

Untitled (47)

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Date: 03 January 2016

[0:00] In the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit. So happy Epiphany to all of you.

! I think that part of the problem is that the coming of the wise men, which is one of the events we associate most strongly with Epiphany, has kind of in our minds been collapsed into the narrative of Jesus' birth.

So Epiphany ends up being treated basically like the sort of direct-to-video sequel to Christmas.

And I think that's actually a major bummer, because Epiphany is really important.

I think we'd all agree that Christmas is important, and we would be right. You know, on Christmas Eve and these days of Christmas, we've celebrated with joy the birth of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ.

And that sure is a cause to celebrate. But in Epiphany, we see the next step in what God has done for our salvation. In Epiphany, we see the baby in the manger that we celebrated at Christmas being revealed for who he is.

[1:31] We see his glory shining forth. We see his lordship. See it all demonstrated for all the world to see. We see that this King of the Jews born quietly and without much attention is in fact the Savior.

He's God's promised Redeemer. Not only for the Jews, but for the whole world. And that, my brothers and sisters, is hugely important. We see his glory.

And we see that all the nations of the world will hope in him. Now, in the Christmas story, the birth narrative that we read on Christmas Eve, we saw the angel of the Lord announcing the birth of Jesus born in the city of David to the shepherds watching their flock by night.

Now, they were Jewish witnesses to the birth of Christ who came to see and then found the Savior of Israel. Israel. But the wise men in our gospel reading for this morning weren't Jews.

They were from the east, probably from Persia, or what we think of as modern-day Iran. They weren't Jews, yet the scriptures tell us that they came seeking the one born King of the Jews.

[2:52] When they found him, found where he was, what did they do? They worshipped him, didn't they? Now, think for a second about what that implies. It implies that the one born King of the Jews, Lord of the Jews, Savior of the Jews, was even more than that.

It means that he was born King, Lord, and Savior of the nations of the whole world. And the wise men from the east, bowing and worship before him, are the first Gentiles in scripture we see doing that.

A sign for us to see that one day the whole world will bow and confess that Jesus Christ is Lord. And that's important to us in particular because many of us here, myself included, are not of Jewish ancestry.

We're Gentiles. And unless the hope that is found in Jesus is for the whole world, and not just for the Jews, then we're without hope. Thank God.

Now, in our epistle reading for this morning from Ephesians 3, Paul takes up this very theme that Christ has been revealed, the nations.

[4:40] If you want, look there with me. Ephesians chapter 3. Now, as we look at Paul's situation as he's writing to the Ephesians, we see that his situation is a familiar one.

Paul is imprisoned, yet again, for his witness to the gospel, his desire to bring the good news of Jesus Christ to all people. Now, we see that reality reflected in the first few verses of our passage for this morning.

It says, Now, Paul here is specifically identifying himself as a prisoner on behalf of the Gentiles.

And how did that come about? He set out to tell the world, to tell the nations about the good news of Jesus. And we see that he was given grace, was given revelation by God, just for that very purpose.

And revelation, as we know, is something that we can be certain is true because it is revealed by God and not thought up by the mind of man. Now, Paul goes on in verses 4 and 5, taking our theme further.

[6:04] 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.

Now, the mystery of Christ, which was not known in other generations, as it has now been revealed. That's what we celebrate at Epiphany.

Something that was hidden or unclear or hinted at has finally and fully been revealed. Think about that for a second. We have been given the full revelation of God in Jesus.

Now, even Abraham, the friend of God, the recipient of God's covenant mercies, saw God's promise by faith and from afar. But we do not look from afar.

We see the fulfillment of God's promise in the person of Jesus. We see Jesus, born and placed in a manger, lifted high on the cross to draw all men to himself, risen from the dead, ascended to the right hand of the Father.

[7:18] Now, all of that which was unclear to prior generations is ours to see by God's grace. And isn't that amazing? But that's not all.

Look at verse 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.

The mystery that has now been revealed is bigger than anything that we could have imagined. The mystery of Christ is all the more extraordinary in that he is the Savior of the whole world.

All the more extraordinary in that a great multitude that no one can count from every nation, tribe, people, and language will find their salvation through faith in Jesus Christ, the Son of God.

A multitude from not just one nation, but every nation. Not just one tribe, but every tribe. Not just one people, but every people. Not just one language, but every language.

[8:30] Jews and Gentiles alike. God's saving power in Jesus has been fully revealed. Now, one thing that jumps out in the next few verses is the role that Paul was given in making this reality known to the Gentiles.

Starting in verse 7. Of this gospel I was made a minister according to the gift of God's grace, which was given me by the working of his power. 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.

Yet, though Paul knew himself to be unworthy of the grace of God, he still found his calling to make known the unsearchable, extraordinary, inexhaustible riches of Christ.

To make that known to the nations. And as we know, Paul did that very simply. By preaching Jesus Christ and him crucified. And so he was called, as our passage tells us, to bring light for everyone. Bring to light for everyone. What is the plan of the mystery hidden for ages in God who created all things? Again, we see that theme.

[9:59] That which was formerly hidden or unclear is now revealed. And why? Why has it been revealed? What is God up to? So that through the church, through God's redeemed people from all the nations of the earth, through them, through what God has done in them and through them and for them, God's power to save, God's unfathomable love and mercy, God's infinite wisdom and God's glory, might be demonstrated to all of creation.

Not only on the earth, but even in the heavenly places. Now think about that for a second. About what God has planned to do through Christ for us.

And what he has now accomplished and now revealed. That he would show his wisdom by redeeming the world, all who believe through the blood of his son.

That's merciful wisdom, brothers and sisters. God shows his wisdom by his mercy to sinners in Jesus Christ. It has been revealed for all of creation to see.

And we're part of it. This merciful wisdom is part of God's eternal purpose.

[11:29] As Paul tells us in verses 11 and 12. This was according to the eternal purpose that he has realized in Christ Jesus our Lord, in whom we have boldness and access with confidence through our faith in him.

This mystery that Paul is talking about was unveiled, was made apparent for the nations to see about 2,000 years ago. But the purpose behind the mystery is eternal.

Think for a second about what that means. God loved us before anything that exists was created. He created us lovingly.

In love he created us, knowing that we would choose to rebel against him. Knowing that we would only be brought back to him at great cost through the very blood of his own son. God's eternal purpose is that he would show forth his wisdom through his merciful, self-giving love for us.

Love that has been revealed in its fullness in Jesus Christ. God's eternal purpose is that he would show up to us. So why wouldn't we have boldness and access to God through our faith in Christ? [12:48] We do, because through our faith in Christ we see God's eternal, unchanging, unquenchable, self-giving, merciful love for us. We have access, we have boldness, and we have confidence.

And that's why we celebrate today. So I think epiphany has gotten a wrong deal in being ignored. What do you think? Yeah? Is this mystery that has been revealed in Jesus we're celebrating? I think we'd have to answer that it is.

But how might we do that today? How might we celebrate? Now, of course, one way to celebrate feast days like epiphany is by feasting. I'd encourage you to do that today.

You have your priest's blessing to feast. As if most of us needed any encouragement to do that this time of year. Unless some of us haven't already broken our New Year's resolutions, at least.

[13:50] But let's also think for a second about how the meaning of epiphany might challenge us. One thing that we should remember in light of epiphany is that God's love extends to all nations, all the tribes of the world.

That being the case, I think that it's important for us, especially to keep Christian missionaries and the persecuted church in our thoughts and prayers. They have been given the difficult and often dangerous work of laboring to reveal Christ in places where he is not widely known.

They need our support. Maybe some of us might be led to provide financial aid or to donate our time in some way to those causes. But all of us should be praying for them intentionally and daily. If that intentional prayer for missionaries and the persecuted church isn't already something that we're practicing, epiphany provides a great reminder to put that into practice.

Because missionaries and persecuted Christians are on the front lines of what we celebrate at epiphany. Christ being revealed to the nations as Lord.

[15:13] Brothers and sisters, God's eternal purpose in Christ, once a mystery, has been made clear. The unsearchable riches of Christ have been made known to us.

Rejoice, brothers and sisters, because our Savior has come and he has been revealed. In the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit.

Amen. Amen. Amen.