

Epiphany Observed / January 7, 2024

Ephesians 3:6

“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.”

The Mystery of the Gospel Revealed in Christ Jesus

Today we observe the Epiphany of our Lord. Epiphany means to reveal, make known, see deeper, see something previously unseen, realize something that was previously hidden. During the season of Epiphany, we see Jesus revealed as our God and Saviour. Jesus expresses His divinity in power over the forces of nature. He calms the sea, quiets a storm and treads upon the waves. Jesus expresses His divinity in divine compassion for humans living under the curse of sin in this fallen world. He speaks words of healing, forgiveness and life. The sick are cured. The injured and disabled are healed. Demons are cast out. The dead are raised. Sins are forgiven. His words reveal the divinity concealed beneath the cloak of His humanity.

During Epiphany the disciples begin to see Jesus in a new light, not simply as their teacher. Ultimately and most importantly as the Christ the Son of the living God. In time, they see their relationships with each differently. They no longer quarrel as to who is the greatest. Instead, they see themselves as brothers, co-workers in the ministry of making Jesus known as God and Saviour, so all might believe in Him. In terms of our lesson from Ephesians, Jewish believers see their relationship to non-Jewish peoples in a different light. They see that Jesus brings the light of salvation to all people. They see that through faith in Christ and by baptism into His death and resurrection, all people have access to God. All believers are reconciled to God in Christ and so every division of ethnicity falls away. The mystery of the gospel revealed in Christ is that all baptized believers are sisters and brothers and have access to God in Christ.

The mystery of the gospel is that in Christ, salvation includes both Jews and the non-Jewish people, known as the Gentiles. Epiphany begins with the visit of the magi to the child Jesus. The magi come in fulfillment of the prophecy from our lesson from Isaiah, “Nations shall come to your light, and kings to the brightness of your rising.” Whether they were kings or not is secondary to their role as representatives of the nations and their kings, upon whom the light of salvation had dawned in the birth of Christ. The gifts they bring of Frankincense, gold and myrrh, are secondary to the gift God gives for all people in the Christ born of the Jews; forgiveness, reconciliation with Himself, the indwelling of the Holy Spirit, and eternal life through the resurrection of Jesus Christ.

The visit of the magi shows the nations honouring the Christ child as King of the Jews. However, its purpose is not to show what the nations do for Christ. Rather, it shows what God will do for all people in Christ. God called the magi to worship the Christ. First, by the scriptures which they would have had access to through the Jewish people scattered among the nations. Secondly, through the star by which God heralded the birth of Jesus, announced the dawning of the season of salvation and led them to the Christ child. In Christ, God brings the light of His salvation to all people. In Christ, all people receive the blessing of knowing God as heavenly Father. The epiphany of our text, the mystery made known in Christ, is that in Him all people have access to God through faith in His name.

The letter to the Ephesians explores the mystery of God’s working in Christ Jesus, through whom He reconciled humanity to Himself by the sacrifice of His cross. It is a mystery not as a problem to be solved. It is a mystery as an incomprehensible expression of divine love. In chapter two Paul writes, “But God, being rich in mercy, because of the great love with which He loved us, even when we were dead in our trespasses, made us alive together with Christ.” The mystery is the revealing of God’s great love in Christ Jesus. It’s a gift to be received through faith with thankful hearts. Human love is a mysterious thing. God’s love defies understanding and exceeds the greatest expression of human love. God’s love is that when we were dead in our sins, alienated from His Spirit, hostile in our actions and attitudes, He gave Jesus to die for our sins, that in Him we would be reconciled as His children and become sisters and brothers, even more dearly loved.

Human love is a mysterious thing, but the mystery of God’s love is of a different order all together. Whatever the source, whether its physical or some quality of character or personality, we are attracted to those we love. God loves, not because there is anything innately loveable in us. Our sin makes us unlovable. God’s love makes us loveable. In the second chapter of Ephesians Paul wrote, “we were by nature children of wrath.” Despite the sin by which we are by nature children of wrath, God loves us. God doesn’t love what is worthy in us. Since the sin

of the first people, we are unworthy of His love. God's love makes us worthy. God makes us worthy of His love through the incarnation, life, sacrificial death and resurrection of Jesus. God loves all people so much that He gave Jesus to bear the sin of the world. Those who receive Jesus as Saviour receive the fullness of God's love in forgiveness, spiritual blessings in time and the fulness of life in eternity, in a share of Christ's resurrection.

An aspect of the mystery made known in Christ Jesus, is the oneness believers have with God in Christ and with each other as believers, baptized into the body of Christ. God has reconciled us to Himself in Christ. Therefore, all those who are in Christ are reconciled to each other. Human divisions of race, ethnicity, gender, social status, etcetera, should no longer divide those who are baptized into Christ Jesus. These divisions are part of life in the world. They affect our lives as long as we live in the world. However, as fellow members of Christ's body, we should not allow them to dictate the way we live with each other, or affect the unity we have in Christ Jesus. In this letter Paul says Jews and Gentiles should treat each other as brothers and sisters, because we are sisters and brothers in Christ. Husbands should love their wives as their own bodies, because husband and wife are both members of the body of Christ. Slaves should serve their earthly masters as they would serve the Lord, because we are all servants of the Lord in Christ Jesus.

All believers are co-heirs, benefiting from the death of Christ. The benefits of Christ are for all people, they are accessed by all who believe and receive baptism into His death and resurrection. Together we receive the inheritance of eternal life through His resurrection. Together we receive the forgiveness of sins and the indwelling of the Holy Spirit to empower us to walk in newness of life according to His righteousness. In the world we have different roles. There are many races and ethnicities, each with their customs and practices. However, believers are united in Christ in one body, the holy Christian church. We are all saved by grace, received through faith in Christ Jesus. In baptism we have all been incorporated, in-fleshed into the body of Christ, which is why baptism is so important. In baptism we are made members of the body of Christ and become one flesh with His flesh. The church in heaven and on earth is united in one Lord, one faith, one baptism. There is no longer Jew or Gentile, male, female, slave or free. There is only the church, the body of Christ, with Christ Jesus as the head.

The mystery of the gospel revealed in Christ Jesus is that salvation, reconciliation between humans and God, is by grace received through faith in Christ Jesus. He sacrificed Himself for the atonement of human sin, so we would be reconciled to God in forgiveness. Human based sacrifice attempts to appease the anger of the gods through a human act of atonement. In Christ, God took the initiative and Himself offered the sacrifice that truly appeased His wrath and atoned for human sin. The mystery of the gospel is that in Christ, God reconciled Himself to the world. The mystery of the gospel revealed in Christ is that reconciliation is offered for all to receive through Him. The mystery of the gospel is that as many as receive Christ and believe in His name, receive the power to become children of the heavenly Father. Born as St. John says, "not of blood, nor of the will of the flesh, nor of the will of man, but born of God."

God bless us with His grace, inspire and preserve us in faith as we live each day in the mystery of His love revealed in Christ Jesus our Lord. In Jesus' Name. Amen