

“Mystery Treasure” – Pr Jim Sprengle, Epiphany, January 3, 2021

- I. **Ephesians 3:8-9** – ⁸To me, though I am the very least of all the saints, this grace was given, to preach to the Gentiles the unsearchable riches of Christ, ⁹and to bring to light for everyone what is the plan of the mystery hidden for ages in God
- II. **I'm not sure why I love Epiphany so much.**
 - a. To most people, January 6 is just another day on the calendar... not a special day to celebrate or praise God for.
 - b. I guess it's special to me because of the Wise Men, the Christ Child, and especially the mystery revealed to these outsiders... it's kind of “mission” celebration with a focus on all nations.
 - c. Who were these Magi outsiders anyway?
 - i. When the Bible says they were from the East, one possibility is from the area of ancient Babylon.
 1. Almost 600 years before Jesus was born, the Jewish people were conquered and became exiles in Babylon
 2. The Book of Daniel has the story of the exile to Babylon, and perhaps this is where these Magi heard the story of a Savior or Messiah that would be born in the future
 - ii. We also know that they arrived a period of time after Jesus was born, rather than the Nativity sets that show them at His birth.
 1. Matthew writes that the Magi went into “the house,” so Mary and Joseph were able to find lodging by that point.
 2. Also, if the Wise Men did indeed come from Babylon, that is 800 miles or many weeks of travel
 - iii. The Bible says they followed a star, which has been the discussion of many researchers... but it says the star was moving and stopped over the home of Jesus – which seems to mean something more than just an alignment of the stars or planets, but a miracle for them
 - iv. Last, we know that they brought special gifts and worshiped Jesus
 1. Frankincense was the incense burned in the temple, Myrrh was not only an expensive perfume, but often used in burials, and of course, gold was fit for a king
 2. In worshiping the baby Jesus, the Magi gave a picture of people outside the Jewish faith and heritage coming to Jesus
- III. **To the Jews, their family line is everything.**
 - a. The people of God traced their heritage back to Abraham, Isaac, Jacob, Moses and King David – the whole Old Testament in the Bible
 - b. They had a rich heritage and were the people God promised to rescue through a Savior in their line

- c. Of course, they assumed that everything they had been doing for thousands of years would remain the same when their Savior arrived... the worship in the temple and keeping all the special laws, and their Messiah would be the great King and Leader of the world
- d. The big surprise came later when the Jewish way of life would be changed to reflect all different cultures that didn't follow the Old Testament rules and laws...
 - i. These outsiders didn't get circumcised as babies, they didn't eat Kosher food, they didn't worship at the temple or celebrate the big festivals like Passover... they didn't know much of anything about the long history and family line of the Jews
 - ii. The Jews had a name for these outsiders... they were the goyim (goy-eem).
- e. For the Jews, the Savior of the world would come to bring them glory and redemption... and perhaps some of the goyim would join in as they also followed all the rules and laws...

IV. **St. Paul also gives us a picture of outsiders coming to Jesus.**

- a. Approximately 20-30 years after Jesus had risen from the dead and ascended to heaven, Paul traveled throughout the Mediterranean sharing the Gospel on multiple mission trips
- b. St. Paul's letters make up much of the New Testament in our bibles, including the one he wrote to the Ephesians we read today.
- c. Paul was the Apostle who reached out to the Gentiles more than anyone else, and even considered himself the Apostle to the Gentiles (Romans 11:13, Galatians 1:15-16)
 - i. Now Paul didn't use the Jewish word, goyim... he used the Greek word for Gentiles... *ethne* (ethnay – or where we get the word, ethnic)
- d. The big trouble for Paul came as the varied backgrounds, languages and false religions of the *ethne* were so different from the traditions of the Jewish people.
 - i. The Jews always wanted to do what they were used to... while the Gentiles had their own traditions
- e. And yet, God wanted the blending, He wanted the connection between Jews and Gentiles so all could be saved by Jesus.

V. **The mystery and the treasure are the same thing...**

- a. Both the mystery AND the treasure are Jesus Christ.
- b. Ephesians says that the great mystery that was hidden came to light.
 - i. The light of the Gospel that shines on all people – the Good News of our salvation is that Jesus Christ was born, died to pay for our sins, and was raised again to defeat death!
 - ii. That light "enlightens the Gentiles" or the *ethne* too...
 - iii. The Christ, the Messiah, was a gift for everyone.

- c. The treasure is also Christ, because nothing in all creation is worth more than Jesus in our lives.
 - i. As we were brought to faith by the power of the Holy Spirit – God gave us the greatest treasure of all – His grace.
 - ii. Not one of us deserved this treasure – but He loved us so much that He was willing to sacrifice His Son on our behalf... and that grace is received through our faith – our trust in Him.
- d. And so you see, the mystery is Christ for all, and the treasure is Christ for all – and that means you and me too.

VI. **God draws all people to Himself by means of the Word.**

- a. He drew the Magi to the Christ Child by means of the Word as He revealed Himself
- b. He drew each of us to Himself by means of the Word
- c. The question is, how does He draw more people to Himself... Those who are out there right now who don't have faith?
 - i. Does He use a special shiny star in the sky?
 - ii. Does He speak from heaven or from a cloud to them?
 - iii. Does He speak through a burning bush?
- d. No, He uses something far less miraculous... but just as effective... YOU.
- e. Paul starts out our reading today by saying that he is a manager, or steward, of the treasure God gave him... to share with the Gentiles the *ethne*.
 - i. He means that all the blessings, forgiveness and life that Jesus gave to him (the mystery and the treasure) are now his responsibility to share
 - ii. Now Paul did it as an Apostle – or an actual eyewitness of Jesus – and that public responsibility is still passed along to pastors
 - iii. Yet, the vast majority of interaction and connection is done privately with the people of God living their ordinary lives!
- f. Do you know where else the word, *ethne* is found?
 - i. In Matthew 28:19-20, Jesus said, “Go therefore and make disciples of all ETHNE, nations... baptizing them and teaching them...”
- g. Our main job in life – our mission – is God's mission... to bring the light of Christ to the goyim... the *ethne*... all nations.
 - i. That means ANYONE who does not know Jesus and that He died and rose to forgive them of their sins.
- h. Epiphany is just that – a mystery revealed, a treasure given – the light of the world shared to all people.
- i. I guess that's why I love Epiphany so much... it's all about God's love – and no one is left out... Thanks be to God! Amen.