

Mysterious Epiphany

- ✦ now revealed (vv.2-6)
- ✦ by the gift of God's grace (vv.7-9)
- ✦ for freedom and confidence (vv.10-12)

In the brilliant Name of God's shining Son "Jesus," dear children of the light:

Last night going out for the mail I had to wonder whether all my neighbors knew January 6th is Epiphany. Up and down the street houses were lit in brilliant colors that for a few days since Christmas had been dark. Then in the early light of this morning, there was just one flickering street light that can't decide whether to be on or off. How long does the light last when the power flows no more?

Have you lost your awe? Does the wonder of the Christ Child get put away with the decorations? It's one of the bright blessings of Epiphany, the Christmas of the Gentiles, that we get to follow the Wise Men today. In the intervening darkness it's as if we too have come to Jerusalem, but the star disappeared. With Wise Men we search the Scriptures. Once again the star appears. It dazzles our eyes with God's grace and goodness as we follow it's light, leading onward, beaming bright. Here we bring our hearts as the first gift, our praises, our prayers, our offerings with theirs, for **Mysterious Epiphany** is...

✦ now revealed (vv.2-6)

Did you notice the bright sunshine late yesterday afternoon? Imagine if we had just experienced two weeks of total darkness. Even the Arctic Circle gets some glimmer of cold light. But what if there were none? Then comes the light, but you still can't enjoy it. Why not? Because you're blind. And if you were born that way, you would have no concept of what it means to see.

This is the danger of spiritual blindness. A physically non-sighted person might wear dark glasses, walk with a blind man's stick and seeing eye dog. But the spiritually blind don't know that they are. If you and I were stuck in our spiritual blindness, it would not matter how brightly shines the sun!

For all the awe and wonder of Christmas, the Bible story reeks with some really despicable characters. It's hard to stand the stench of Herod's depravity and vice. Trying to trick the Wise Men so he could have Jesus killed! Outwitted by them, so Herod slaughters the baby boys in Bethlehem! Do you know medical scientists still debate how many dreadful diseases Herod suffered as he died?

But there was another spiritually blind man who stumbled onto the scene about forty years later. He heard that Jesus had been crucified and must have thought, "Good riddance!" And when a Christian named Stephen defended Jesus' teachings, the man's blindness burst into hatred and strong support for those who stoned Stephen to death. What a lesson in reality when Jesus met the man on a distant highway and struck him blind physically! Suddenly Saul could sense how truly blind he was. Not to be destroyed by God's Son right then and there was amazing. To be called as Paul the missionary to Gentiles was absolutely a mountain of grace piled high with blessings. Suffering for Christ was an honor.

See the light of his letter to non-Jews? *"Surely you have heard of the administration of God's grace given to me for you, ³namely, that the mystery was made known to me by revelation (as I have already written briefly). ⁴When you read this, you will be able to understand my insight into the mystery of Christ. ⁵This mystery was not made known to people in past generations as it has now been revealed by the Spirit to his holy apostles and prophets. ⁶This mystery is that in Christ Jesus the Gentiles are fellow heirs, members of the same body, and people who also share in the promise through the gospel."* (EHV)

✠ by the gift of God's grace (vv.7-9)

For us to be able to worship the God of the Jews is an absolute miracle. The Magi could see it when the star appeared again. *"They rejoiced with overwhelming joy."* (EHV)¹ Jews hated Gentiles too much to eat with them. They would not enter a Gentile home. Not long ago in a conversation with a nice Jewish woman, it all turned sour as soon as we said we were going to Bethlehem. Her look told the whole story. And Saul had been right there too in hatred of all non-Jews until the lights went on, not just around him, but deep in his soul. **Mysterious Epiphany** light shone into him **by the gift of God's grace**.

Have you lost the wonder and awe of **God's grace** to you? Maybe you feel you're a pretty good person. Maybe it makes you uncomfortable when Pastor seems to be talking right to you. Maybe it doesn't matter that he preached this sermon first to himself. Other people's sins you can see. If you listen to a sermon, it's all about other people who really should hear this. My friend, you can't see it, but you're spiritually blind. So dangerous. No earthly light can pierce what must be everybody else's problem.

So it was for a young man named Justin. His wealthy parents provided an awesome education. With money to travel and a brilliant mind, he seemed to have everything. But one day when Justin was thirty, he was walking along the shore thinking, *"Nothing makes sense! Everything is nonsense. I've seen it all—nothing makes sense!"* Every philosophy he studied came up empty. In his depression it felt like darkness crushing him. Then one day by the ocean an old man said something to him. Ready? The old man met Justin and told him: "Jesus Christ is Lord." Justin's life never the same. The lights were on!

So simple, yet so profound – Paul breaks out in praise of **God's grace**: *"I became a servant of this gospel, in keeping with the gift of God's grace that was given to me by the working of his power. ⁸To me—even though I am the very least of all the saints—was given this grace: to preach to the Gentiles the unsearchable riches of Christ ⁹and to enlighten everyone about the administration of this mystery. In past ages this mystery remained hidden in God, who created all things."*

✠ for freedom and confidence (vv.10-12)

Mysterious Epiphany is no longer hidden. God's plan progresses from Paul and the apostles, now through you and me. *"He did this so that, through the church, the multifaceted wisdom of God in the heavenly places might now be made known to the rulers and authorities. ¹¹This was done according to the eternal purpose that he accomplished in Christ Jesus our Lord. ¹²In him we can freely approach God with confidence through faith in him."* *"Angels long to look into these things!"* (1 Peter 1:12) And Christ still uses His Church to give people **confidence** to pray. You can't come without Christ. God only welcomes forgiven sinners. Trust His full, free, forgiving grace **for freedom and confidence**.

That's what happened to Justin from Palestine. After the old man by the sea shared the gospel, Justin immediately began telling everyone that Christ can satisfy both mind and heart. He debated and defended the gospel for many years all the way to Rome. Then a cynic named Crescentius looked so bad after debating Justin that he reported Justin to the authorities as an atheist who refused the gods of Rome. Justin and several others were condemned, flogged, and beheaded. Justin Martyr – **freedom, confidence**.²

In **Mysterious Epiphany – now revealed, by the gift of God's grace**, how free and confident are you? When you hear Christ's **church** at New Life needs a Treasurer and a fourth Elder, do you joyfully, freely, confidently storm the gates of heaven in prayer? When you hear the Nominating Committee is being met with few men willing to say, "Yes" even to nomination, can you pray for God to enlighten the hearts and minds of brothers who have these skills and just lack the heart? Some are serving in **Epiphany** light elsewhere. But God gives the gifts we need. Lord Christ, let your star appear again! Amen.

¹ EHV – Scriptures from the *Holy Bible – Evangelical Heritage Version*. The Wartburg Project, 2017. NPH: 800-662-6022.

² Morgan, Robert J. *On This Day*. © 1997. (Thomas Nelson, Inc.) DailyReader © 1999-2001 – Wheeler, Rairdin. Laridian. For *The Preacher's Apprentice (TPA)* sermon study or copies: m.cordes@comast.net . New Life Evangelical Lutheran Church You can also call: 651-484-1169. Hear the sermon at www.wels.us/newlife . 180 County Rd F - Shoreview, MN 55126