

God does a lot of awe-inspiring things. Our lesson mentions that God created all things (3:9). When we look around at God's creation we are amazed by the whales in the sea and the stars in the sky. But as wonderful as God's creation is, even more wonderful and amazing is God's plan of salvation, his plan to save people. In our passage today Paul is filled with awe and wonder at God's plan of salvation and the fact that he gets to proclaim it. So today let's join Paul in his wonder. Let's

### Wonder at the Mystery of Grace.

I. That we are heirs.

II. That we are proclaimers.

Our passage begins, **“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” (3:2-3a)**. The word “mystery” in the Bible does not necessarily refer to something that is hard to understand. Instead, the word “mystery” in the Bible refers to something that we would not have known if God would not have revealed it to us. That's why Paul says, **“the mystery made known to me by revelation” (3:3)** and later in our passage Paul talks about **“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” (Ephesians 3:4b-5)**. A mystery is something that we would not have known if God had not revealed it to us.

The mystery that Paul is referring to in this passage is God's plan to save both Jews and Gentiles through Christ. God made this plan in eternity. Paul talks about **“this mystery, which for ages past was kept hidden in God” (3:9)**. Before he created the world he had already planned how he would save people from sin. Then he carried out his plan when he sent Jesus to die on the cross and rise again for the forgiveness of our sins. Paul says **“his eternal purpose, which he accomplished in Christ Jesus our Lord” (3:11)**. God made his plan in eternity and then he carried out his plan by sending Jesus.

In our passage Paul emphasizes that God's plan to save people includes both Jews and Gentiles. It says, **“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” (3:6)**. This is important because we are Gentiles. You and I are a small part of the fulfillment of Isaiah's prophecy: **“nations will come to your light” (Isaiah 60:3)**. We do not deserve to be part of God's people. We are part of God's people by grace.

The word “grace” comes up a few times in our reading for today. Paul says, **“the administration of God's grace that was given to me for you” (3:2)**. Grace is God's undeserved love. In this letter Paul talks about why we don't deserve grace. In Ephesians chapter 2 Paul says, **As for you, you were dead in your transgressions and sins, in which you used to live when you followed the ways of this world and of ... the spirit who is now at work in those who are disobedient. All of us also lived among them at one time, gratifying the cravings of our flesh and following its desires and thoughts. Like the rest, we were by nature deserving of wrath” (Ephesians 2:1-3)** It would make sense to our way of thinking if God would have said, “OK, now work your way out of it. If you are good enough, then you can be saved.” But God didn't say that. Instead he said that we would be saved by grace. **“For it is by grace you have been saved, through faith – and this is not from yourselves, it is the gift of God – not by works, so that no one can boast” (Ephesians 2:8-9)**. God planned that we would be saved by grace. Isn't this a wonder? Wonder at the mystery of grace. And when I say “wonder at,” I mean be filled with awe and wonder that we sinners are saved by grace. Paul himself was filled with awe and wonder when he thought about how he was saved by grace. In 1 Timothy 1:15 he said, **“Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners – of whom I am the worst” (1 Timothy 1:15)**.

Not only are we saved from God's wrath in hell, but we even get a glorious inheritance in heaven. Paul says, **"This mystery is that through the gospel the Gentiles are heirs together with Israel" (Ephesians 3:6)**. An heir is someone who has an inheritance. We have heaven as our inheritance.

All of this is because of Christ's work for us. Paul says that he **"preached to the Gentiles the glorious riches of Christ" (3:8)**. Paul expanded on this in the verse right after our passage when his readers would **"grasp how wide and long and high and deep is love of Christ" (1:18)**. Sometimes we are filled with awe and wonder when we gaze up at the sky. Paul wants us to be filled with awe and wonder when we look at the expansive love of Christ. Wonder at the mystery of grace: that we are heirs. And secondly, wonder at the mystery of grace: that we are proclaimers.

Paul says in verse 2: **Surely you have heard about the administration of God's grace that was given to me for you" (3:2)**. The Greek word that is translated "administration" here is an interesting word. It can mean "putting a plan into effect." That's what it seems to mean in verse 9 when Paul says, **"to make plain to everyone the administration of this mystery" (3:9)**. God had a plan of salvation and he put that plan into effect when he sent Jesus. But the word can also mean "management" or "responsibility." And that's what it seems to mean in verse 2. **"Surely you have heard about the administration (the management, the responsibility) of God's grace that was given to me for you."** Paul was given the responsibility of proclaiming God's grace.

And Paul is filled with awe and wonder that this responsibility and this privilege was given to him. He says, **"Although I am less than the least of all the Lord's people, this grace was given to me: to preach to the Gentiles the boundless riches of Christ" (3:8)**. In Greek the words "to me" are put first in the sentence for emphasis: **"To me! Less than the least of all the saints, this grace was given: to preach to the Gentiles the boundless riches of Christ" (3:8)**.

Paul is filled with wonder and amazement because he knew how unworthy he was. Before Christ appeared to him on the Road to Damascus, Paul had been a fierce enemy of Christianity. He had thrown Christians in prison. When were on trial he even voted to put some of them to death. And now Paul wonders at God's grace, that not only did God forgive him, but God gave him the privilege of proclaiming grace to the Gentiles.

Paul knew that not only was he saved by grace. He was also a minister by grace. He says, **"I became a servant of this gospel by the gift of God's grace" (3:7)**. That grace fueled his ministry. In 1 Cor 15 he says, **"For I am the least of all the apostles and do not even deserve to be called an apostle, because I persecuted the church of God. But by the grace of God I am what I am, and his grace to me was not without effect. No, I worked harder than all of them – yet not I, but the grace of God that was with me" (1 Cor 15:9-10)**.

Grace is also what fuels us to share our faith with others. We know what grace has done in our lives and we want others to experience that same grace. Paul says that his task was to **"make plain to everyone" (3:9)**. Those Greek words could also be translated "give light to everyone." On Epiphany we emphasize that we were in darkness, God shined the light of his grace into our hearts when someone told us about Jesus. I told you that in the Bible the word "mystery" means something that you wouldn't know unless someone told you. We wouldn't know about Jesus unless someone told us.

How was the mystery revealed to you? The mystery was revealed to me when my parents had me baptized as an infant. The mystery was revealed to me when my parents brought me to church and Sunday school to hear about Jesus. The mystery was revealed to me when teachers in my Lutheran grade school taught me Bible stories. The mystery continues to be revealed to me when I hear sermons and when I read the Bible on my own. Paul says, **"in reading this you will be able to understand my insight into the mystery of Christ" (3:4)**.

On this Epiphany think about the wonder of how the mystery was revealed to you and then let that grace drive you to think about how you can reveal the mystery of Christ to others.

We sometimes are filled with wonder when we see breath-taking aspects of God's creation: the stars in the sky or the Grand Canyon. But even more worthy of awe and wonder is God's plan of salvation. The Bible says that even the angels are amazed by God's plan of salvation. Our passage says, **"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" (3:10)**. The rulers and authorities in the heavenly realms are the angels. In 1 Peter 1:12 it says something similar. There it says that the prophets predicted the sufferings of the Messiah and the glories that would follow and then Peter says, **"even angels long to look into these things" (1 Peter 1:12)**. Even the angels are amazed by God's plan of salvation. And if even the angels are amazed by it, how much more should we, we who are the beneficiaries of God's plan of salvation. If even the angels are amazed by it, how much more should we be filled with wonder over the fact that God became flesh for us. Be filled with wonder at the mystery of grace. Be filled with wonder that we are heirs and that we are proclaimers. Amen.