felt like many in our day and age who wait for a monstrous lottery drawing, believing that they will be the “one” who wins the prize. To be a part of the promise fulfilled must have been the dream of every young Jewish woman, believing she could be the main character in the mystery of the world’s salvation.

But of course, she very likely assumed that salvation was only for the people of Israel. God’s people, the Israelites, who had the clues, assumed that salvation was forever to remain a mystery to all the other nations.

Stargazers in Babylon or Persia? Ancients in India or China or Japan or Korea? Not for them, this plan of salvation. Not unless they could trace their lineage back to Judah or Issachar or Zebulun or Naphtali. And where would we sit? In the dark? Clueless? Eternal life a total mystery. This is getting personal! And the stakes could not be higher!

Unlike mystery novels of today that a clever reader might figure out, the story of Christ was guaranteed to remain a mystery until God himself revealed it. Even Paul, the chief apostle to the Gentiles, in our text recounts the importance of the mystery being revealed to him by the Father. This revelation was not necessarily a hidden reality; it was one that was spoken about and in many cases was just not believed.

Humankind has taken the approach that on our own we can do great things. The Old Testament story of the tower of Babel, for example, reminds us clearly of this reality. In fact, the Father saw this so strongly that he confused the people with different languages in order to make it harder for them to communicate and achieve their sinful goals.

And man, try as he might, foolishly proud as he may be, has been failing ever since. It's no mystery that humankind is desperately in need of the Savior and King. People have ignored the mysteries of God and his promises through the entirety of the Bible.

But the plan of salvation has not changed from the first time the Father made the promise to Adam and Eve in the garden. The mystery was set in motion at that time when God said that women would have pain in childbirth and men would toil in the ground as punishment for sin.

As in all mysteries, the plot becomes clearer and clearer as time goes by and the story unfolds. Characters and people in the mystery emerge and stand out. In the case of the Father's great mystery through the pages of Scripture, Jesus comes on the scene very late, but he immediately becomes the leading actor and main player in the plot of the world's story. The apostle reminds us clearly that in Christ the Father has brought forth the clear truth of his will and plan, which had been hidden for ages.

Jesus had now come, and as the light of the world, he had broken through the darkness.

Now Paul is the instrument the Father is using to communicate his message and to decode his mystery to the world. This mystery is not one that was forever to be kept secret, nor was the mystery something that the Father had intended us to keep quiet once the moment of revealing arrived.

And now is the time, Paul declares! ***“When you read this, you can perceive my insight into the mystery of Christ, which was not made known to the sons of men in other generations as it has now been revealed to his holy apostles and prophets by the Spirit”*** (vs. 4–5).

And just what is that mystery? Paul tells us, v 6: ***“This mystery is that the Gentiles are fellow heirs, members of the same body, and partakers of the promise in Christ Jesus through the gospel.”***

This message was formerly a Jewish message and one that was connected to your lineage and heritage.

Now Paul is making it clear that the revelation is that Gentiles are just as much a part of the Gospel message as the Jews. That Jesus is the centerpiece of salvation and forgiveness for all people, now and into eternity.

This is the message of Epiphany! This is why God put a star in the sky that Gentile Wise Men could see and follow. This is why these men from Babylon or Persia or wherever their real origins are still a mystery this is why those men could come and worship the King of the Jews. Because God had now revealed that he wasn't only King of the Jews. This is why, Paul says, ***“this grace was given [to me], to preach to the Gentiles the unsearchable riches of Christ, and to bring to light for everyone what is the plan of the mystery hidden for ages in God, who created all things, so that through the church the manifold wisdom of God might now be made known to the rulers and authorities in the heavenly places. This was according to the eternal purpose that he has realized in Christ Jesus our Lord”*** (vs 8–11).

There's to be no mystery about the world's Savior, Jesus Christ! The eternal plan of God is that all people should be saved through Jesus Christ and his death and resurrection. This plan is now realized in the living Savior, the risen King, our Lord Jesus Christ. This message and revelation of the mystery of God is now unfolded and decoded so that we may have confidence and assurance that the Word is true, and the message is no longer hidden from the ages long past.

So now, Paul says, "***we have boldness and access with confidence through our faith in him***" (v 12). See where this puts us? No longer distant from God. We have access to him through the reconciling blood of Christ. We have access to the throne of grace, knowing that when we pray, he hears us for Jesus' sake. We have access to his every blessing!

And having access to the mystery revealed, we're called to proclaim it. The Father desires Jesus' story to be told and shared. We are asked by our Lord to share the Good News that all are saved by the grace of the eternal plan of God. All now have access to the Father through the Son, Jesus Christ.

As the mystery of God becomes clear for the world, we, the children of Christ, are called to proclaim, live, and declare the message of the Gospel to all people. Like Paul, we have been given clarity in the Gospel, clarity in the message as God calls us to share this with all generations and people.

Like the Wise Men who came from afar to visit this mystery made flesh, we are able to come and kneel before the Savior. We are able to see the mystery made known from ages past and now brought to light. We see the light of the world in the form of the Son, and we are able to see clearly. Give thanks and praise the Lord that you now have the ability to understand and explain the mysteries that have been hidden. This is the Good News for those who call themselves children of the heavenly Father.

Amen