

## February 15

### A Mysterious Gospel - For Everyone!

***“For Jews demand signs and Greeks seek wisdom, but we preach Christ crucified, a stumbling block to Jews and folly to Gentiles, but to those who are called, both Jews and Greeks, Christ the power of God and the wisdom of God” (1 Corinthians 1:22-24, ESV)***

What is a “mystery?” In our popular understanding of the word, a *mystery* is something to be solved—a cold case, an unsolved crime, an occurrence for which there is no easy or apparent cause or answer. It’s a job for special investigators - for Hercule Poirot or Sherlock Holmes or Father Brown. But that wasn’t always what the word “mystery” referred to. To the ancient Greeks and Romans, a “mystery” was a certain kind of religious cult that was secret in nature and had teachings that only initiates were allowed to know.

For centuries, people across the Mediterranean sought acceptance into these religions, undergoing rites and ordeals in order to join the mystery cults and be let in on their secrets. Some included strange requirements for initiation—the famous Eleusinian Mysteries of the cult of Demeter in Greece, for example, required that initiates raise piglets and take them for a bath in the sea before offering them up for sacrifice in the rites.<sup>1</sup> But the major feature of the ancient mystery cults was that they harbored secret knowledge to be shared with only a select few.

But Christianity is different. The mysteries here aren't only for initiates, and they are not to be kept secret; the mysteries are for all people though certainly, they may require explanation. Indeed, the mystery at the heart of the Christian faith can present a difficulty to those who don’t understand it—it is a stumbling block to Jews and folly to Greeks (1 Corinthians 1:23). The mystery, for Christians, is the *Gospel*, and while its meaning had previously been hidden from the world (1 Corinthians 2:8-9), with Christ’s coming, the meaning of the Gospel has been revealed and made known.<sup>2</sup>

Unlike the mysteries of old, the meaning of the Gospel isn’t revealed through complex rituals or through the required study of arcane lore. Instead, its fullness is revealed in Christ’s work on the cross. For as Paul says, “[A]nd I, when I came to you, brothers, did not come proclaiming to you the testimony of God with lofty speech or wisdom. For I decided to know nothing among you except Jesus Christ and him crucified” (1 Corinthians 2:1-2, ESV). The mystery of the Gospel is found in its simple proclamation of Christ and Him crucified, and its meaning is illuminated by the Holy Spirit working through those who proclaim it, for “we impart

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<sup>1</sup> Interestingly, this activity of going for a swim with a piglet prior to the rites resulted in one of the world’s first recorded shark attacks, preserved in Plutarch’s *Life of Phocion* (28.3).

<sup>2</sup> St. Paul speaks of the Gospel as being the mystery, and it is in its broadest sense—the other mysteries of the faith (like the Sacraments) flow from it.

this in words not taught by human wisdom but taught by the Spirit, interpreting spiritual truths to those who are spiritual” (1 Corinthians 2:13).

The Holy Spirit prepares those who hear the Gospel to understand its mystery. The Spirit works through the words of Scripture and through the words of the preacher to make the Gospel known. And the amazing thing is that the words of the Gospel, the very Word of God, through the work of the Spirit, can bring about faith and understanding in the people who hear and read it. The Word of God illuminates and reveals itself. The mystery is self-revealing. Those who hear it don't need to go through trials or go swimming with a piglet. They need only to hear, and the Holy Spirit will do His work. God himself will reveal the mystery, and He will reveal it to everyone who hears.

***Prayer:*** *Dear God, we thank You for revealing the mystery of the Gospel to us through Your Word and Holy Spirit. Grant us faith and understanding in Christ's great work on the cross, and a willingness to share this mystery with other people, through Jesus Christ, our Lord. Amen.*

Feb. 15 NN – Philemon and Onesimus