Epiphany Ephesians 3:2-12
January 3, 2021 80-83-79/90-72

Merry Christmas, All You Gentiles!
I. God's grace is also for you.
II. God's grace is found in Jesus.
III. God's grace is ours to share with others.

Dear Christian friends,

Today give us the opportunity to clear up something that **might seem to be** TRIVIAL to some people. The wisemen didn't show up at the stable **with the shepherds**. The wisemen didn't find the baby Jesus ***"wrapped in swaddling clothes and lying in a manger."*** The wisemen didn't come FOR AT LEAST two months – **if not** a whole year after Jesus was born. By then – **as Matthew told** us in the gospel reading – Joseph, Mary and Jesus were living in a ***"house"*** in Bethlehem.

All that may seem trivial – "SO WHAT! BIG DEAL!" But there is nothing trivial about Epiphany. Epiphany has been called "the **Gentiles'** Christmas" because it emphasizes that Jesus was born to be the SAVIOR OF ALL people. As far as I know ALL OF US are Gentiles. **Remember** that a Gentile is anyone who is **not Jewish**. On this "**Gentiles' Christmas"** God here says, "MERRY CHRISTMAS, ALL YOU GENTILES!" **Merry Christmas** because 1)**God's grace** is also for Gentiles, 2)**God's grace** is found in Jesus and 3)**God's grace** is ours to share with others.

I. God's grace is also for Gentiles.

These verses deal with a truth that the **early church** had a HARD TIME ACCEPTING - **the truth** that God's grace is also for Gentiles. We today have a HARD TIME UNDERSTANDING **how much** the **Jews back then** despised Gentiles. Paul **in his days** as a Pharisee would have looked down his nose at ***"tax collectors, prostitutes and sinners"*** – but Gentiles – they WEREN'T EVEN PEOPLE! They were dogs!

Remember that God had **given His OT people** the CEREMONIAL law – **including** laws governing what they could eat – how they were to dress, etc. **With those laws** God was teaching the Jews that He was God of their WHOLE LIFE and that AS GOD'S CHOSEN PEOPLE they were different from their **heathen, Gentile** neighbors. That difference was to SHOW UP yes in their personal morals – in the language they used – in their priorities in life – EVEN IN the **food** they ate and **the clothes** they wore. They were GOD'S people and that was TO SHOW in their lives.

Unfortunately many Jews took being different to mean that they were BETTER than their Gentile neighbors. They forgot that it was GOD'S GRACE that had chosen them to be **God's people** – that **God's grace** had made them different. So they despised Gentiles. **Many** early Jewish Christians had a HARD TIME ACCEPTING Gentiles **as** EQUALLY LOVED by God. It took a vision from heaven to get Peter to visit the **Gentile Cornelius**.

MERRY CHRISTMAS, all your Gentiles! God's grace is ALSO FOR US! We may not fully appreciate that **Jew-Gentile relationship** but do we fully appreciate THE GRACE that God has shown **us**? **Grace** is God's undeserved love. That's UNDESERVED love. God didn't OWE us anything – certainly not His **love** – a **Savior** – **eternal life** in heaven.

Let's be honest here. BEFORE GOD intervened in our lives we were ***"dead in sin."*** With David we must confess, ***"Surely I have been a sinner from birth, sinful from the time my mother conceived me."*** Before God made us Christians we had only a SINFUL NATURE and ***"nothing good lives in that sinful nature."*** Paul tells us that ***"the sinful mind is hostile to God"*** (sees God as the enemy) – ***"it does not submit to God's law, nor can it do so. Those controlled by the sinful nature cannot please God."*** Everything about us – everything we did – **said** – thought – was REVOLTING in God's

sight. Everything about us CALLED FOR GOD to **turn away** from us in righteous anger and **damn us** to hell's eternal punishment.

Instead God sends us **to Bethlehem** and says, "MERRY CHRISTMAS, all your Gentiles!" WHAT AN EPIPHANY – what a REVELATION! ***"This mystery is that in Christ Jesus the Gentiles are fellow heirs*** (with the Jews)***, members of the same body, and people who also share in the promise through the gospel."***

As we look at that **Jew-Gentile** prejudice and **hatred** – let's also look at our **own hearts** and **lives**. Let's never forget that IT'S GOD'S GRACE that has made us His people. Let's never restrict **God's grace** to ONLY THOSE who measure up to **our standards**. WE never measured up to GOD'S **standards** – and yet God showed us **His grace**. If God CAN SHOW GRACE to people like you and me that's more proof that **His grace** is FOR EVERYONE.

II. God's grace is found in Jesus.

That must have been QUITE THE SCENE when the **wisemen arrived** at Joseph and Mary's door. Bethlehem was basically a SMALL, SLEEPY farm town. **Here come** these rich – important – well-educated **foreigners** – and WHAT did they do? They got down on their **hands and knees** before the child Jesus ***"and worshipped Him."*** These men were publicly confessing that they were BUT DUST and ashes compared to this little Child. They were **publicly confessing** that this Child was THEIR GOD – that they were counting on this Child to save them from their sins and bring them to **eternal life** in heaven. They LOOKED PRETTY STUPID doing that – but they didn't let that STOP them. These **Gentile wisemen** understood that God's GRACE IS FOUND **in Jesus**.

Several times here Paul uses the word ***"mystery"*** with God's grace. ***"The mystery was made known to me by revelation - this mystery was not made known to people in past generations as it has now been revealed - this mystery is that in Christ Jesus the Gentiles …share in the promise through the gospel."*** That mystery is ***"the eternal purpose that (God) accomplished in Christ Jesus our Lord."***

The gospel of GOD'S GRACE is a ***"mystery."*** In other words no one COULD FIGURE IT OUT **on their own**. God must reveal this ***"mystery"*** for us to know and believe it. In 1 Corinthians Paul wrote, ***"For the message of the cross is foolishness to those who are perishing, but to us who are being saved it is the power of God. We preach Christ crucified: a stumbling block to Jews and foolishness to Gentiles, but to those whom God has called, both Jews and Greeks, Christ the power of God and the wisdom of God."*** In the next chapter Paul went on, ***"What no eye has seen, what no ear has heard, and what no human mind has conceived — the things God has prepared for those who love Him — these are the things God has revealed to us by His Spirit."***

In the gospel God ***"reveals the mystery"*** that His grace is found in Jesus. **In the gospel** God reveals exactly WHO **Mary's Child** is. He is ***"Immanuel – God with us."*** Today we join the wisemen in ***"bowing down and worshiping the Child"*** Jesus AS OUR GOD. Jesus is our Creator born our brother – the eternal Son of God IN THE FLESH. **What** a mystery – what an epiphany – what a REVELATION!

And what a mission! Jesus came to ***"accomplish God's eternal purpose."*** Behold THE GRACE of God! BEFORE God had even created this world He knew all about **us** and **our sins**. And ALREADY BACK THEN God planned to save us sinners. What a plan God **came up** with! **A plan** in which God Himself TAKES CARE of everything for us. God's plan called for Christmas – for the Son of God being born ONE of us to take the place of **all** of us under God's law. **As our substitute** Jesus would live that holy, sinless life we owed God. Jesus would perfectly obey all the commandments His whole life through and IN GRACE Jesus gives us all the credit for His perfect life.

Then came those days WE CALL Good Friday and Easter morning. The sinless Son of God TAKES THE BLAME for the sins of the whole world and is punished in our place. The ***"beloved Son"*** of God is ***"forsaken"*** by His Father that we might be forgiven. Jesus dies and PERSONALLY PAYS ***"the wages"*** of our sins in full. Jesus rise triumphant over death and the grave. Jesus promises us that ***"Because He lives, we shall live also."***

"MERRY CHRISTMAS, all you Gentiles!" Jesus did all this for you and me – FOR ALL people. Paul calls this ***"the unsearchable riches of Christ - the multifaceted wisdom of God."*** Look AT ALL that God's grace gives us in Jesus. Forgiveness full and free for all our sins. Peace with God – a whole new relationship with God. God's presence and power in our daily lives. The privilege of prayer. Eternal life in heaven the minute we die. The glorious resurrection of our bodies on the Last Day. The ***"new heavens and new earth."*** God as ***"our Father in heaven."*** Jesus as our ***"Good Shepherd."*** The Holy Spirit as our ***"Counselor and Comforter."*** God's Word – Holy Baptism – Holy Communion. **How** can we put a PRICE TAG on all those blessings?

III. God's grace is ours to share with other people.

"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. To 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."

God not only SHOWERS His **grace** on us – God calls on **each one** of us TO SHARE His grace with others. Think of WHERE YOU'D BE if you didn't know or **have** God's grace in Jesus. **If** you DIDN'T HAVE Jesus where would you find your **strength** – **peace** – hope – comfort? Think now of people YOU KNOW who don't know about Jesus – who have fallen away from Jesus – who have traded away God's grace for the **petty treasures** of this life. **How** can you not talk to them about Jesus – not invite them to church with you – NOT SHOW THEM the difference **Jesus** and **His grace** make in our lives?

God has also established the **public ministry** of His Word – calling people to serve as pastors, teachers, missionaries. ***"Pray the Lord of the harvest"*** to send forth more workers in His harvest fields! **Pray** that God give them the **strength** – **health** – **dedication** – **patience** they need in their labors. **Pray** that they ever realize what a SPECIAL PRIVILEGE – what a ***"gift of God's grace"*** – it is to be a called servant of the gospel. **Pray** that through the sharing of the gospel MANY more – JEWS and GENTILES – will hear God say, "MERRY CHRISTMAS, all you people!" Amen.

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