

God's Promises Revealed

Ephesians 3:1 – 7

¹For this reason I, Paul, a prisoner of Christ Jesus on behalf of you Gentiles—²assuming that you have heard of the stewardship of God's grace that was given to me for you, ³how the mystery was made known to me by revelation, as I have written briefly. ⁴When you read this, you can perceive my insight into the mystery of Christ, ⁵which was not made known to the sons of men in other generations as it has now been revealed to his holy apostles and prophets by the Spirit. ⁶This mystery is that the Gentiles are fellow heirs, members of the same body, and partakers of the promise in Christ Jesus through the gospel. ⁷Of this gospel I was made a minister according to the gift of God's grace, which was given me by the working of his power.

What kind of strange kings are these we see at the manger with the Christ Child? And why did they undertake such a long and dangerous journey, only to be deceived by a foreign-speaking tyrant named Herod? And why were they so determined to reach this child with a questionable family background, who had been placed in the manger? These wise men, who perhaps spoke ancient Persian in Jerusalem and therefore certainly needed a translator, returned as mysteriously as they had arrived, back to where they had come from. What drove them? It could only be that they knew something hidden from everyone else. It was the secret that this child, laid in the manger, was to be the Savior of the world. Of course, not everyone was equally aware of this. Herod, in his palace, feared the child as a political opponent. Even most of the religious experts of the time, while they suspected Bethlehem as the place of the coming king, didn't fully grasp the significance of the child's existence. Just as it began in the manger, so it continued with Jesus. What Jesus meant was far from being revealed to everyone. Therefore, his appearances repeatedly led to questions about his very ordinary origins. "Isn't this the son of Joseph, whose father and mother we know?" (John 6:42) When Jesus was tempted by Satan, Satan wanted to challenge Jesus to reveal himself: "If you are the Son of God, throw yourself down from the pinnacle of the temple!" This temptation did not cease until Jesus' agonizing death on the cross. For there Jesus was also challenged: "If you are the Son of God, come down from the cross!"

The fact that Jesus is the Son of God and at the same time was a completely ordinary human being is and remains the great challenge to our human understanding. That is why Muslims still have the greatest difficulty with the idea that the Almighty God could be a completely ordinary human being, like you and me. Quite frankly, this idea that God becomes human is incomprehensible. It's a million times more absurd than when foreign-language tourists ask about a Messiah during a day trip to my city. In our sermon text today, the Apostle Paul says that it is a mystery. When the Apostle says this, we shouldn't pretend that being the Son of God is something completely normal that can be understood or grasped with the human mind. We shouldn't be surprised that so many people have just celebrated Christmas and yet the very meaning of the birth of the Son of God seems completely foreign to them and they haven't understood it for a long time. "Oh, the depth of the riches and wisdom and knowledge of God! How unsearchable are his judgements and how inscrutable his ways!" (Romans 11:33) the Apostle Paul laments. He shows us that there are limits to our understanding of God. Naturally, we don't like the idea of our understanding being reduced to the lowest level. This is especially true because we now understand so much more about so many other things in our world than before. We understand much more about the natural world and even many things in the universe. But when it comes to the question of God, it's a mystery. We can't get any further with the tools of reason. And unfortunately, many people angrily abandon their faith at precisely this point. Please don't do that. Because what is impossible for mankind is possible for God!

The Letter to the Ephesians speaks precisely about God making the impossible possible! God himself did what no human being can comprehend and showed people back then who Jesus Christ is. We hear this repeatedly in the Christmas story. The shepherds, the wise men, Simeon and Anna were all brought to Jesus by God himself. God revealed to them the mystery of Christ's birth. Today's Sunday is called Epiphany. This translates as "to make manifest" Ever since Paul met Jesus on the road to Damascus, he had known about this God who reveals himself through Jesus. Paul knew that he is not the only one who had

understood this. He saw himself as part of a long chain: that's why he quotes from the Gospels and the Old Testament. They are all bound up in the one Jesus Christ. So, we must always ask this question: What drove these people to point to Christ with such focus and persistence? What drove them to risk their very lives so that the truth of the Gospel might come to light? Surely it couldn't have been just a whim. They all knew what ordinary human understanding simply cannot grasp. And likewise, there are still people today who, completely against ordinary human understanding, are baptized and follow Jesus Christ, even if they might die for it. It can only be that God transcends all human understanding, goes out, calls people, and opens their eyes. When God calls people time and again in such a wondrous way, he doesn't do so by visibly breaking through the boundaries between heaven and earth. No, the Almighty reveals himself in such a way that most people don't even notice. The wise men of old returned to their home. There, they most likely found everything just as it had been before. And yet, everything was different. They had found the Christ Child. It's similar for us. After our baptism, our hair color doesn't suddenly change, and nothing strange happens to us. We remain exactly the same person as before and return to the same everyday life as before. And yet, everything is completely different! Jesus has been revealed to us! It seems to me that Jesus doesn't allow himself to be challenged at all to prove himself through any displays of power. Just as Jesus didn't jump from the tower to prove to Satan and the whole world that he was the Son of God, so too will he not give us visible proof of his existence beyond what he has already done. Much in our Christian lives must remain hidden. Many paths God leads us down, we will never understand. Perhaps we even have a heartfelt desire for God to finally reveal one mystery or another to us. And yet, God doesn't suddenly appear on the stage of our lives and explain to us in detail what we should do with our lives and what the future holds. Just like the wise men, we walk our own paths and find our way back into everyday life. Through Jesus Christ, this everyday life isn't simply lifted up and turned upside down. Jesus himself remains hidden as the human son of Joseph. Even as he hung on the cross, he could have changed everything so quickly. But he didn't. The fact that God, in the suffering man on the cross, bears the sins of the world, remained hidden. And yet, this very message and this very Jesus have set so many people on a completely different path, like the Apostle Paul. Of course, after encountering Jesus, the Apostle Paul couldn't simply continue with his business of imprisoning Christians in Damascus. No, with great joy, he did everything differently. What was previously unknown to him shone into his heart like the bright morning star, and he knew of the One, who is above heaven and earth and yet is so close to us. In this very way, Christians for many generations have worshipped Christ and remained with this Jesus Christ despite much hardship and persecution.

Even today, these Christians suffer with tears that Jesus remains hidden. Of course, they pray, hope, and believe that Jesus will simply return, and then we will understand everything clearly. What will it be like then? Surely similar to when a family member returns after a very long journey. You embrace, you share stories, or you simply say: "Abba, Father." And we do all this even now, knowing and believing that Jesus hears and understands everything. Abba, Father! Through Jesus Christ, Amen!