

Sermon on Ephesians 3:2-12 – Epiphany 1.2.22
St. Paul's Lutheran – New Ulm, MN – Pastor N. Scharf

Hannah wants me to take the Christmas tree down. The tree is dried out and dropping needles. It looks rough. I was trying to make it to Epiphany, January 6th. As a kid my dad put the tree up on Christmas Eve and kept it up through Epiphany, spanning the 12 days of Christmas – from Jesus birth on the 25th of December through January 6th Epiphany. “On the first day of Christmas...”

Epiphany is called, “the Gentile Christmas.” Epiphany means “to manifest” or “show forth.” Jesus Christ shines forth as God in the flesh and the promised Savior of all mankind, the light of the world. Magi from the East come and worship the Savior born for them. Isaiah says “All nations will come to your light.” The reality of Epiphany is that:

Epiphany: Jesus is revealed as the Savior of all.

1) Jesus is the Savior of both Jew and Gentile.

2) Jesus is My Savior too.

3) Jesus is our confidence to share him with the world.

“Surely you heard about the administration of God’s grace that was given to me for you, that is, the mystery made known to me by revelation, as I have already written briefly. In reading this, then, you will be able to understand my insight into the mystery of Christ, which was not made known to people in other generations as it has now been revealed by the Spirit to God’s holy apostles and prophets. 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.”

I. Jesus is the Savior of both Jew and Gentile. “Mystery.” Paul uses this word to refer to something that God has had in the pipeline of his plan from eternity, something we could never have imagined or understood, but now gloriously revealed in the gospel, “*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 gospel is good news that sinners like you and me who were born enemies of God and outside his family, have been brought to him, bought back from our sin, shame, and the punishment we deserved from God, purchased, and cleansed by the blood of Jesus Christ to be children of God, loved by him.

But Gentiles in Paul’s day could easily feel like second class Christians. They had lived lives of ignorance worshipping pagan gods. Some lived in shameful practices – greed, sexual deviance, idolatries of every sort. Some felt out of place not knowing the religious culture and curriculum, not growing up in the synagogue learning the Old Testament and ways to worship. But **Epiphany**, God reveals through the gospel that through Christ Jesus Gentiles are brought close and stand shoulder to shoulder with Jews – as recipients of the grace of God, equally loved, equally cherished, one body, co-heirs of all God’s promises, all according to God’s plan.

Someone once asked about our church’s windows and paintings, that they depict Jesus as white. They had read something about Jesus not being white. I assured them that Jesus was probably not fair skinned, and probably definitely not Germanic/Norwegian, of European complexion. He is the Savior of all mankind – Jew and Gentile. Each culture as they hear the Gospel and the Holy Spirit works faith in their hearts understands that Jesus is born for the world, all people of all lands. So, artists would draw Jesus with the features, color-wheel, stature common to what they see in the mirror. In nativity scenes you have the figures and the baby Jesus himself in different colors, shapes, and sizes. That’s great because Jesus was born for all. And maybe each artist is depicting Jesus in the way they do because they are astounded in the fact and saying, “Jesus was born for...me.”

II. Jesus is My Savior too. Even after his third mission journey, and sitting in house arrest in Rome, Paul couldn’t get over God’s grace to him in his conversion and his commission, that Jesus loved him! “*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 the Lord’s people, this grace was given me: to preach to the Gentiles the boundless riches of Christ, and to make plain to everyone the administration of this mystery, which for ages past was kept hidden in God, who created all things.*” All of it is in God’s plan, even using Paul’s imprisonment to spread the gospel! The almighty creator of the world had planned to save a world full of sinners who turned away from him.

He promised two sinners in the garden of Eden. He promised their descendant Abraham, *“all nations on earth will be blessed through you.”* The Savior would come through his line. He dropped more prophecies and promises into place as God gave words through his prophets. Though the people showed themselves undeserving in their idolatries, and many wondered why and how the Lord would deliver them, God was faithful. Jesus was born. The local Judean shepherds praised God. Magi from the East – Gentiles from far off, worshipped the Savior born for all.

Jesus fulfilled all God’s promises, under God’s perfect law, with perfect obedience that he would credit to shamed sinners like you and me who too often have failed and yo-yoed in our following God and his commands. Jesus gave up his life as a ransom for you and me. He rose to assure our forgiveness is won and we are justified, declared not guilty. Jesus is for all mankind. Jesus is for you. It doesn’t matter where you grew up, or how you grew up, or your life previous, in Christ your sins are forgiven and you are made co-heirs of the great inheritance God has given to those who believe in him – forgiveness, life, purpose, his protection, and heaven.

Are you sure? We, people of all different backgrounds, lineages, heritages, need to know this, because our sinful nature loves to sit in unbelief, doubt and hostility toward God and his Word. Is it true? How can this be true for me, I’m such a sinner? Jesus’ mercy knows no limit. And Paul experienced it first-hand. Paul raged against Jesus. He did all he could to stamp out Christianity, even going on anti-mission trips to hunt down those who believed in Jesus and professed him. He was a violent man, deserving of God’s divine retribution, heaping up guilt upon himself. And Jesus confronted him not in punishment, but in unbounded mercy to show him the *“boundless riches of Christ.”* That Jesus would even consider Paul who wanted to be his greatest enemy, forgive him, turn him from his path of rage and sin, and send him to be his foremost Apostle to the Gentiles to share the Savior born for all. If Paul, then also Me! **Epiphany: Jesus is My Savior too. Epiphany:**

III. Jesus is our confidence to share him with the world. *“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, according to his eternal purpose that he accomplished in Christ Jesus our Lord. In him and through faith in him we may approach God with freedom and confidence.”*

The angels longed to look into the great prophecies that were given that foretold the coming Savior. The angels delivered messages from God to his people, to old Zechariah about the son to be born to him and Elizabeth, to Mary about the Savior being born to her, a virgin, the great excitement and praise of God on the hills of Bethlehem as heaven and earth met and rejoiced that *“Today, a Savior has been born to you, he is Christ the Lord.”* *“Glory to God in the highest!”* Jesus said to his disciples and the crowds gathered one day, and even here today that, *“In the same way, I tell you, there is rejoicing in the presence of the angels of God over one sinner who repents.”* The angels stand in awe and listen, silently cheering you and me on as we share this wonderful news of the gospel, *the manifold wisdom of God.*

God in his mercy and love for the world, for you, uses you, his church to take this message Paul heralded, the message the angels announced, that was passed along by prophets and apostles, that Jesus Christ is the Savior of the world, my Savior, a Savior for all. Your words, thoughts, and actions matter. God can and does use them for his glory and to further his kingdom. The example you set for your children or grandchildren, the words of encouragement you speak to a co-worker, the help you give a friend, and passage you share with a friend, the invite to come check out worship or a class, God uses all of it and all of you! Whether you think you are weak or strong, God uses you. It’s his plan!

God forgave you all your sins, made you his own, and he uses you. He has accepted you. You can go to him at anytime, in any place, with whatever you’ve got going on in your mind, in your heart, in your life. He will help you. Think of it: You and I may not be able to walk into the White House or the Oval office, but the President’s children can, and are not turned away. We have it better, God the Father has promised us heaven, and says we can come to him with anything and everything with confidence and boldness. Jesus is our confidence. **Epiphany: Jesus is revealed as Savior of all, the Savior of both Jew and Gentile, My Savior too, our confidence to share him with the world.** The tree may not make it to the 6th of January, but our Savior and his Epiphany promises will last forever. Amen.