

THE COLLECT

O GOD, who by the leading of a star didst manifest thy only-begotten Son to the Gentiles: Mercifully grant, that we, which know thee now by faith, may after this life have the fruition of thy glorious Godhead; through Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen.

Epiphany means to appear, become manifest - we might think of it as getting a sudden insight. Paul had that experience on his way to Damascus - and in his letter to the Ephesians he's telling them of another Epiphany.

This one has unveiled a mystery. Now, I like reading mystery novels - often murder mysteries. Paul's mystery however, although created by the murder of Jesus, is a mystery about life, eternal life.

His insight, a revelation given to him by the spirit, is that God's grace, eternal life for all who believe, brought about through Jesus' incarnation, death and resurrection is not only for his chosen people Israel, but is for all peoples. It's been alluded to in ancient times - Isaiah foretells

I will make you a light for the Gentiles, that my salvation may reach to the ends of the earth.¹

And we heard in our Gospel reading Jesus saying "*I have other sheep that are not of this sheep pen. I must bring them also. They too will listen to my voice, and there shall be one flock and one shepherd.*"

One flock and one shepherd. Unity in Christ - this is the real mystery. The word mystery is used quite a few times in the New Testament, and we Christians are familiar with holding contrasting concepts together as a mystery - think of the human and divine nature of Christ, the goodness of creation yet presence of evil, Almighty God as judge and yet also mercy We don't always want the mystery simplified, we're content to faithfully trust that the truth of God is beyond human understanding.

And yet, Paul wants us to understand clearly this key mystery of the equality of Jew and Gentile in Christ.

We are heirs together with Israel, members together of one body, and sharers together in the promise in Christ Jesus.

Through the church, the mystery can be told to everyone. The Church, the new body of unity of people and Christ, a previously unimaginable union of two groups with each other and with Christ. It reminds me of the Trinity - a dance in and between three as they become one.

The magi came from afar to worship the baby in whom they glimpsed great things, following a star of light. We see light in Jesus and follow it to him, but mysteriously, we can also become light for others to find Christ. A light for Jew and Gentile, for everyone we meet, to come into this mystery, of being heirs together and sharers of salvation and promise in Christ.

Jesus laid down his life to take it up again - and his prayer at supper the night before he died included this plea for unity

¹ Is 49:6

...that they may all be one. As you, Father, are in me and I am in you, may they also be in us, so that the world may believe that you have sent me.²

Complete union of Father and Son, and union of believers where all divisions, no matter how ancient, fall away. What an epiphany gift that is for each of us.

Some people frown on regifting presents, but this gift is given in such abundance that we can receive it and share out it with everyone. Like the bread at the miracle of loaves, this gift expands to meet the need.

Our role as the church, as members of the one body and heirs together, is to receive our gift with great joy and to gift it on to everyone, not just the in crowd, but to everyone we meet, as we join in God's great plan of complete union for this broken, divided world we now see. Then it will really be a Happy New Year.

Ephesians 3.1-12

For this reason I, Paul, the prisoner of Christ Jesus for the sake of you Gentiles—

Surely you have 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 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. 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.

John 10: 14-18

"I am the good shepherd; I know my sheep and my sheep know me— just as the Father knows me and I know the Father—and I lay down my life for the sheep. I have other sheep that are not of this sheep pen. I must bring them also. They too will listen to my voice, and there shall be one flock and one shepherd. The reason my Father loves me is that I lay down my life—only to take it up again. No one takes it from me, but I lay it down of my own accord. I have authority to lay it down and authority to take it up again. This command I received from my Father."

² Jn 17:21