

Ephesians 3:2-3a(3b-4)5-6 - Epiphany [3.1.2016]

God's Good News is for all people!

² As you already know, God has given me this special ministry of announcing his favour to you Gentiles. ³ As I briefly mentioned earlier in this letter, God himself revealed his secret plan to me. ... ⁵ God did not reveal it to previous generations, but now he has revealed it by the Holy Spirit to his holy apostles and prophets.

⁶ And this is the secret plan: The Gentiles have an equal share with the Jews in all the riches inherited by God's children. Both groups have believed the Good News, and both are part of the same body and enjoy together the promise of blessings through Christ Jesus. [NLT]

Do you know the feeling of getting a present a few days late - suddenly there is this surprise for you, just waiting to be unwrapped.

These verses from the letter to the Ephesians is a bit like this. What Paul writes about had been lying wrapped up for a long time. Now it was there - a gift, nobody had known about until it was revealed. This gift is something we may once again hear as

God's Good News - for all people!

Many will be returning to their everyday lives this week. For some of us the 'everyday' things never really left - problems have been there hovering at the periphery like a dark cloud. This dark cloud can so easily close out the light which came to us at Christmas, that is why it is good to reflect once more on the news of the wonders of God's love: for you!

The Festival of Epiphany reminds us again today that we too have received this wonderful gift. In all the festivities that surround Christmas in our time, it may sometimes be overlooked that Jesus did not come into the world so that we could celebrate Christmas - with all its excesses. Instead we are called on to celebrate and be filled with wonder at this time of year, because Jesus came to us. He came to show us who God is - and that this God loves us!

I realise that I have not told you anything that you have not heard many times over. It is probably safe to say, that we mostly take it for granted that we are members of the church. Paul reminds us, however, that God did something quite out of the ordinary, for us also to be his people. He writes, almost as if he has to remind himself, **The Gentiles have an equal share with the Jews in all the riches inherited by God's children.**

Epiphany is the festival to celebrate the appearance of Jesus Christ - bearing the message that *God's Good News is for all people*

As things return to normal, and as the new year stretches out ahead of us, it is good to remember God's faithfulness and love for you and me. Perhaps we can reflect on Christmas a bit more objectively today - without all the hype which so often surrounds our celebrations.

We are reminded here that our place in the church - that our being Christians - is 'an unearned gift' from our God. [Actually when we speak of a gift, it should be something you can't earn. That is what makes a gift so wonderful. Those threats that 'you won't get anything for Christmas if you aren't good' have perhaps brought us to believe that we have to do something to receive a gift.]

God's gift - his good news to us - is totally unexpected, and something we could not earn. Take some time to think about what God gives you. In the previous chapter Paul writes that we are now "**citizens along with all of God's holy people ... members of God's family**" (Ephesians 2:19). God's gift means that nobody is an outsider anymore - as far as our God is concerned. He has called us to be part of his body - the church - together with those who have been there before us, and with those who come after us. The gift God gives us is **the Good News, [that] both [Jews and Non-Jews] are part of the same body and enjoy together the promise of blessings through Christ Jesus.**

What does that mean for us? One aspect we should not forget, is that being part of God's people is not a right! No matter what you - or your forefathers - have done in the church, we are all only here because of God's grace - because

he has given us this as a free gift. God's promise is not linked to what you have done - it is not because of who you or I are that he comes to us. His good news is that my place in the church does not depend on what I have done, but on what Jesus has done for me. My place in the church does not depend on what I know, but on the fact that God knows me, and that I may now know him. We don't have to prove to God that we belong, because he has made a place for us when he sacrificed his Son - and thereby gives me a guarantee that I belong in his church.

This is the gift we receive again today - to unwrap, and to use. If we are to use this gift right, we have to do something I have pointed to in recent weeks: we need to read the manual. We do not set the rules about what church is - we can only go by what God's manual - what his Word - tells us.

The amazing thing we discover there is that *God's Good News for all people* is that it truly is **for all people**. It applies especially to those who feel that they have nothing to offer; it applies to those who feel that there is nobody to care for them.

But, if we are to receive God's gift to us in the right way, we too must become aware that we have nothing to offer. Jesus came to a world that needed light - his light. Jesus came to a world that needed love - his love. He came into a world that needed life - the life he gives.

God's Good News is that we must not try to light up the darkness of our world on our own. He who made light, shines his light into our lives.

God's Good News is that we, who often feel unloved, don't need to make believe that there is somebody who cares about us - we have the assurance of God's love. Even if there times when I can hardly love myself, God loves me and has made me his child. He knows you - and his love for you knows no boundaries.

God's Good News is that we don't need to find a purpose to life; we must not strive to make sense of the world, and of where we are going. God has given your and my life a purpose. He has made us a part of his family - and we have

his light in us to share with a world in great need.

Receiving this good news and sharing it, may meet with opposition. We heard it shortly after the birth of Christ - as reported in the Gospel reading (Matthew 2:1-12), that Herod was 'deeply disturbed' when he received news of the newly born king - his plan was to have him killed. At the time of writing this letter, Paul was in prison, **because of my preaching to you Gentiles**. So since the beginnings, there has been a great deal of opposition to carrying the saving message of Jesus Christ to the 'undeserving' out there. Yet, the mystery of God's love is that he truly wants his message to reach those still on the outside - they too are to be called to his side.

It is amazing that God's gift does not meet with open approval, and is not received with open arms. Yet, that should not dim our joy at what God gives. His light shines on us, and lights up our world. That is why we rejoice in the fact that *God's Good News is for all people* - and that we too share in this gift.