

Ephesians 3:1-12
Epiphany C
January 6, 2019

“Mystery Revealed”

Grace to you and peace from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ. Amen.

Most of us like a good “who dunnit” ... a good mystery. An event happens, but we don’t see who dunnit. But, no matter how careful the perpetrator might be, there’s a clue here and there ... that leads to another clue ... and another. Finally, after a series of cliffhangers ... the more the better ... detectives specially trained in finding clues, sorting through them, and putting them together reveal the truth. It takes time. But, eventually, the mystery is solved.

In some ways, God’s Word is a “good mystery.” The crime as it were ... wanting to be like God led to sin’s entrance onto the scene. The perpetrator ... Satan who took the form of a snake ... tempting Adam and Eve on that fateful day. This mystery isn’t about solving the crime though. The mystery is about how God will save the creatures He created in His image from their crime ... their sin. There are plenty of clues scattered throughout His Word. But it takes time and a special person to help us find the clues, sort them out, understand their meaning, and put them together. But God has laid all these out for us. And by the power of the Holy Spirit, He reveals the mystery to us piece by piece, bit by bit.

We enter a new church season today called “Epiphany” ... it’s a season of lights and illumination. That’s what Epiphany is ... outshining; shining all around; shining on everybody; to light up for all the clues in order to understand “the mystery.” On Epiphany we celebrate how all the clues come together to point us to an understanding of

the mystery of how God will save His creatures ... the plan He's been unfolding since the beginning.

The star lit up and illuminated the *mystery* for the Magi. It was called a mystery because what God was revealing through the prophets by an ongoing process was not understood by the world; the mystery was being unveiled over time. But like all good mysteries, the solution isn't the obvious one at first glance!

A good mystery has at least one cliffhanger ... a surprise twist changes our understanding of things. And God's mystery is no exception. The Magi, like everyone, thought they understood ... they saw a clue in the sky ... a special star indicating a king of Israel was born. So, they went to the obvious place to find the newborn king the star alerted them to ... Jerusalem. The big city. The center of the Jewish universe. The likely place a king of the Jews would be born.

Clueless, the Magi asked, (Matthew 2:2) *"Where is he who has been born king of the Jews? For we saw his star when it rose and have come to worship him."* The clues were there for them, but they didn't see them. Additional clues were there for Herod and his chief priests and the scribes in the words of God's prophets. So, they pointed the Magi to Bethlehem. But Herod and the chief priests and scribes didn't actually want to honor the new king of the Jews. They wanted to eliminate Him. He was a threat to their way of life ... their comfort ... their power and influence. They tricked the clueless Magi into revealing the final piece of the mystery for them ... the location of the new king ... this threat. And so the Magi went off ... to honor the newborn king. But they had no clue who this king truly was ... to them, He was just a king.

How many among us have the same difficulty seeing the clues? Or seeing the clues, like Herod, don't like what they see. The clues are there for all to see. Fully illuminated by the Light of the World born 2000 years ago. Yet, many don't want to see it. He's a threat to a way of life ... a life focused on getting as many toys as possible because in the end, "The one with the most toys wins." He's a threat to the pursuit of comfort and happiness ... giving away to others takes away from the perceived right many have to being comfortable and happy in their excess. He's a threat to power and influence ... it's better to be served by others than to humbly bow down to others and serve them.

We live in a world where it's easy for us to get caught up in modern Herods' tricks too. We know Jesus is God ... we know He's our King ... we know we should bow down with our lives to worship Him and live by His Word. However, modern Herods tell us otherwise. They do it in ways that seem okay too. It seems natural to take care of our own selves first ... to do what we can to be comfortable and happy in our lives ... to use our influence to protect our personal, self-interests. Once we've taken care of these things ... then we can take care of others.

The Magi went to pay homage to the new king. These Gentiles ... unbelievers from the East ... brought gold, frankincense, and myrrh ... to honor the king they expected to find. But there was a cliffhanger waiting for them. The star led them to an unexpected place ... a small village ... a stable occupied by a man, his wife, and a baby.

The prophet Isaiah said, **(Isaiah 60:6)** *"They shall bring gold and frankincense,"* and so **(Matthew 2:11)** *"opening their treasures, they offered him gifts, gold and frankincense and myrrh."* These gifts ... they were symbols of homage to a king. But this baby was more than a king. The gifts provide some clues. Gold – the way you pay tribute to a

king. Jesus was indeed a king. Incense – the way you worship God. Jesus was indeed God. Myrrh – what about myrrh? This third clue unveils the mystery.

Why myrrh? Myrrh is used to anoint royal beauty for love ... God's Word tells us the beautiful Queen Esther was bathed in the oil of myrrh for six months before being presented to the king for marriage. King Solomon's lover in the Song of Songs anointed her bed with myrrh. It's the smell of love. But there's another use for myrrh.

(Matthew 27:33–34) *“And when they came to a place called Golgotha, (which means Place of a Skull), they offered him wine to drink, mixed with gall [Guess what? That's myrrh!], but when he tasted it, he would not drink it.”* And then Jesus died ...

... and was buried. **(John 19:39–40)** *“Nicodemus . . . came bringing a mixture of myrrh and aloes, about seventy-five pounds in weight. So, they took the body of Jesus and bound it in linen cloths with the spices, as is the burial custom of the Jews.”*

The clue provided in the third gift reveals the mystery of the Word made flesh came down from heaven to show the infinite love of His Father for His creation ... it shows that Jesus, God the King, would die. That little boy was there to rule as King and be worshiped as God because the Word was made flesh to die.

Jesus received gold because He is a king. He received incense because He is God. Many could see these things as Jesus lived out His life and ministry in the world. But I don't know if anyone understood the cliffhanger the gift of myrrh would reveal until Holy Saturday. God used Gentile Magi to provide these clues to His creation. He guided them to His Son by a star so that the mystery could be revealed. God's plan to redeem and save His Creation is revealed by the power of the Holy Spirit in His Word and the clues contained therein.

In baptism you and I receive the gift of the Holy Spirit, who gives us faith to see and believe the clues to the mystery contained in God's Word. We see and believe that our salvation is only possible through Jesus Christ ... the King of kings – honored with gold, the Son of God – honored with incense, who died on the cross – honored with myrrh – to pay the price for our sins and the sins of all mankind. But this scene wasn't the end ... it simply led to one last cliffhanger ... the final piece in the mystery.

After three days of dark dreariness ... the sun rose. And with it the next cliffhanger is revealed ... Jesus also rose ... from the dead! By overcoming death, Jesus defeated forever the eternal power of sin and death over us. This is the mystery of God's plan of salvation ... the mystery was illuminated in the star light of God's Word transmitted to each of us here today through God's prophets and apostles; including Paul ... who praised and thanked God for the gift he was given, to reveal the mystery to others, saying, **(Ephesians 3:8-9)** *"To me, though I am the very least of all the saints, this grace was given, to preach to the Gentiles the unsearchable riches of Christ, and to bring to light for everyone what is the plan of the mystery hidden for ages in God, who created all things."*

Paul called himself the least of all because he led the brutal persecution of Jesus' followers. In yet another plot twist, God chose this murderous hater of Jesus to spread His Gospel to Gentiles throughout the world. Through Christ ... the Father forgave Paul for his murderous ways ... for a purpose ... to spread His good news to others.

You and I have received the same gifts from God. By the power of the Holy Spirit, the clues have been illuminated ... the mystery has been revealed to us. Like Paul, we've

also been redeemed and forgiven. God saves us for a purpose ... so we can share His good news with others. God our Father calls on us to spread His Word far and wide.

Unlike what the Herod's of the world might lead us to believe, one's religion is not "a very private thing." The unsearchable riches of Christ can't be searched out in private; they're unsearchable! They must be preached, made known, revealed; the mystery must be lit up in public for those still lost and wandering in the darkness. We, the Church, exist to light it up! (Ephesians 3:10) *"So that through the Church the manifold wisdom of God might now be made known to the rulers and authorities in the heavenly places."* Through us, the Church, the Body of Christ, God works to light up the darkness in the world!

We are surrounded by modern magi: people who fancy themselves as spiritual but are dead. They are lost! What might happen should a *star* appear to them? You and I, we're the stars God has prepared and sent, shining stars in the universe holding out the Word of life! God calls us to go into His creation, to bring light to the dark world through our lives and words ... lived and spoken consistently with His will.

Then ... by the Holy Spirit's power they too will see the clues, put them together, and come in from the darkness joining us as witnesses to the Light of the World who saves all who believe. One day, we'll enter the Kingdom of God, (Revelation 21:23-24) *"The city (which has) no need of sun or moon to shine on it, for the glory of God gives it light, and its lamp is the Lamb. By its light will the nations walk, and the kings of the earth will bring their glory into it"* living in the eternal presence of our King and God, Jesus Christ.

Grace be with you all, who love our Lord Jesus Christ. Amen.

James Kent