



Ephesians 3:2-12 - ² Surely you have heard about the administration of God's grace that was given to me for you, ³ that is, the mystery made known to me by revelation, as I have already written briefly. ⁴ In reading this, then, you will be able to understand my insight into the mystery of Christ, ⁵ 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. ⁶ 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.

⁷ I became a servant of this gospel by the gift of God's grace given me through the working of his power. ⁸ 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, ⁹ and to make plain to everyone the administration of this mystery, which for ages past was kept hidden in God, who created all things. ¹⁰ 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, ¹¹ according to his eternal purpose which he accomplished in Christ Jesus our Lord. ¹² In him and through faith in him we may approach God with freedom and confidence.

The Savior is Revealed!

To all people

Through his church



Arise, shine, for your light has come, and the glory of the LORD rises upon you! (Isaiah 60:1)

Have you ever seen the light go on? You know, the expression on a person's face? You tell your friend a joke. You masterfully remember and relate all the details of the situation, you pause for proper comedic effect, and you deliver the punch line. And then? Nothing. There is no reaction on the face of your friend, just a puzzled look. But all of a sudden, almost on its own, you see the eyebrows raise and the corners of the mouth curl up into a smile. Your friend understood. You just saw the light go on. I've heard that missionaries to foreign countries often get to witness the "light go on." But their experiences are no joke. Theirs is a mission of eternal life vs. eternal death. People who live in nations, impoverished both economically and spiritually, are met by God's messengers who tell them that only one true God exists; that human beings are sinners; that Jesus came to pay for all of our sins; that through faith in Jesus, we will live forever in heaven. And the expressions on the faces of the native people? Well, through the working of the Holy Spirit, many times the missionaries got to see the light go on because the Savior was revealed. Today, we're celebrating the festival of Epiphany. The word Epiphany comes from a Greek word meaning, "shine forth," or "appearance." It is on this Sunday and in this season of the church year that we celebrate the fact that Jesus Christ appeared and shined forth as the Savior of all people, even you and me. At Christmas, we celebrated the Light of the World dawning on those in darkness. Now, we rejoice because the Savior is revealed to all people through his church.

In the Old Testament God had chosen the nation of Israel to be his people. They inhabited the Promised Land, they worshipped the Lord in a specific way in the temple, and from their nation, the Messiah would come. The people of Israel were privileged to have a very special relationship with the Lord. They were his people and he was their God. The Israelites were separated from all the Gentiles around them by living in their own land, obeying their specific set of laws, and worshipping the Lord. And so they lived, waiting for the Messiah, the promised Savior who would come and save the people. They lived on the promises of God, anticipating the day, "When the time had fully come." That time came with Jesus. Fast forward to the Apostle Paul's time. Jesus Christ has come into the world. Jesus is revealed as the Savior – Not just to the Jews, but the Savior for all people. This is Paul's message. This is the "mystery of Christ" which Paul writes about in Ephesians chapter 3.

Paul says, **"In reading this, then, you will be able to understand my insight into the mystery of Christ, 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."** The Old Testament prophets wrote about the coming Savior, but they all waiting for his arrival. Paul makes a bold, inspired claim that the mystery of Christ has now been revealed. When you hear the word "mystery" you probably think of a TV show like CSI, or a novel about Sherlock Holmes. If you put the clues together, you can solve pretty much any mystery in about an hour or in about 400 pages. But the mystery Paul talks about is a mystery that no human being could ever hope to solve on his own. In fact, this mystery was such a foreign concept to human minds, Paul refers to it as "the foolishness of God."

What was that truth? **"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."** In these young Christian congregations Paul was starting, there were both Jews and Gentiles. The Jews were tempted to think that they were better off than the Gentiles, while the Gentiles were tempted to become jealous and feel like second class citizens.



Within many of these congregations, there was a visible divide between the Jewish Christians and Gentile Christians. But now, all of those divisions cease. The two have become one. What once had been the distinct privilege of Israel, was now the Gentiles' to share. The Savior is for all people – Jew and Gentile, male and female, you and me.

This was earth shattering. Consider how profound this is – Gentiles are heirs together, members of the very same body as God's chosen people, Israel. Israelites had been taught not even to associate with Gentiles, much less consider them a part of their nation. But now, look again at what God's plan was all along – to save both Jews and Gentiles through the promise of the good news of Jesus Christ. That's what Isaiah promised in our OT lesson. The wise men of our gospel lesson were living proof of God's purpose and plan! I don't know all of your family heritages, but for myself, I am a Gentile, non-Jewish person. The very fact that I'm standing here preaching the gospel to you and the very fact that you're sitting here listening to God's promises and applying them to yourselves – that's the exciting outcome of Paul's words here. You're included. Jesus is YOUR Savior.

Paul reminds us, **"In reading this...we will understand."** In God's word, the entire plan of salvation is outlined for us to cherish and share. A few Christmases ago, I went to visit my parents. Their garbage disposal was on the fritz, and after purchasing a new one, it was time for the installation. Instead of paying Lowes \$75 to come and install it, I offered to help install the new one. How hard could it be? So, in preparation for the task, I did what many twenty-somethings do before undertaking a project like this one. I looked it up on YouTube. *"How to install an Insinkerator garbage disposal."* There it was – a video detailing the procedure. So I played the video clip, then paused it, and then carried out the step illustrated in the video. Play...pause...work. Play...pause...work. Things were going swimmingly, until we hit a hiccup. For whatever reason, I must have been carried away in the success of my efforts, I neglected to follow the instructions that had taken me this far. I was so close! I laid a hold of the old disposal, twisting and twisting and twisting, but nothing was happening. The work had hit a standstill, morale was low, and I thought I heard the faint sound of \$75 jumping from my father's wallet and into the cash register at Lowes. But then, the instructions were consulted once again. After taking hold of a small allen wrench, I was able to twist the old garbage disposal, lift it off the fittings that once held it, and then replace it with the new unit. Then some sage advice from my father: *"When all else fails, read the instructions."* Some advice that would have been helpful a few minutes earlier in the process. Had someone shared those precious instructions with me at the beginning of the job, that would have saved me some scuffed up knuckles, sore knees, and overall frustration. Had I known the instructions were still there for me, things would have been different.

God has given us his word. But God's word is so much more than an instruction manual for life on earth. It's how God reveals his truth, telling us that Jesus Christ is the Savior of all people. That information does no good unless people know it's there and it's for them. And God chooses to carry that message out through us, his Church. Paul tells us, **"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."** The mystery of Christ has been revealed - God has brought us out of darkness and into the light of his family. And now, the Savior is revealed through us, his Church. But we're human. We're weak and sinful. Maybe that's why God chooses to reveal the Savior through us – so that all attention is directed away from us and focused squarely on the grace of God in Jesus Christ.



Paul was having some similar feelings, **“I became a servant of this gospel by the gift of God’s grace given me through the working of his power. Although I am less than the least of all God’s people, this grace was given to me: to preach to the Gentiles the unsearchable riches of Christ.”** When we consider our lives, we see ourselves as unworthy servants of the gospel. We know our own sins. We know that the Savior has been revealed to all people, but sometimes, it’s a whole lot easier to be selfish with that message. As a church body that teaches God’s word in its truth and purity, we might be tempted to think of ourselves as our own little “Israel,” sheltered from the world and exclusive against outsiders. We stand before God and say, “Here am I, send me!” But the sinful nature inside each of us says, “Here am I, send me...but not to them, not to that neighborhood, or to that coworker from a different background than mine.” The Savior is revealed to all people, but sometimes, we’d rather be satisfied with the status quo, and keep the good news to ourselves, because after all, we’re the only ones who *really* appreciate it.

This is where God’s grace finds us every day – in a battle with our selfish sinful natures. It is God’s grace that gives us the privilege, as a church, to reveal the Savior – to proclaim **the unsearchable riches of Christ**. How unsearchable as the riches of Christ? Paul uses a beautiful word picture here. The idea is that of a person following a single set of footprints in the sand. The tracks are straight so following them is easy enough. But then the footprints start crossing back over themselves, again and again, until you’ve got a mess of footprints in front of you and no way to locate the original set of tracks. That’s how unsearchable God’s grace is. You could never count all the coins of glory that make up the riches of God’s grace in Christ. He came to earth for us. He lived perfectly, never once showing the selfishness we demonstrate. He died and rose to take away all of our sins.

The Savior is revealed to all people through us, his church. How do we do this? As a church body, we pool our resources and our efforts to take the message of the Savior to the world. With our prayers and offerings, we support schools to educate our young men and women to teach in our Lutheran Elementary and High Schools. We support and encourage young men to prepare for the pastoral ministry. We support missionaries, both at home and abroad, who take the message of the Savior to places we cannot go. As a congregation, we decided to support an Early Learning Center where over 70 children hear about their Savior every day. As individuals, we share the good news of sins forgiven in Christ with the people we know and even those we don't.

Paul reminds us, **“In [Christ] and through faith in him we may approach God with freedom and confidence.”** So do just that! Pray that God would bless the work of our church, that we would always faithfully reveal the Savior to all people. Pray that God would give you the opportunity to reflect the love of Christ to all those around you. Pray that God would give you chance upon chance to tell the good news of sins forgiven in Christ. Thank God, because the Savior has been revealed – and he’s been revealed to you! Happy Epiphany!

Amen

And the peace of God, which transcends all understanding, will guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus.