

Isaiah 60: 1-6
Psalm 72: 1-7, 10-14
Ephesians 3: 1-12
St. Matthew 2: 1-12

Feast of the Epiphany 2022.

“In former generations this mystery 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.”
Ephesians 3: 6

Who doesn't enjoy a good mystery?... When I was learning to read, I devoured Hardy Boy mysteries. More recently, I would consume Robert Parker novels, and I was really put out when the best-selling author died. The nerve of him – dying! Ghostwriters never met the original author's standard...

When we play with small children, a favourite game can be “peek-a-boo,” when the adult will hide his or her eyes and then suddenly re-appear, to squeals of delight from the little boy or girl... I think there is something deep inside the way God has designed us that so many of us enjoy mysteries – and then the mystery being resolved...

The mystery isn't enough. The mystery has to be solved or resolved in some way, for us to be satisfied...

The same is true in the Christian Church: There are some Christian leaders who discourage questions being asked. “It's not our place to ask questions,” they say... I disagree. I encourage us to ask questions. For example, if we are puzzled by a Bible passage, see how others have responded... If we have a theological question about Jesus Christ, please don't stay being confused – ask!... If we have a moral conundrum, then let's seek the best answer together!... One of the gifts of the Holy Spirit is the gift of wisdom. So let's draw on the wisdom of other Christians, to seek to understand... Questions are a healthy process which can lead to deeper growth...

However, questions presuppose an answer... We might not know the answer yet. The fullness of God's answers sometimes need to wait for our times of life after death... But the answers to genuine questions are always there...

In a gentle poke to some clergy of a more liberal persuasion, the writer C. S. Lewis once developed the character of a fuddy old bishop, who always tried to encourage questions, but never was willing to take a stand, or to offer an answer... In the end – remember, this is a story – the old bishop wanders off to the kingdom of hell, where there are all kinds of questions, but never *any* answers... Lewis' point is that it is appropriate to have questions, but we don't want to leave one another hanging – we want to come to a place where mysteries are solved, and where genuine questions are given fulsome answers...

What about the nature of God himself? Isn't that very mysterious, and beyond our capacity to capture or to understand?...

Yes, by definition, God is always beyond us or above us... Creatures like us can never measure up to understanding the Creator fully! The Old Testament prophet Micah puts it this way: “[The nations] do not know the thoughts of the Lord; they do not understand his plan. [4: 12]”

As well, we are tainted with sin (Romans 3: 23), while God is perfect...

There seems to be a universal sense that God is beyond our capacity to capture, or to understand... Devout Hindus, for example, strive to know a god, or the God above the gods, through spiritual disciplines. But deep within Hinduism, as I understand it, there is a striving which can never be fully achieved or completed. My point is that there is a universal human sense that God is mysterious and beyond us...

Jesus Christ is the world's game-changer... As the Lord Jesus taught and modelled a new way of being, and a new way of living, his first followers gradually received his truth. Here is an important distinction between Christians and non-Christian believers: Christians believe we do not have to strive, to know God fully. Instead, God has *revealed himself* through Jesus Christ. We don't have to find God! God has shown himself to us through Jesus. This process began during Jesus Christ's earthly ministry. Matthew 16:

[Jesus] said to [the apostles], “And who do you say that I am?”
Simon Peter answered, “You are the Christ, the Son of the Living God.”
And Jesus answered him, “Blessed are you, Simon son of Jonah! For flesh and blood has not revealed this to you, but my Father in heaven.”

Often, though, the apostles didn't really catch on – at first... Luke 18: 34 records, “[Jesus' disciples] did not grasp what [Jesus] said...”

But after Jesus' ascension, the *Holy Spirit* came upon all the followers of Jesus Christ... Jesus himself prophesied that the Holy Spirit, the Comforter, would lead us “into all truth...” The Holy Spirit guides Christians, individually and as the whole Church of God, into knowing the fullness of Jesus Christ... And as we know Jesus, we know God himself...

To take but one example, the opening of Hebrews explains it this way:

Long ago God spoke to our ancestors in many and various ways by the prophets, but in these last days he has spoken to us by a Son, whom he appointed heir of all things, through whom he also created the worlds. He is the reflection of God's glory and the exact imprint of God's very being, and he sustains all things by his powerful word. When he had made purification for sins, he sat down at the right hand of the Majesty on high, having become as much superior to angels as the name he has inherited is more excellent than theirs.

So, Christians believe that we know the essentials about what God is like, by knowing the Lord Jesus himself... Jesus Christ perfectly reveals God, and we encounter this by faith...

In summary, Christians believe that God's nature is mysterious, but God has revealed himself through Jesus Christ, and we come to know God as the Holy Spirit reveals the Lord Jesus... The mystery has essentially been solved: We can know the depth of God's love, his hatred of sin which can destroy his creatures, God's holiness, and so on... The mystery has been solved. God is now revealed and known – not only to the Jewish people who dare to believe the promises, but to *Gentiles* – to foreigners... God has revealed himself for all people...

St. Paul, in today's second reading, puts it this way (listen for the words "mystery" and "revealed"):

[...] how the mystery was made known to me by revelation, as I wrote above in a few words, a reading of which will enable you to perceive my understanding of the mystery of Christ. In former generations this mystery 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.

This truth of God's revelation to all people is enacted in today's gospel reading, from Matthew 2. Wise men from the east follow a star, and come to find the little Lord Jesus. The wise men come and worship him, offering magnificent gifts of gold, incense, and bitter perfume...

We can't offer the gifts of the wise men, but best of all, we can offer ourselves humbly in his service... In the words of the hymn,

What can I give him, poor as I am?
If I were a shepherd, I would give a lamb.
If I were a wise man, I would do my part.
Yet what I can, I give him – give him my heart.

During "Epiphany" – this season when we celebrate God's self-revelation, and the mystery being made known to all people – may you all have a glorious Epiphany season. The pandemic is understandably a concern to many of us, but do not fear. As Jesus has revealed to his followers, "I have overcome the world."

Thanks to be God. Amen.