

Epiphany Observed / January 4, 2026

Ephesians 3:4-6

*"When you read this, you can perceive my insight into the mystery of Christ...The mystery is that the Gentiles are fellow heirs, members of the same body, and partakers of the promise in Christ Jesus through the gospel."*

To Bring to Light the Mystery of Salvation for the Nations

The Epiphany of our Lord commemorates the visit of the Magi to the Christ Child. The significance of their visit is the fulfilment of prophecies regarding the inclusion of the Gentiles into the promises of the covenants God made with Abraham and Moses. Their visit foreshadows their full inclusion in the covenant God would make with all people in Christ Jesus. Our text from Isaiah sings, *"And nations shall come to your light, and kings to the brightness of your rising."* The nations are drawn to the Lord through the light of Christ. The first of the nations to bow down before Him were the magi. Over the course of the succeeding ages countless Gentiles and their kings have been drawn to the Lord through the light of Christ and bow down before Him, including us here today. Christmas is the good news of the Saviour's birth. Epiphany is the bringing to light of the mystery of salvation, the good news that the Jesus is the Saviour of all people, especially of those who believe.

The Apostle Paul was set apart as the missionary to the Gentiles, their kings and to the Jewish people who lived among the Gentiles. When the Lord sent the disciple Ananias to baptize Paul, He said, *"This man is my chosen instrument to carry my name before the Gentiles and their kings and before the people of Israel."* Israel, also called 'the Jews' were the remnant of the tribes of Israel dispersed and scattered throughout the ancient near east successively by the Assyrians and Babylonians in the seventh and sixth centuries before Christ. By the time of Christ most Jews lived outside the holy land. These Jews, scattered among the nations, were the seed bed for the Church, which in the New Testament era is composed of people from every racial background and every people under heaven. Paul was given the stewardship of making the grace of God in Christ Jesus known to the Jews and Gentiles who lived in ancient Roman world.

Epiphany is about the grace of God that is in Christ Jesus. In our text Paul says, *"To me, though I am the very least of all the saints, this grace was given, to preach to the Gentiles the unsearchable riches of Christ and to bring to light for everyone what is the mystery hidden for ages in God."* The mystery hidden for ages in God

was His plan to bring redemption to all creation in the forgiveness of sin. The mystery hidden for ages in God was His plan to bring blessing to all peoples through His people Israel in general and in particular through the offspring of Israel, Jesus Christ the Saviour. In ancient times the Hebrew people thought the Lord was God of their people only. In the scriptures God from ancient times showed Himself the Creator of all people. He is the Maker of all things in heaven, on earth and under the earth. He is the Creator of all peoples and their Redeemer in Christ Jesus. In ancient times He allowed all peoples to their own way in worshiping the gods of their imagination. Now, in the coming of Christ Jesus, God shows that He is the God of all people. God now calls all people to Himself through faith in Christ Jesus.

Paul uses the word mystery in our text and in various places in the letter to Ephesians, always in reference to God's self revelation in Christ Jesus. In Christ the mystery of God's plan of salvation for the world is disclosed. In Christ, God makes Himself known as love. Everyone has a natural knowledge of God, a sense of the Divine. In the letter to the Romans, Paul writes, *"His invisible attributes, namely, His eternal power and divine nature, have been clearly perceived, ever since the creation of the world."* Humans have always perceived God in creation and in the forces of nature and understood Him according to the qualities they saw in nature. God has written His law on the human heart and despite the advent of sin, people have a sense of wrong and right and perceive God through that sense of right and wrong. God, no matter how He is conceived by the human mind, is the powerful Creator who deserves honour and the judge who deserves obedience!

Epiphany commemorates the worship of the Magi who came seeking the One born 'King of the Jews'. The Magi offered worship to Jesus, not with the understanding of St. Paul the apostle to the Gentiles, but rather with their own natural understanding of God who revealed Himself in the forces of nature and the birth of kings. They did not fully understand who Jesus is as God from eternity and as a human born in time. That knowledge would come to the Gentiles through the ministry of people like St. Paul, who were set apart by the Holy Spirit specifically to make known the mystery of God in Christ Jesus. Nevertheless, the Magi played an important role. Their worship was the beginning of the revealing of the mystery of God's love in the Christ child that is for all people and brings blessings especially to those who worship Him as God and believe in Him as their Saviour.

The greatest mystery of God in terms of something unthought of by people is His love. One of the shortest bible passages and most succinct descriptions of God

is 1 John 4:8 *"God is love."* The gods of the Gentiles were not love. The gods of the Gentiles were the forces of nature that could swallow you up in cataclysm just as easily as bless you with food from the earth. The gods of the Gentiles were easily offended and quick to express their anger in plague and pestilence. The gods of the Gentiles gave gifts in return for sacrifice on the part of their devotees. Jesus observed that the Gentiles thought they would be heard by their gods, because of their wordy prayers. He said the Father in heaven knows what we need even before we ask Him, because He loves us. The gods of the Gentiles demanded of their devotees the most abominable sacrifices; human lives, including infants and children. The mystery of God, what was unknown to the Gentiles, is that God is not what they imagined Him to be. Instead, God is love.

We don't always know God as love either. Oftentimes we perceive God according to our feelings or experience of life. Sometimes we feel God doesn't care for us. Sometimes we feel God is punishing us. Even God's people Israel, to whom He revealed Himself through Moses and Prophets, often saw God wrongly through their sins and sinfulness. In Jesus, God reveals Himself as our loving Saviour. In Jesus, God reveals Himself as a present help at all times, especially in times of trouble. In Jesus, God reveals Himself as the One who bears our sins so that rather than judgement we would receive forgiveness. In Jesus, God joins Himself to our humanity and shares in the human experience of life under the dominion of sin and condemnation of death. God offers Himself in Jesus as the sacrifice of atonement for our sins, the world's sins. God offers Jesus to the world, so that we would know Him as love and receive Him as our loving Saviour. Jesus is the Saviour of all people, especially of those who believe.

Paul's purpose in the letter to the Ephesians is to make known the mystery of God in Christ Jesus. The mystery made known is that God makes us alive to Himself in Jesus through forgiveness, which we receive through faith in Him. The mystery made known is that God is God of Jews and Gentiles and that in Christ, He is the God and Father of all who believe. God's purpose in Christ, which was hidden in part until the coming of Christ, was to make all people one with Him and with each other in Him. There are so many things that divide us as people and separate us from one another. Christ is the most important thing all people have in common. God from eternity, He joined Himself to our humanity through His conception by the Holy Spirit and birth of the Virgin Mary. His humanity includes and encompasses both Jew and Gentile. He joined Himself to our humanity, so that as God from eternity and a human being in time, He would take our place in being obedient to

the law that is written on every heart, suffering the consequence for human sin through His death on the cross. He unites all people to one another and to the Father through the sacrifice of His cross, especially those who believe.

God brings to light the mystery of salvation for all nations in the gospel of Christ Jesus. It's a mystery, because it comes from the inscrutable mind of God, whose thoughts are not our thoughts and whose ways are higher than our ways. The mysterious working of God leading to Christ Jesus can be traced through the Old Testament. Beginning with the words of hope God spoke to the woman when He promised one of her offspring would destroy the power of the serpent who deceived her. The mysterious working of God can be perceived in His promise to Abraham of universal blessing through the seed God would give through Him. The mysterious working of God is seen in the creation and preservation of Israel and finally in the birth of Jesus through Mary. What was hidden in ages past is now fully known in Jesus, revealed in His birth as God and man and made known as the Saviour of all people, especially of those who believe in His death for our sins and resurrection for our salvation. God open our eyes and the eyes of all people to see the mystery of His love in Jesus. God open our hearts and the hearts of all people to receive and believe in Him as our Saviour. In Jesus' Name. Amen.