

## Christ's Mystery in You

God's blessings to you this New Year and Merry Epiphany! Mysteries catch our attention and just won't let go. Getting to know what we don't know is the reason why we will read the paper, ask people what is going on, and use any number of sources to find what has happened. Mysteries are so appealing to us that we even see them in entertainment. We don't know what will be the outcome. We get all worked up and the excitement builds as we get closer to seeing what will happen and who will still stand at the end.

Today we will look at the mystery that God became man and still remained God. Not that long ago we rejoiced at the miraculous mystery of the birth of Jesus. God became man—a mystery, a miracle. At Christmas we study the blessed fact that Jesus lived and walked on this earth as a human being. Such was the gracious plan of salvation of our loving God. "Oh, the depth of the riches of the wisdom and knowledge of God! How unsearchable his judgments, and his paths beyond tracing out! 'Who has known the mind of the Lord? Or who has been his counselor?'" (ROMANS 11:33,34).

Today we celebrate Epiphany. The word epiphany has the meaning "to reveal" or "to show." Epiphany is that season when God reveals something about himself, shares with you some of his secrets. Today, as we look at the Apostle Paul's words in the book of Ephesians, we see God revealing things to us that we really need to know, things that are important, and yet things you'll never figure out unless God tells you about them. <sup>2</sup> **Surely you have heard about the administration of God's grace that was given to me for you, <sup>3</sup> that is, the mystery made known to me by revelation, as I have already written briefly. <sup>4</sup> In reading this, then, you will be able to understand my insight into the mystery of Christ, <sup>5</sup> 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. <sup>6</sup> 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. <sup>7</sup> I became a servant of this gospel by the gift of God's grace given me through the working of his power. <sup>8</sup> Although I am less than the least of all God's people, this grace was given me: to preach to the Gentiles the unsearchable riches of Christ, <sup>9</sup> and to make plain to everyone the**

**administration of this mystery, which for ages past was kept hidden in God, who created all things.<sup>10</sup> His intent was that now, through the church, the manifold wisdom of God should be made known to the rulers and authorities in the heavenly realms,<sup>11</sup> according to his eternal purpose which he accomplished in Christ Jesus our Lord.<sup>12</sup> In him and through faith in him we may approach God with freedom and confidence.**

Here's an unsolved mystery: how do you really bring people together? We live in a very divided world. Any number of things leads to divisions: age, gender, ethnicity, race, culture. These differences will never go away no matter how hard we try but how could we get past all these differences and truly get together?

There's a false idea about how we can do it. That false idea is that all religions are the same and we should just be happy that we are passionate about something. Following this thought, churches have tried to unite people by watering down the Bible, not talking about Jesus Christ. Here's how it works—throw out anything in the Bible that might be difficult. Throw out that Jesus was born of a virgin. Throw out that you can't work to please God and pay off your sins. Throw out the important things in the Bible, throw out your beliefs. Throw out the things that you know about God's Word, don't mention Jesus Christ too much, and that's how you get rid of your differences. Sure they seem to be together but the pure message of God's forgiveness in Jesus Christ is gone. It still leaves behind the question of how can we truly be together?

The Apostle Paul tells us: **Surely you have heard about the administration of God's grace that was given to me for you,<sup>3</sup> that is, the mystery made known to me by revelation.** God revealed to Paul how people of different age, gender, ethnicity, race, and culture come together. **In reading this, then, you will be able to understand my insight into the mystery of Christ,<sup>5</sup> 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.<sup>6</sup> 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.** The mystery that brings people truly together is the mystery of Christ. The solution to bringing people together all the way has been hard to see but now the Holy Spirit

is working through the Word. Here in the Word we find the solution—Christ. Christ solves the mystery.

You see, the Gospel removes the thing that really divides us. We need something removed in our lives before we can really get together. And that's our sin. You and I can't see it, but there are huge, invisible piles of sin and that's what keeps people apart. Sure we have our ethnic and economic differences, but the thing that really keeps people apart are those invisible piles of sin. How do you bring people together? You can't pretend that those piles of sin aren't there! How do you get rid of those piles of sin in your life? How do you get rid of those piles of sin in the lives of the people around you? You can't really get together until that sin is gone. It's an unsolved mystery, until you realize what Jesus Christ has done for you.

Jesus is the key to solving this mystery. Jesus is the great sin-remover. The great unite-er. That's why he came! There on the cross, you and I can get rid of those piles of sin in our lives. There at the cross, dump truck after dump truck of sin was piled onto the shoulders of Jesus Christ, and there, he took all of our sins away. And once people realize this and believe that their sin is really gone, really forgiven because of Jesus Christ, then they can really and truly get together, no matter what their differences might be.

That's what Mary and Joseph had in common with the wise men that came from the east. They had different culture and maybe even different ethnicity and race. It appears that Mary and Joseph were of humble means and that the wise men were rich. What brought them together? The Christ-child, and what he would do three decades later.

The main message of the Epiphany season is that we have a worldwide Savior—that no matter who you are, what your background, no matter how different you are, no matter what you have done, Jesus is still for you. He brings you into a group that is not about your differences and where true unity can be found, a group called Christians. People who have all kinds of differences, but people who have one thing in common that binds them all together—forgiveness of sins in Christ.

Paul considered that mystery of his forgiveness. **Although I am less than the least of all God's people, this grace was given me: to preach to the Gentiles the unsearchable riches of Christ,<sup>9</sup> and to make plain to everyone the administration of this mystery...according to his eternal purpose which he accomplished in Christ Jesus our Lord.** Paul didn't stop exploring the wonders that God showed him. Paul could not stop the power of God in his life. God moved him to see that he was the fully unworthy of the faith gifted to him. In spite of his unworthiness God gave Paul the mission to share the riches of Christ. To bring more people past their differences to share in the riches of Christ.

Consider that great mystery of your forgiveness. We are all among that unworthy band to be given such insight into the mystery of Christ. We do not deserve to be saved. We cannot earn forgiveness. We do not have enough money to buy our way into the gates of heaven. The joy of our salvation is the work of Christ that according to his eternal purpose he cleansed us from all sin—not just a few, but all.

Our joy as individuals is to be shared with others. Our privilege as a congregation of believers is to encourage one another in this sin-darkened world. Sadly some cut themselves off. Some harbor ill feelings. Satan would love to see more and more people use their own personal differences as excuses to miss out on the importance of being united in Christ. He wants nothing more than to see the differences stand in between people and Christ who lived, died, and rose so that the sins of world would be taken away.

How undeserving we are! This is truly a mystery that God would plan to reach and grab hold of any of us. As we begin a new year we can renew our joyful commitment to share what has been given to each of us—forgiveness of sin, new life, and salvation. May this world see in us the mystery of God—Christ's mystery in you, the hope of glory. Amen.