

Epiphany?

Ephesians 3:1-12

INTRO:

Epiphany does not usually occur on a Sunday. All the assigned texts for today are about how God reveals himself to us and to the world. The Magi come to worship the Bethlehem baby. **Why?** They saw a star that *revealed* to them that something wonderful had occurred. They received an *epiphany*.

Paul writes to the Ephesians Church that he has *seen* something. He tells of the event that he had *experienced and that was not self-generated*. This was **revealed** to him. Through Jesus we now have “**access**” to a God who is otherwise **inaccessible**. This access is a gift from God, not due to our intellectual or even spiritual achievement or worth. Our boldness and confidence, if we have any, is in the faith we have in the **revelation** we have **received** from God. Our faith rests on and is initiated by Epiphany. **Epiphany?**

ME:

Maybe it is just me, but I was late to *understanding* and even *appreciating* that word. The word “**Epiphany**.” *But, then . . . I had an epiphany!*

YOU:

Have you understood this word for a long, long time? Or, are you like me, “**Epiphany?**”

Let’s look for an epiphany from God through Paul.

We had better pray together first . . .

GOD:

Ephesians 3:1 This is the reason that I Paul am a prisoner for Christ Jesus for the sake of you Gentiles — 2 for surely you have already heard of the commission of God’s grace that was given me for you, 3 and how the mystery was made known to me by revelation, as I wrote above in a few words, 4 a reading of which will enable you to perceive my understanding of the mystery of Christ. 5 In former generations this mystery was not made known to humankind, as it has now been revealed to his holy apostles and prophets by the Spirit: 6 that is, the Gentiles have become fellow heirs, members of the same body, and sharers in the promise in Christ Jesus through the gospel. 7 Of this gospel I have become a servant according to the gift of God’s grace that was given me by the working of his power. 8 Although I am the very least of all the saints, this grace was given to me to bring to the Gentiles the news of the boundless riches of Christ, 9 and to make everyone see what is the plan of the mystery hidden for ages in God who created all things; 10 so that through the church the wisdom of God in its rich variety might now be made known to the rulers and authorities in the heavenly places. 11 This was in accordance with the eternal purpose that he has

carried out in Christ Jesus our Lord, 12 in whom we have access to God in boldness and confidence through faith in him.

WE:

Epiphany?

We may remember that's Mark's Gospel has a favorite word, the word **immediately**. Paul probably has a favorite word too. In this passage it is the word **revelation**. This word or other words that mean the same thing. God is doing a new thing. This new thing that God is doing was not really all that new. It flowed from the beginning of God's "*eternal purpose.*"

Now being brought to light, revealed—in Christ Jesus.

In verse 3, Paul refers to it as a "*commission*" of divine grace. That usually means stewardship or task. Here it means the carrying out of a strategy. Paul is not referring to saving grace, but to that which empowered him to fulfill his calling as a missionary to the Gentiles. In spite of his personal unworthiness as a persecutor the Way, Paul was God's chosen instrument to carry his grace to the Gentiles and to Israel. Paul recognizes that the inclusion of the Gentiles is itself an act of grace. Grace implies "**givenness**" and Paul underlines this. But he adds that grace was **given** to him for their benefit.

Although the blessing of the Gentiles was revealed in the Hebrew Bible beginning in Genesis 12:3, where God told Abram that all the families of the

earth would be blessed through him. All . . . the families of the earth. It was not proclaimed as fully as in the New Testament. It was not realized that the old system wherein the priests ruled in God's name would be replaced by the body of Christ composed of Jews and Gentiles forming "*one new person.*"

This revelation was made to the whole church of Christ through "*apostles and prophets.*" And Paul was one of these. He was the first to **receive** this truth that was not immediately recognized by the rest. Apostles and prophets are designated as "**holy**" because they are *set apart* for the special task of proclaiming Christ. Paul is not arrogantly assuming moral superiority. On the contrary, he displays a calmly modest objectivity here.

The instrument of **revelation** is always the Holy Spirit. This seems to be a subtle reference to the interplay between the Holy Spirit and the human spirit. This is very relevant in the context of **revelation**.

THE SERMON IN A SENTENCE:

Epiphany is about revelation and the words experiencing God's grace through faith in Christ.

YOU:

Today is Epiphany.

Epiphany

Christianity is not a faith you can embrace on your own. Believe it or not, we don't find this faith; *it finds us*. Epiphany means “**revelation**,” and *revelation* is a gift.

The way we often talk about faith, it sounds like something we have achieved, or discovered through our own cleverness. Paul clearly **shows** us, **reveals** to us, that faith is a gift. It is like the work of the star on the Magi. The Magi didn't come toward the star; it shined toward them. This is a great way to think about how we come to Christ. We come to him only because he came to us. He revealed his Father to us. He showed the Spirit to us.

CLOSE:

I mentioned earlier that I was late in coming around to the real meaning of Epiphany. It was through my studying for a sermon many years ago. The sermon was based on the Magi coming to the Bethlehem baby. That sermon was called **Epiphany - Now the World Knows!** The world has had an epiphany. It has gained new understanding and insight. **Did this happen because the world was so clever and smart, or was it something else?**

The Long Search was a TV series many years ago. It was a documentary, of sorts. It looked at the role of religious faith in human life. We will notice that they did not call it *How God Gets to Us! The Long Search*.

We enjoy thinking of ourselves as the searchers, the seekers, and the travelers. But this is not right, if Epiphany is true.

You see, the agnostics are totally right in saying that we just cannot know of there really is a God. *Sorry folks, we just cannot!*

Unless, and only . . . if . . . God reveals himself to us. And . . . God has, he has revealed himself to us. Beginning in creation itself, moving through the judges, the kings, the prophets, all the way to the baby born in Bethlehem.

Epiphany?

Revelation.

Epiphany — Now the world knows! The world knows that God created them and loves them and they are free to love him in return. And this is Good News!

Flannery O’Conner paraphrased the well known line from John’s Gospel:

You shall know the truth, and the truth will make you odd.

Immersion I this “mystery” of Christ is certainly an odd-making adventure.

But that’s not all! We could tweak John’s line more:

YOU shall know the truth, and the truth will set you free. But first . . . it will make you miserable!

I spiritual formation, the misery factor reveals that a new cornerstone has been laid, that there is a new creation emerging. It doesn’t mean that God lies to see us squirm. It is a detoxifying process that comes with a recovery from the addiction to the way things are.

G. K. Chesterton said:

“If there were no God, there would be no atheists.”

Well, there is a God. And there are atheists. There are agnostics too, but there is a God who has revealed himself to us.

Let's pray to him now...