

January 5 2014

Scripture Lessons ~ *Ephesians 3: 1-12*
Matthew 2: 1-12

Sermon *The Mystery of the Gentiles*

I have said this before, and I think I will continue to say it until the day I die. God has got to have a sense of humor! And God has got to have a sense of drama as well, if you take into the account the unexpected twists and turns which God has somehow pulled off during the course of time. Our passage from Matthew this morning presents a night onto impossible scenario. Magi – gentiles – that is non-Jews astrologer kings from the east, visiting the home of a poor Jewish family to worship that child and present that child with valuable gifts. And then to the passage from St. Paul, in *Ephesians*, where St. Paul speaks of a mystery revealed to him by God. The most Jewish of Jews, Paul was, told by God, that he of all people should invite again non-Jews – gentiles, to be a part of God's family. Included in God's love, destined to be major players in the plan of a God they had often called barbaric in the past. What a comedy in the words of Shakespeare, what a mystery of mysteries in the words of St. Paul, why what was that about anyway? What in the world are you up to? Well Paul saw it in this way, and as a result, we can read back into what happened with those kings, and it goes like this. God had destined from the beginning of time that his own chosen people would not forever hold a monopoly on God's love. But instead in the fullness of time, through the most unlikely means imaginable, God would make God's love, forgiveness and hope and joy and peace known like an atomic explosion, not to just the originally chosen people or the Jewish people but to all people of all races, through all walks of life throughout the world till the end of time. That my friend was good news, that my friends, is what the gospel is all about. Not that God's love is only suitable for a narrow segment, a small group in a small place or a small region of the world, but in all times and all places God loves everybody. In former

generations Paul says 'this mystery, this weird turn of events was not made known to humankind as it has been revealed to his holy apostles and prophets by the Holy Spirit. That is the gentiles, have become fellow heirs members of the same body and shares in the promises of Jesus Christ through that good news of the gospel. And Paul recognizes what a strange turn of events this all seems when he says these words 'Although I am the very least of the saints, this grace, this gift was given to me to bring the gentiles the news of the boundless riches of Jesus and to make everyone see what is the plan of the mystery hidden for all ages by God who created all things. But was it such a strange turn of events? Was it that great a mystery that God loves all of the creation? Loves all of God's children equally?, a level playing field. I don't think the Magi thought so, because as we pick up their story in Matthew's gospel as royal, as smart, or as insightful as they were, by their position or education in society they didn't even question what the prophecy said the omen of the star pointed to. They certainly didn't smooze King Herod who is their colleague, nor they didn't arrive with any airs or pretensions for him, they merely went with all haste to the lowly home of Joseph and Mary and paid homage to a truly unlikely King. And I think their message to us is the same as St. Paul's for the first officially gentile people to acknowledge Jesus' presence and Jesus' mission and as such they are often represented as members of all nations of the world. African, Asian, Caucasian, the works is represented in those three people which brings to today and to us and to the obvious question it asks, so Pastor Russ why are you wasting our time with all of this? What is this all about, Pastor Russ? What does this mean for us as modern followers of Jesus Christ? Well I will tell you what it doesn't mean. It doesn't mean any one sect, or any one race, or sex or social status or age or one group of people in any one country or region of the world has a corner or monopoly on God's love. No way, no how! Putting it in the positive, God has done a great equalizing; God has done another great leveling act in the world before us. All have sinned, Romans reminds us and we fall short of the glory of God and scripture tells us that therefore all

have the means as we call it in theology, that we have the love, the forgiveness and the hope, peace and the joy of God. And so what does this all mean? Well I think it is a very scary thought for some of us because it means that we can get right down off our high horses, as my mother and dad would put it, and realize that in the playground of life, we don't have the option of picking up our marbles and go home and still be in part of the game. If you and I look at the one on the right of us, and the one on the left of us, and the one behind us, and the one in front of us, the person across the street, and down the block and God forbid, someone in center city Spokane or Seattle or even Timbuktu we are no better than they, and they are no better than we. All are children of God, are brothers and sisters in the human family, deserving of the same love the same second chances as even our own blood relationships, as even our best friends that we have had for the whole of our lives. But is that such a mystery? Is that such a surprise that the God we call pure love would love the entire creation with a love that cannot possibly die. Well we might like to pretend it is, the Magi knew. The Magi knew and they showed us the way. They showed us the way to a humble home. They showed us the way to a tiny child. They showed us the way to the heart of a mystery. A mystery which had been prepared for all of us from the beginning of time.

Together we say, Amen.