

We live in a world of unsolved mysteries. There was even a TV show on for 15 years called Unsolved Mysteries. Name a few a couple you have heard about? How about The Bermuda Triangle, this legendary expanse of ocean can be found between the points of Miami, Bermuda, and Puerto Rico. Pilots often tell of their instruments going haywire and numerous ships have been lost at sea. With explanations ranging from gas bubbles to aliens, no one is sure what is behind the strange phenomena. Sasquatch or Bigfoot. Supposedly, a creature that lives in the snowy regions of the United States and Canada. Sightings have said, he looks like a guerilla, but walks like a man. Or the Shroud of Turin. Is it the burial cloth of Jesus? Is Jesus' face impressed on that Shroud? Or what about The Loch Ness Monster. Is there really a sea serpent swimming around in Loch Ness? More recently-2014? The missing Malaysian Airlines plane, flight MH370, which had 239 people onboard and was en route from Kuala Lumpur to Beijing? Where is that plane now?

We have weather mysteries too. Why is it that we have hurricane force winds and blizzard conditions on the East Coast? What is a bomb cyclone winter storm? How do you get rid of the hiccups? What's the cure that really works? People have all kinds of ideas, but for many, it's an unsolved mystery. There are some deeper mysteries that remain unsolved – when will Judgment Day come? Why exactly does God allow certain things to happen on this earth? Do you have any unsolved mysteries in your life?

Today is Epiphany Sunday. The word epiphany has the meaning “to reveal” or “to show.” Epiphany is that season in the church year when God reveals some things about himself, shares with you some of his secrets. Epiphany is that time of the year when God solves some mysteries. Today, as we look at the Apostle Paul's words in the book of Ephesians, we see God revealing things to us that we really need to know, things that are important, and yet things you'll never figure out unless God tells you about them. Our theme today is: The Greatest Mystery Ever Solved!

Here's an unsolved mystery: how do you really bring people together? Isn't it true that we live in a very divided world? What are things that divide people? Ethnic background would be an obvious one. How comfortable would you feel around someone who is Japanese or Chinese? How about racial divisions? In the United States African Americans feel that police officers, particularly white ones single them out, and treat them unfairly. So we have protests with signs saying: Black Lives matter. Religion is a divider too, isn't it. There's the false idea out there that all religions are the same – it doesn't matter what you believe. But if that's true, then why is religion such a divider? People of different religions separate into different groups because they believe different things. What else divides people? How about your economic situation? The rich people hang out with the rich people. The middle class people hang out with the middle class people. The poor people hang out with the poor people. Money divides people. And the list could go on and on.

The unsolved mystery: how do you really bring all these people together? And I mean truly together. Some in the United States want open borders. Others want a wall. Some believe we need to get rid of President Trump. Others believe we should give him a chance to make America great again. Some believe we should deal with North Korea totally through sanctions, others, we need to stop them with force, before they destroy us. A crazy man goes on a shooting spree from a hotel window in Vegas, and kills 50 and injures 500. Immediately, there are cries for gun control. We are divided over gun

control.. Some who want to take our guns away from us, and have the government protect us. Others say, don't mess with the 2<sup>nd</sup> Amendment of our Constitution. I need to protect myself, because the government sure can't. Divisions.

Churches have tried to unite people by watering down the Bible, not talking about sin in sermons, or Jesus Christ. Just give people some practical information in sermons on how to be happier in their lives, raise their kids properly, and teach them to do community service. There is a major movement among liberal churches today, to unite. It's called the ecumenical movement. And here's how it works – throw out the important things in the Bible, throw out your beliefs – things that you know are in God's Word, don't mention Jesus Christ too much, and that's how you get rid of your differences. Now we all can get together! That hasn't proven to be a very good solution. Sure, different churches are getting people together, but they no longer believe in anything. They no longer have the truth of the Gospel, the pure message of God's forgiveness in Jesus Christ.

And so how do you solve this mystery? How do you really bring people together? The Apostle Paul tells us: "Surely you have heard about the administration of God's grace that was given to me for you, that is, the mystery made known to me by revelation." God revealed to the Apostle Paul how to bring people together. "In reading this, you will be able to understand my insight into the mystery of Christ" – the mystery of Christ. So the solution to bringing people together has something to do with Jesus Christ. "Which was not made known to men in other generations as it has now been revealed by the Spirit to God's holy apostles and prophets." Do you see what this is saying here? The solution to bringing people together has always been around, but it was hard to see. But now, the Holy Spirit is working through the Word – the apostles and prophets – and here in the Word we find the solution to the mystery of Christ. Here it is: "This mystery is that through the Gospel, the Gentiles are heirs TOGETHER with Israel, members TOGETHER of one body, and sharers TOGETHER in the promise in Christ Jesus."

The mystery has been solved! How do you bring Jews and Gentiles together? In the first century, these two groups of people were very very different, and not very fond of each other. They had different diets, different lifestyles, different everything. And yet, God was able to bring these two opposite groups of people together – how? There it is, in verse 6 – through the Gospel, the promise in Christ Jesus.

You see, the Gospel removes the thing that really divides us. What do you think it is like to live in the UP of Michian? Every year they get a ton of snow! Piles of snow everywhere, and snow like that keeps people from getting together. Students can't get together at school. Employees can't get together at work. Snow like that limits people in what they can do. If some of the snow is removed, that's good. But if it's all removed, then people once again can get together at schools and workplaces and restaurants and wherever else they go.

We need something removed in our lives before we can really get together. And that's our sin. You and I can't see it, but there are huge, invisible piles of sin, just like the snow in Michigan and Wisconsin, and that's what keeps people apart. Sure we have our ethnic and economic differences, but the thing that really keeps people apart are those invisible piles of sin. How do you bring people together? You can't pretend that those piles of sin aren't there! That would be like pretending that the snow isn't there in

Michigan and Wisconsin. How do you get rid of those piles of sin in your life? How do you get rid of those piles of sin in the lives of the people around you? You can't really get together until that sin is gone. It's an unsolved mystery, until you realize what Jesus Christ has done for you.

Jesus is the key to solving this mystery. Jesus is the great sin-remover. The great uniter. That's why he came! There on the cross, you and I can get rid of those piles of sin in our lives. There at the cross, dumptruck after dumptruck of sin was piled onto the shoulders of Jesus Christ, and there, he took all of our sins away. And once people realize this and believe that their sin is really gone, really forgiven because of Jesus Christ, then they can really and truly get together, no matter what their differences might be.

Our church body, the Wisconsin Synod, is part of a bigger church body, called the Confessional Evangelical Lutheran Conference. These are churches all over the world, and we're all very different in the way we dress and talk and in the things we eat, but we all believe the same thing! We all believe that the Bible is God's Word, and that through Jesus Christ all of our sins have been taken away. A couple years ago representatives of these church bodies got together for a conference, and it was quite an event. How could it be, that these people at that conference who are so different could get along so well? They looked different, they talked different, they ate different, and yet, they were truly a united group of people. How?

Only one thing can do that, my friends, and that is the message of the Gospel – that all those piles of sin in your life have been taken away by the Lamb of God. That's the solution to the mystery – that's how you get people together - the Gospel of Jesus Christ can do that – nothing else.

That's what Mary and Joseph and the wise men from the east had in common. Mary and Joseph – not rich. The wise men – rich. Mary and Joseph – not very educated. The wise men – very educated. Mary and Joseph – Jews. The wise men – Gentiles. Very very different people. What brought them together? The Christchild, and what he would someday do.

One of the main messages of the Epiphany season is that we have a world-wide Savior – that no matter who you are, what your background, no matter how different you think you are, Jesus is still for you. He brings you into a group of people called Christians, people who have all kinds of differences, but people who have one thing in common that binds them very closely together, and that's the most important thing of all – the forgiveness of sins in Christ. It's no longer a mystery. Today, God reveals his grace to you. Amen.