



DAILY FAITH PRACTICES

The Epiphany of Our Lord (A,B,C) – Ephesians 3:1-12

Focus: *The Mystery of Faith*

word of life

“...the Gentiles have become fellow heirs, members of the same body, and sharers in the promise in Jesus Christ through the gospel.” Ephesians 3:6 (NRSV)

Read Ephesians 3:1-12

The theme of the letter to the church in Ephesus, a community in Asia Minor, centers on the mission to the Gentiles. The author (Paul or a companion or follower in the tradition of Paul) describes his mission as one of a “prisoner for Christ Jesus for the sake of you Gentiles.” (Ephesians 3:1 NRSV) The word “prisoner” might best be translated “in bonds.” Paul’s physical imprisonment has purpose and meaning. He is imprisoned for the spread of the Gospel to the Gentiles – a task to which he is commissioned by God and to which he is bound.

1. *How does Paul’s imprisonment serve a purpose?*
2. *To what mission are we as Christians bound and commissioned?*
3. *How do we understand our calling as followers of Christ?*

Note the use of the words “mystery” and “revelation” in the passage for today. (See Ephesians 3:3-5.) Paul’s commission to spread the gospel to the Gentiles is given to him through the revelation of the mystery of God. We see other places in the New Testament where the word “mystery” is used. Jesus, for example, used the word to explain to his disciples the meaning and purpose of the parable of the sower: “to you has been given the secret (mystery) of the kingdom of God.” (Mark 4:11 NRSV) Mystery implies an inner knowledge; it requires revelation in order to be understood.

4. *What are some examples of mysteries?*
5. *How important is the gift of revelation in order to understand mysteries?*

Paul’s calling to spread the gospel is grounded in the revelation given to him by the Spirit. He is given grace to understand the mystery that was hidden to previous generations. In verse 6 the author defines the central mystery of the gospel: “that is, the Gentiles have become fellow heirs, members of the same body, and sharers in the promise in Jesus Christ through the gospel.” Ephesians 3:6 (NRSV)

As 21st century readers, we might miss the radical nature of this revelation. The early church wrestled mightily with the inclusion of the Gentiles. It was a mystery that Gentiles and Jews would be gathered together as one body – the body of Christ. God’s grace makes the mystery known and revealed. It is part of God’s plan for humanity. Paul writes: “this grace was given to me to bring to the Gentiles the news of the boundless riches of Christ.” (Ephesians 3:8 NRSV)

The church serves as the embodiment of this mystery: “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.” (Ephesians 3:10 NRSV) This good news has cosmic implications. The insight that God’s plan of grace is to be inclusive of all, Jew and Gentile, impacts the whole world.

6. *How would we articulate this mystery today?*

word among us

Everyone loves a good mystery! The drama, the plot, the suspense, the unexpected resolution – all is designed to draw the reader into the story. A good mystery does just that; it invites, engages, and encourages the reader to turn the page to see what will happen next. The plot thickens with each new revelation, until the final outcome is revealed.

1. *What do you like or dislike about a mystery?*

We often think of a mystery as something unfathomable, something we can't explain, something beyond human comprehension. Even relationships are sometimes described as a mystery. Perhaps you've overheard someone say of a couple, "It's a mystery to me what they see in each other!"

The writer of the letter to the church in Ephesus was caught up in a mystery – a mystery that gave Paul his mission and purpose. The mystery was hidden to previous generations (Ephesians 3:5), but in Christ it is revealed and made known. For the apostle Paul, the great mystery of the faith is simply this: "...the Gentiles have become fellow heirs, members of the same body, and sharers in the promise in Jesus Christ through the gospel." (Ephesians 3:6 NRSV)

2. *Why do you think this is a mystery?*
3. *How was this so clear to Paul?*

One can almost hear someone describe the early church of Jewish and Gentile Christians with the words: "It's a mystery to me how they stay together." But that's what God has in mind. Diverse peoples with little in common, except a common baptism and a common Lord, being brought together as fellow heirs – brothers and sisters – members of the same body. It's a mystery that is still being revealed today as barriers are overcome, walls of division are torn down, hardness of heart melts into a generous spirit, alienation is transformed into inclusion, and strangers are made brothers and sisters "... so that through the church the wisdom of God in its rich variety might now be made known..." (Ephesians 3:10 NRSV) Thanks be to God for this mystery!

4. *What is still a mystery to you about God's ways?*

faith practice in daily life

Live among God's faithful people

Isn't the diversity among God's people amazing? People of different races and backgrounds come together as one body, brothers and sisters in Christ. It's a mystery how it can be; but by the grace of God, it is so. It is through the church that the mystery of God's all-encompassing inclusion is revealed, experienced, and lived out. As we live among God's faithful people, we grow in our understanding of God's grace that includes all as members of one body – the church, the body of Christ.

5. *In what ways does your congregation reflect the rich variety of God's people?*
6. *In what ways can your congregation live out the mystery of God's inclusion of all?*

Prayer

Gracious God, we give you thanks for your loving grace that includes us all. We thank you for the Church, the body of Christ. May our congregation and our lives reflect the rich diversity of your people, that we might proclaim the great mystery of your love for all; in Christ's name we pray. Amen

last word

Look for ways to invite and include others in the activities of your congregation this week.