

#1693  
Cf. #347

Ephesians 3:2-12<sup>1</sup>  
The Gentiles are heirs  
together with Israel.  
Epistle for Epiphany  
Supplementary Lection Series "B"  
Epistles, adapted

Pastor A. J. Kunde  
Grace WELS Durand MI  
Sunday, January 8, 2012  
Installation, Church Council  
& Boards  
Elders  
Remove Christmas decorations

<sup>2</sup> Surely you have heard about the administration of God's grace that was given to me for you,  
<sup>3</sup> that is, the mystery made known to me by revelation, as I have already written briefly. <sup>4</sup> In  
reading this, then, you will be able to understand my insight in the mystery of Christ, <sup>5</sup> which  
was not made known to men in other generations as it has now been revealed by the Spirit to  
God's holy Apostles and Prophets. <sup>6</sup> 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.

<sup>7</sup> I was made a servant of this Gospel by the gift of God's grace given me through the working  
of his power. <sup>8</sup> Although I am less than the least of all God's people [the saints], this grace was  
given me: To preach the Gospel ["Gospelize"] to the Gentiles the unsearchable riches of Christ,  
<sup>9</sup> and to make plain [to enlighten] to everyone the administration of this mystery, which for ages  
past was kept hidden in God, who created all things. <sup>10</sup> His intent was that now, through the  
Church, the manifold [multifaceted] wisdom of God should be made known to the rulers and  
authorities in the heavenly realms, <sup>11</sup> according to his eternal purpose [plan] which he  
accomplished in Christ Jesus our LORD. <sup>12</sup> In him and through faith in him we may approach  
God with freedom and confidence.

ST PAUL REVEALS A MYSTERY:  
GENTILES SHARE SALVATION WITH ISRAEL  
I. BY GRACE ALONE  
II. BY FAITH ALONE  
III. BY THE SCRIPTURES ALONE

In the Name of Jesus, Dear Fellow-Recipients of God's Grace in Christ Jesus,

Last Friday, January 6<sup>th</sup>, was Epiphany. That word, Epiphany, means to shine out or be  
revealed. This morning's Gospel Lesson, Matthew 2:1-12, is the Lesson set aside for  
Epiphany. That Lesson describes how the Magi or Wisemen saw a star in the east,  
followed that star, and came to worship and give gifts of gold, incense and myrrh to Jesus  
their Savior.

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<sup>1</sup> *The New International Version*, (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan Publishing House) 1984.  
All Scripture references are taken from this translation unless noted otherwise.

The Magi or Wisemen were not Jews but Gentiles. Yet somehow, through the Scriptures that they had been given, they learned that the King of the Jews was not only for the Jews but for all people – Gentiles included. This is the mystery to which St. Paul refers in our text this morning: ST PAUL REVEALS A MYSTERY: GENTILES SHARE SALVATION WITH ISRAEL ... I. BY GRACE ALONE; II. BY FAITH ALONE; III. BY THE SCRIPTURES ALONE.

ST PAUL REVEALS A MYSTERY:  
GENTILES SHARE SALVATION WITH ISRAEL  
I. BY GRACE ALONE

God's grace is mentioned in our text in connection with the special gift of grace given to St. Paul to proclaim the Gospel to the Gentiles. St. Paul writes, "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" (3:2,3). Paul speaks about "administrating ... God's grace" – as if he were handing out that grace of God, which he indeed was by his proclaiming of the Gospel. St. Paul states that he "was made a servant of this Gospel by the gift of God's grace given me through the working of his power" (3:7). St. Paul did not choose to be an administrator of God's grace; he "was made a servant of this Gospel by the gift of God's grace." Moreover, St. Paul amplifies the fact that it was by God's grace that he was an administrator of God's grace to the Gentiles, when he says, "Although I am less than the least of all God's people [the saints], this grace was given me: To preach the Gospel ["Gospelize"] to the Gentiles the unsearchable riches of Christ" (3:8).

In stating that he, St. Paul, was "the least of all God's people" – the saints, believers – St. Paul was recalling how, initially, he had been an enemy of God's people – an enemy of the Church. St. Paul had persecuted the Church and even participated in the responsibility of the murder of Stephen, one of the believers in Jesus (cf. Acts 8:1). So, it was by grace alone – God's undeserved love – that St. Paul was made a minister or administrator of God's grace to the Gentiles. More than that, it was by grace alone that St. Paul was brought to faith in Jesus in the first place.

St. Paul was saved by grace alone. As mentioned before, grace is God's undeserved love. Grace is God's steadfast love for those who deserve, rather, his wrath, punishment and damnation. As a persecutor of the Church, St. Paul certainly deserved God's wrath. But, out of his grace for St. Paul, God turned Paul around and brought him to faith in Jesus. In that faith in Jesus, God also made St. Paul a minister or administrator of his grace to others, specifically the Gentiles.

The Gentiles were excluded from Israel and the promises given to Israel in the Old Testament. There were a few "flashes" in the Old Testament indicating that God would be gracious also to the Gentiles. For example, you saw one of those "flashes" in the Old Testament Lesson, Ruth 4:13-17, in which Ruth, a Moabite woman outside of Israel, was the great

grandmother of David from whom Jesus, the Messiah descended. Another Old Testament flash was given through the Prophet Isaiah when God proclaimed to his Son, “It is too small a thing for you to be my Servant to restore the tribes of Jacob and bring back those of Israel I have kept. I will also make you a Light for the Gentiles, that you may bring my salvation to the ends of the earth” (Isaiah 49:6). But for the most part, the Old Testament proclaimed that salvation was from and for the Jews. The mystery that St. Paul revealed by grace was 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” (3:6).

#### APPROPRIATION

It is by grace alone that you too are included among those to whom the mystery of Christ Jesus has been revealed – the mystery that God has reconciled himself to you through his Son Jesus, by not counting your sins against you (cf. 2 Corinthians 5:19). You, along with St. Paul, have to admit that you do not deserve this grace of God.

You do not deserve God’s grace – his love for you is totally and completely undeserved. Oh, you can fool some people by your exterior words and actions, but you cannot fool God. When you look in the mirror, you are forced to confess with King David, “Surely I was sinful at birth, sinful from the time my mother conceived me” (Psalm 51:5). You too are forced to confess that every thought of the imagination of your heart is only evil continually – evil from childhood (cf. Genesis 6:5b; 8:21b). What you deserve is gloom, doom and damnation because of your sinfulness. But God, who is rich in mercy and grace, delivered you.

God delivered you from your eternally condemned condition by his grace alone. By his grace alone, God has made you an heir of Christ, a member of Christ’s body of believers, and a sharer “in the promise in Christ Jesus” – the promise of forgiveness of sins, eternal life and salvation. God did this by bringing you to faith in Jesus as your Savior. In addition, God has also made you an administrator of his grace, just like he did with St. Paul.

The Apostle Peter writes concerning you as a believer in Jesus, “But you are a chosen people, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, a people belonging to God, that you may declare the praises of him who called you out of darkness into his wonderful light” (1 Peter 2:9). To “declare” God’s praises means to administer God’s grace by telling others about Jesus the Savior, just as St. Paul did. Thus, you are not only a recipient of God’s grace but also an administrator of God’s grace as you tell others about Jesus. It is by this grace of God in the Gospel that a person is brought to faith in Jesus.

#### ST PAUL REVEALS A MYSTERY: GENTILES SHARE SALVATION WITH ISRAEL II. BY FAITH ALONE

St. Paul writes, “In [Christ Jesus] and through faith in [Christ Jesus] we may approach God with freedom and confidence” (3:12). It is by faith in Jesus that a person is a believer in

Jesus. That faith is trust, reliance and confidence in God that a person has forgiveness of sins through Jesus. In that faith in Jesus, St. Paul also says, a believer “may approach God with freedom and confidence.”

By nature, a person is not free to approach God, because by nature a person is a sinner, and sinners cannot approach God – sinners cannot come into God’s presence. God despises and hates both sin and sinners, as David proclaims in Psalm 5,

***<sup>4</sup> You are not a God who takes pleasure in evil;  
with you the wicked cannot dwell.***

***<sup>5</sup> The arrogant cannot stand in your presence;  
you hate all who do wrong.***

***<sup>6</sup> You destroy those who tell lies;  
bloodthirsty and deceitful men  
the LORD abhors (Psalm 5:4-6).***

Those Psalm Verses clearly state that God hates sinners and will not permit sinners to come into his presence. How then can anyone hope to be saved, since all are sinners? The answer to that question is faith in Christ Jesus.

By faith alone in Jesus, a person’s sins are forgiven. This faith is created in a person’s heart through the Gospel or Good News about Jesus – Jesus’ perfect life and his innocent suffering and death on the cross as the payment for the sins of all. Moreover, as we see in the case of St. Paul, a person does not choose to believe in Jesus. Rather, a person is chosen by God to be a believer.

St. Paul was a persecutor of the Church. No one would ever think that he would ever become a believer in Jesus. But by God’s power in the Gospel, St. Paul was made a believer – and not only a believer, but also a minister and administrator of God’s grace to others.

#### APPROPRIATION

It is by faith alone in Jesus that you have forgiveness of sins, eternal life and salvation. This faith was not manufactured by you. You cannot by your own reason or strength believe in Jesus Christ or come to him, but the Holy Spirit calls you by the Gospel. Jesus said, “You did not choose me, but I chose you” (John 15:16a). Faith in Jesus has been created in your heart by grace alone.

Since your natural tendency is also to be rebellious against God, the Holy Spirit has to work a change in you. The Holy Spirit gives you a new heart (cf. Psalm 51:10; Ezekiel 36:26). The Holy Spirit brings you out of your rebellious state against God and his will, and into a saving relationship with God through Jesus. It is through the Holy Spirit at work in the Gospel that you have faith, trust and reliance upon Jesus as your Savior.

You have faith, trust and reliance in Jesus as your Savior. This faith is created and sustained in you by the Holy Spirit in the Gospel of Jesus. That Gospel is found in God’s Word. This

is what St. Paul is speaking about when he refers to “the mystery made known to me by revelation” (3:3).

ST PAUL REVEALS A MYSTERY:  
GENTILES SHARE SALVATION WITH ISRAEL  
III. BY THE SCRIPTURES ALONE

What did God use to reveal his grace to people? What did God use to bring people to faith in Jesus? He used the Gospel, and that Gospel is found in the Holy Scriptures – the Bible. This is what St. Paul says when he writes about “the mystery made known to me by revelation” (3:3a). In addition, St. Paul states that this mystery “was not made known to men in other generations as it has now been revealed by the Spirit to God’s holy Apostles and Prophets” (3:5). God’s New Testament “holy Apostles and Prophets” had this mystery revealed to them, that the Gentiles along with the Jews who were believers in Jesus, shared in “the promise in Christ” (3:6c), that is, the forgiveness of sins, eternal life and salvation. But, that “promise in Christ” is found in the Scriptures alone – in the Bible alone.

By inspiration of the Holy Spirit, the Apostles, Evangelists and Prophets, wrote the Bible, so that the Bible is not the words of men but the very Word of God. St. Paul was made a servant of the Gospel in God’s Word, so that he could proclaim God’s eternal plan of salvation to others – especially to the Gentiles. Through that proclamation, whether to Jew or Gentile, a person was brought from unbelief to faith in Jesus, in accordance with God’s plan of salvation from the beginning. All of this is found and proclaimed in the Scriptures alone – in God’s Word alone.

APPROPRIATION

It is by the Scriptures alone, in which the Gospel of Jesus is found, that people are brought to faith and kept in faith in Jesus. This is why it is so important that you continue in these Scriptures. Having faith in Jesus in one’s youth is no guarantee that you will keep that faith in Jesus as you grow older. When a person separates himself from the Scriptures – from hearing and worshipping – then he is separating himself from the only means that God has given both to create and sustain faith in Jesus in the heart. That is why the writer to the Hebrews proclaims, “Let us not give up meeting together, as some are in the habit of doing” (Hebrews 10:25a). That is why Jesus said, “If you continue in my Word, then you really are my disciples” (cf. John 8:31b). Faith in Jesus that is once grasped can be lost through neglect. Do not let that happen to you.

Continue in God’s Word. Continue in the Holy Scriptures. Read, mark, learn and inwardly digest what God has to say to you in his Word. Through the work of the Holy Spirit in God’s Word alone, you have faith and will continue to have faith in Jesus your Savior and your salvation.

## CONCLUSION

You are saved by grace alone, by faith alone, by Scripture alone. This is true for you and for every believer in Jesus. St. Paul was given the revelation of this mystery in Christ Jesus, that both Jew and Gentile believers in Jesus shared together and were partakers together of the promise in Christ Jesus – the promise of the forgiveness of sins, eternal life and salvation. Continue in that faith by grace through God's Word. Amen.