

Sermon Text: Ephesians 3:2-12 (NKJV)

² *If indeed you have heard of the dispensation of the grace of God which was given to me for you, ³ how that by revelation He made known to me the mystery (as I have briefly written already, ⁴ by which, when you read, you may understand my knowledge in the mystery of Christ), ⁵ which in other ages was not made known to the sons of men, as it has now been revealed by the Spirit to His holy apostles and prophets: ⁶ that the Gentiles should be fellow heirs, of the same body, and partakers of His promise in Christ through the gospel, ⁷ of which I became a minister according to the gift of the grace of God given to me by the effective working of His power. ⁸ To me, who am less than the least of all the saints, this grace was given, that I should preach among the Gentiles the unsearchable riches of Christ, ⁹ and to make all see what is the fellowship of the mystery, which from the beginning of the ages has been hidden in God who created all things through Jesus Christ; ¹⁰ to the intent that now the manifold wisdom of God might be made known by the church to the principalities and powers in the heavenly places, ¹¹ according to the eternal purpose which He accomplished in Christ Jesus our Lord, ¹² in whom we have boldness and access with confidence through faith in Him.*

Sermon Theme: As Gentiles We Rejoice in the Manifestation of Jesus also Being our Savior.

In the name of the Christ Child, who is the Savior of all the world, dear fellow redeemed;

The Christian observance of Epiphany is especially meaningful to us as Gentiles. This season of the church year is so very special to us, because on Epiphany Sunday we call to mind the miraculous event of God's use of a special star to announce to certain Gentile wise men from the east the birth of Jesus and to lead them to Bethlehem where the baby Jesus was to be found. Some have referred to the commemoration of this event as the Gentile Christmas. Why is that? It is because the worshipful visit of the baby Jesus by these distant travelers represents the first of many Gentiles in the New Testament age who beheld in faith the child born of Mary as the Son of God and Savior of all mankind.

The manifestation or revealing of Jesus as the Savior also of the Gentiles should be looked upon as something truly remarkable and important that gives us reason to rejoice with joy. From the Old Testament days of Abraham down through the many centuries of time up to the early beginnings of the Christian Church it was the Jews and not the Gentiles who were highly honored and blessed in the kingdom of God.

- It was the Jews who were singled out from the rest of the world to be the chosen people of God.
- It was with the Jews that God made a special covenant to bless them above all others.

- It was to the Jews that God made known His divine revelations of the Law and the Gospel, and appointed them to serve as spokesmen of His Word to the rest of the world.
- It was from the Jews that Jesus was to come.
- And it was also to them that Jesus was promised to be sent in order to carry on His ministry.
- Also, in the early days of the Christian church the Gospel of Christ was brought first to the Jews with the result that the church was primarily made up of Jewish Christians.

But then as time progressed, Gentiles were added to the Church. And the number of them increased to the extent that there were more Gentile Christians than Jewish Christians. And now, at the present time it is not very common to hear of Jewish Christians, with the exception of those who are called Messianic Christians.

Do we as Gentiles consider it remarkable that the Gospel has been made known to us and that through the gift of faith in Jesus we have been made a part of God's kingdom and are made full partakers of the many wonderful blessings won for us through Jesus' redemptive work? For centuries now, many Gentiles through out the world have heard the good news that by the grace of God in Christ Jesus God welcomes us into His kingdom with all its many privileges and blessings.

That this wonderful happening would take place was not commonly known prior to this era. Paul reveals in our text, "the mystery of Christ, which in other ages was not made known to the sons of men, as it has now been revealed by the Spirit to His holy apostles and prophets: that the Gentiles should be fellow heirs, of the same body, and partakers of His promise in Christ through the gospel." (3:4b-6) Paul speaks of the knowledge that through faith in Jesus Christ Gentiles are to be included in God's kingdom and be partakers of all His many gracious promises and blessings as being a mystery. It was a mystery in the sense that in the Old Testament times these truths were generally hidden, being unknown to many Jews and Gentiles.

While this was a mystery to many, God had given some indication of it in Old Testament times through various prophecies. Recently, we were reminded that through the promised seed or descendant of Abraham, that is Jesus Christ, all the nations of the world shall be blessed. (Gen. 22:18) There were also other prophecies where God made known this blessed truth. In our Old Testament reading in Isaiah, it was prophesied that the Light of the world would come and that nations would come to that Light and be blessed by it. We know this Light as being Jesus the promised Christ who through the Gospel enlightens all people with the knowledge of their salvation through Him.

Even though these glorious prophecies were made known and recorded in Old Testament Scripture, still they were not completely understood by many of the Jews and for the most part they were unknown to the Gentile world.

This does not mean, however, that prior to the New Testament times there weren't any Gentile believers. We read of people like Ruth the Moabitess, Rahab the Canaanite, and

Naaman the Syrian who learned of the Savior through the Jews and embraced Him by faith. The wise men from the east had also learned of Jesus and believed in Him. And there were also other Gentiles who came to faith, but they were a small minority.

Of those Old Testament Gentiles who believed not all were welcomed into full partnership in the kingdom of God with all its rights and privileges. Only those who were willing to submit to all the covenant laws of Israel could possess such rights and privileges. These were called proselytes of righteousness. They could not participate in all the religious observances in the temple, being restricted to the Gentile court in the house of God. And Jews could not come into social contact with them without becoming ceremonially unclean.

According to God's plan, which He had determined in eternity before the creation of the world, it was not His intent to limit membership in His kingdom with all its privileges to those who submitted to His Old Covenant laws through out the history of the world or to have the vast population of Gentiles remain in spiritual darkness. According to His eternal plan He would unite believing Jews and believing Gentiles into one body, the Holy Christian Church, with both receiving the same privileges and blessings of Christ, freely and equally. When we say freely, this means we as Gentiles would not have to submit to the Old Covenant laws, like the observance of circumcision and Jewish festivals, for we are received as full partners in God's kingdom by grace through faith in Jesus Christ. May God preserve us from those religious beliefs of today which would bring us under the yoke of the law by telling us our salvation is partially dependent upon our obedience to religious laws.

The gracious plan of God in regard to Gentile nations began to be realized in the New Testament age. What was once a hidden mystery to many would become widely known through out the world. The apostle Paul was called upon by God to have a major role in all of this. Paul first learned of it at his conversion to Christianity. On that occasion the Lord Jesus said to Paul, "I have appeared to you for this purpose, to make you a minister and a witness both of the things which you have seen and of the things which I will yet reveal to you. 'I will deliver you from the Jewish people, as well as from the Gentiles, to whom I now send you, 'to open their eyes, in order to turn them from darkness to light, and from the power of Satan to God, that they may receive forgiveness of sins and an inheritance among those who are sanctified by faith in Me.'" (Acts 26:16b-18) Through this revelation Paul not only learned of the mystery concerning Gentiles coming into God's kingdom with full rights as sons of God through God's grace, but he also was chosen to serve as an instrument of God to lead Gentiles to Christ. He was called to be an apostle to the Gentiles. In the book of Acts, we read of Paul's missionary journeys, traveling far and wide through out different regions of the world, proclaiming the Gospel to Gentiles.

We see from the words of our text how important it was and still is to have the Gospel made known to Gentiles. As Paul testifies, he was to "preach among the Gentiles the unsearchable riches of Christ." The great spiritual riches of Christ, which are intended for all mankind, are a hidden treasure, that is unsearchable. "They defy search and discovery. 'There

are no footprints leading to them which man may follow in order to find them.” We cannot look into the deep recesses of our mind and discover the wonderful blessings God has in store for those who are united together with Him in Christ nor can we unearth this hidden treasure by looking about ourselves in nature, for it is to be found alone in the inspired writings of the apostles and the prophets.

Because of the inspired testimony of the apostles and the prophets, we Gentiles have been blessed with a knowledge of, faith in and possession of the riches of Christ which are the fullness of salvation and all the spiritual, heavenly blessings that have been won for us by Jesus Christ.

Yes, we Gentiles like the Jews in Old Testament times have been greatly blessed of God through the Gospel of Christ. But then, what has been the number of Gentiles who have believed in and fully appreciated that Gospel? Have there not been many who have treated the saving Word of God like many Old Testament Jews who were spiritually apathetic and complacent or who either compromised or completely abandoned God’s Word or who rebelled against God’s precepts of life? Certainly, none of us want to fall into the state of spiritual sluggishness or apostasy wherein God would declare His judgment against us saying, take the Gospel away from them and give it to others who will gladly hear and keep it. From this preserve us dear heavenly Father.

When we give full consideration to the great treasures we have in Christ Jesus and then also consider what life would be like without them, we recognize how richly blessed we have been. Gentile Christians in Ephesus were reminded by Paul what their situation in life was like before they learned about their Savior, and then he calls to mind what they now possessed in Christ. He writes, “Therefore remember that you, once Gentiles in the flesh... were without Christ, being aliens from the commonwealth of Israel and strangers from the covenants of promise, having no hope and without God in the world. But now in Christ Jesus you who once were far off have been brought near by the blood of Christ... Now, therefore, you are no longer strangers and foreigners, but fellow citizens with the saints and members of the household of God.” (Eph. 2:11-13,19) May these Bible verses that tell what life would be like without Christ and what life is like with Christ aid in our rejoicing in what we possess as Christians.

As we commemorate the wise men’s pilgrimage to the baby Jesus, may we rejoice that God made it possible for us and Gentiles all over the world to know Jesus by faith and through Him be blessed with priceless, eternal blessings. May God help us to guard, keep, and treasure the precious truths of the Gospel. And may our chief mission in life always be the work of sharing the Gospel of Christ with others, both Jew and Gentile alike for Jesus’ sake. Amen.