

At Christmas time, we wrap the gifts we give in brightly colored paper and bows. This helps to create a mystery, for even if the person sees the present, they still will not know exactly what is inside. That is why some pick up the gifts that are placed under the tree to see how they feel, to determine how heavy they are and if they make any noise or not. The mystery of what is inside is what is drawing them to do this. It is only after the mystery is revealed, when the paper is removed, that the present can be fully enjoyed. Today we are still celebrating Christmas. I know that the day on which we celebrate the birth of Jesus was on December 25, but on this coming Wednesday will be the festival called Epiphany. Epiphany is often called the Gentile's Christmas. On this day we celebrate the coming of the wise men, Gentiles, to worship the new born Savior of the world. We seem to take it for granted that Jesus came, not just for the Jews, but for all people. But that was a mystery that needed to be revealed to the world. It is during this season of Epiphany that we do want to focus our attention on this fact, as well as the proof that Jesus was able to be the Savior of all since He is both true God and true man in one person. So this morning, let us join with Paul and GAIN INSIGHT INTO THE MYSTERY OF CHRIST. This mystery is that 1) we are all sharers together in the promise in Jesus, and also that 2) this mystery is to be proclaimed to all.

This mystery of Christ is like that Christmas gift that is wrapped and placed under the tree. It is not a complete mystery. It is out in the open for all to see, and there is someone, or some people, who do know what is inside that package, only they are not telling. This mystery of Christ was revealed from the very beginning, that God would send a Savior of all. When God called Abraham, He had said that through his offspring, all nations would be blessed. Even the prophet Isaiah reminded the people that the Savior Who was to come was not meant only for the Jews, but was coming for all people living in the darkness of sin and unbelief. This mystery was out in the open for all to see, but the problem was that it was not being shared with everyone. Remember how Jonah resisted going to Nineveh to proclaim the Word of the Lord? He really wanted to see those wicked people be destroyed by God rather than let them hear of God's love and then repent and come to faith.

That was the prevailing attitude among the Jews. Since they were the chosen nation, they considered everyone else inferior. Oh, they did have some Gentile converts to their beliefs, but they were always considered second-class citizens. No real effort was ever made to proclaim the good news of salvation to all nations, as we have been instructed in the New Testament period. They had this wonderful gift, the promise of the Savior, but they kept it all wrapped up as a secret kept for themselves.

But now that Jesus came into this world, all of that was changed. Jesus did not want this mystery to remain. He loved all people, and came to die to take away the sins of all people, even the Gentiles. That is why the account of the Gentiles coming to worship is so special to us. The night on which He was born, the angels announced it to the shepherds in the nearby fields. This was the announcement to the Jews. But the star in the sky shows that His birth was meant for people all over the world. All people were to know that their Savior had been born. The wise men recognized this, and they came to worship their king. In the same way, the Lord wants the mystery of Christ to be revealed so that all men, from all over the world, would come to Him in faith.

That is how you and I have become members of His kingdom. We are not of the physical nation of Israel, which classifies us as Gentiles or foreigners. But we are still part of the true Israel in that all believers are the members of the Israel that God will take to Him in heaven. In order to have as many as possible to be saved, the Lord used His New Testament apostles and prophets to spread the mystery of Christ to the ends of the world. And what is this mystery? Paul tells us very clearly, **“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.”** (6)

This new-born Savior came to do for all men the same thing. He came to lay down His life on the cross so that forgiveness of sins and salvation could be preached to all mankind — to Jews and Gentiles alike. For it is only through faith in Jesus that anyone will ever be able to become God's holy children. We are

all saved in exactly the same way. And that is the mystery that is to be revealed today on Epiphany. We are sharers together in the promises which God made to mankind through faith in Jesus our Savior. He came to rescue us from all of our sins.

And from now on, this mystery is not to be kept as a secret any longer. We are to proclaim this to all mankind. In writing this letter to the Ephesians, Paul explains that in God's great love and grace, He called Paul to be the messenger to the Gentiles of this wonderful good news. In the past, the Jews had been keeping this to themselves. But from now on, Paul wanted to make sure that all Gentiles also came to know of the love of God revealed in Christ Jesus our Savior. This was not revealed just to Paul, but to all of the New Testament apostles and prophets. Jesus made it very clear that He wanted the good news proclaimed to every creature throughout the world. His love was not limited to one nation or people, but truly wants all men to be saved and to come to a knowledge of the truth.

Later in this same chapter, Paul speaks about revealing the unsearchable riches of Christ. Unsearchable means that you simply cannot find them all, because there are way too many. We would be able to spend a lifetime trying to speak of these wonderful blessings which are ours through Jesus. And these are the wonders which we are to share with all mankind.

A gift that is all wrapped up is a mystery, but it is meant to be revealed and enjoyed. On this Epiphany, the mystery that God loved the Gentiles as much as His chosen people has been revealed, for Jesus is the Savior of all mankind. They are saved through faith, just as surely as anyone else. This is no longer meant to be a mystery, but is something which is to be shared with all people.