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Ephesians 3:1-1

The Epiphany of our Lord

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We have access to God

In boldness and confidence through faith in Christ

This is how today's reading ends

And this is key part of the Good News that we proclaim as Christian people.

Let's start here today

To get an idea of what St Paul is saying

The picture: a child approaching their parent

It's a simple picture: not fear or presumption

An approach from trust, knowing that they are loved

This is how it is with God and with us

Through faith in Christ we can approach God with boldness and confidence

We can call out by the Holy Spirit 'Abba, Father'

Those of you who are parents

Don't you want your children to know that you love them?

How much more does God want us to know and trust

That he loves us. But parents, on top of this

Don't you want your children to grow in love *for each other*?

And if your children show love for each other

Doesn't that reflect well on you?

Doesn't that show your parental wisdom at work?

This is also how it is with us and with God.

As children of the Father we have many brothers and sisters

Indeed, part of the Good News that we proclaim as Christians

Is that we have brothers and sisters

From every language, tribe, and people

And more than this: that the unity we have in Christ

Shows the wisdom of God in the flesh

It shows this wisdom on what we could call a cosmic scale

So that although God has created us as individuals

And although he knows each one of us

Better than we know ourselves

And although he calls us as individuals to faith in Christ

He joins us into the Church: the household of faith
Where who God is as Father shines out in his glory

These are the themes we'll be hearing about today
OK, let's listen to the text

In former generations this mystery [and here St Paul is talking about the mystery that was made known to him] was not made known to humankind, as it has now been revealed to his holy apostles and prophets by the Spirit: that is, the Gentiles have become fellow-heirs, members of the same body, and sharers in the promise in Christ Jesus through the gospel.

Let's pause on the word 'mystery'

St Paul is not talking about a secret

About something that, once it is known ceases to be a secret

Like someone's PIN number for their credit card

Rather, St Paul is talking about something that

Even after it is revealed, is something that we could not guess at

That remain marvellous and strange and beautiful

And the mystery is that: **the Gentiles have become fellow-heirs, members of the same body, and sharers in the promise in Christ Jesus through the gospel.**

The God of the Jews: the God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob

Is the God also of the Gentiles

This mystery is Good News in a world

Where ethnic differences can be the cause of suspicion, hatred, and violence.

God is not a God of tribal hostilities

But a God who wishes to bring people from every tribe nation and language

Into a true and lasting unity

A unity that comes about

As he leads each one of us to acknowledge our own individual sinfulness

As he leads us to put our trust in Christ Jesus

And the promise of the forgiveness of sins, and of life with God

That is the gift of Christ Jesus

As God leads us into a unity with a common hope in Christ

St Paul goes on: **Of this gospel I have become a servant according to the gift of God's grace that was given to me by the working of his power.**

On the one hand what St Paul says in Ephesians could sound arrogant:

That *he* has received the revelation of a mystery

Not made know through the ages

It seems to me St Paul was aware of the temptation to pride
So repeatedly in his writings he emphasises that this revelation
Came to him as a gift, not as something that he could have acquired
What's more, he makes it clear that his status as an apostle for the Gentiles
Has landed him in prison: not a glorious place to be
Not a place designed to pump up human pride
And more than this he clearly acknowledges
That his calling came to him despite his unworthiness

In fact, this is what St Paul goes on to say: **Although I am the very least of all the saints, this grace was given to me to bring to the Gentiles the news of the boundless riches of Christ, and to make everyone see what is the plan of the mystery hidden for ages in God who created all things; so that through the church the wisdom of God in its rich variety might now be made known to the rulers and authorities in the heavenly places.**

St Paul was called by God, as someone most unworthy
To be a great proclaimer of the Cross of Christ
And God's love revealed through this
To be the ambassador of reconciliation between God and all people
And to be someone through whom God revealed his plan
To bring the varied people of the world
To true and lasting unity in Christ Jesus

Note, by the way, that St Paul says this: **so that through the church the wisdom of God in its rich variety might now be made known to the rulers and authorities in the heavenly places.**

We can easily skip over these words, but think about what St Paul is saying
That it's in the church that the wisdom of God is revealed
Not just to his own people, or to the people of the world
But to what he calls **the rulers and authorities in the heavenly places.**
God, through the church, is showing what he is like to all of creation
To the very highest powers of creation
It's as if God says to the rulers and authorities:
See my church: see people from different tribes
Confessing their own sin, placing their trust in my Son
Being reconciled with each other and maturing in love for each other
This shows who I am; this shows what I am like.

Again, we know that human parents have joy

When their children love each other
And that when their children love each other, it's a credit to the parents
How much more with God, the true Father of creation
And what God News, that we have such a God as our Father.

This is how St Paul closes our text for today: **This was in accordance with the eternal purpose that he has carried out in Christ Jesus our Lord, in whom we have access to God in boldness and confidence through faith in him.**

And this brings us back to the beginning
It is in Christ Jesus, through faith in him
That we have access to the Father
Not simply access: but access in boldness and confidence

Dear brothers and sisters in Christ
This is who we are
Children of God, loved by the Father
Members together of his one household, the Church
The place where he shows his wisdom at work
Let's today approach God as dearly loved children
And grow in a mature Christian love
That brings glory to the Father
For Jesus' sake. Amen!