



Ephesians 1:3-14; Mark 6:14-29
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Think of the most beautiful thing you have ever seen. What is it? The Gulf of Naples with Mt. Vesuvius? The Grand Canyon? Niagara Falls? A sunset, a powerful storm, a rainbow? The bright colors of a coral reef? Images of a supernova and other marvels of the Universe? A newborn baby? A baby asleep?

What feelings do you experience? Awe? A sense of peace? Respect for nature? Gratitude and appreciation for the simplicity/complexity of beauty?

What physical emotions? Expansiveness of the heart? Fullness of spirit? An accelerated heartbeat? Lightness of heart? Calm? Goose bumps? Laughter? Tears?

If we respond with such intense feelings when in the presence of created beauty, what about when we consider where this beauty comes from? If God is the source of beauty, God is Beauty itself. God is Light. God is Peace. What awe does that inspire?

Read today's rich epistle segment ([Ephesians 1:3-14](#)). You'll find:

- An invitation to bless God, Father of our *Lord Jesus Christ*... (v. 3a) – ever thought about blessing God?
- This is the same God who has blessed us *in Christ* with heavenly blessings (v. 3b)

- God was thinking of us (chose us *in Christ*) even before the world was created to be holy and blameless in the presence of God (v. 4).
- God’s pleasure in our adoption (v. 5): people who are strangers become part of a family. God adopts (includes) us who are *estranged* from God but not *strangers* to God). The adoption/inclusion happens *through Jesus Christ*.
- The purpose of the adoption itself is the “praise of God’s glorious grace that he freely bestowed on us *in the Beloved (Son)*” (v. 6). What God wants is for us to enjoy and be in awe of God’s grace. Awe fills us with joy and gratitude.
- By God’s grace in him (*in Christ*) we have reunification (redemption) with God (v. 7). God spreads blessings not sparingly but lavishly (v. 8). God is generous in giving.
- The grandeur or mystery of God’s will is made known to us and that is wisdom per se. God finds pleasure in letting us in on this mystery *in Christ* (v. 9).
- Mystery is not lack of knowledge, but knowledge infused with awe which only the initiated, those to whom the secret is revealed, understand.¹
- God’s plan is the full reconciliation of heaven and earth in God in the fullness of time (v. 10).
- Adoption in Christ guarantees inheritance for both Jews and Gentiles (vv. 11-12).
- Those who hear the gospel and believe are marked *in Christ* with the seal of the Spirit (v. 13)
- That is the pledge (mark, sign, commitment)² of God’s promise of inheritance (v. 14).

¹ [Matthew 11:25](#); [Matthew 13:35](#); [Luke 18:34](#); [Luke 19:42](#); [Mark 4:22](#); [1 Corinthians 2:7](#); [Colossians 1:25-27](#)

² [Genesis 9:13-17](#)

- The Trinity is present through this passage.

Read today's dreadful gospel passage ([Mark 6:14-29](#)). You'll see:

- A second open question³ about the identity of Jesus: Is he John the Baptist, Ilijah, or one of the prophets? Herod is convinced it is John, whom he had killed, risen to life. (Mk 6:14-15)
 - NOTE: Introduction of the theme of the Resurrection (Mk 6:16)
 - Herod Antipas showed interest in John (Mk 6:20) just as later he showed interest in Jesus (Lk 23:7-12)
 - Herod and Herodias' illicit marriage and John's imprisonment for speaking truth to power (probably based on [Leviticus 18:16](#) and [20:21](#)); Herodias' grudge against John the Baptist; Herod's birthday banquet; Herodias' (the daughter, aka Salome by other sources) dance; Herodias' (the mother) revenge against John; beheading of John (Mk 6:17-28); John's burial by his disciples who refuse to be intimidated and stand by their teacher (Mk 6:29)
 - Good News? John's faithfulness to God's mission: speaking truth to oppressive power despite all consequences, even his own death. His end mirrors Christ's own. Stick close to Jesus and lose your head.
 - Family dynamics: How are decisions made? How do we handle differences of opinion, conflicts? Who has the last word? Herod doesn't dominate his wife. Violent and powerful as he is, he's cowed by her!

³ Mark deals with Jesus' identity throughout. However, a clear first question about his identity can be found in the previous verses, Mark 6:1-6.

- Power dynamics: A tyrant sets himself above the law and can choose to do whatever he wants. He has power over people's life. He can use people as a disposable plaything and abuse them at his whim.
- Herod is hardly an outwitted dupe in this episode. His idiotic pledge to reward his stepdaughter with up to half of his kingdom reveals him as arrogant and reckless. He uses his power in terrible ways. His unwillingness to risk embarrassment "out of regard for his oaths and for the guests" (Mark 6:26) makes him quite shameless. Nothing matters more to him than nursing his own vanity; he will suppress whatever fear of God remains within him, squelch any spiritual curiosity he might experience, and snuff out the life of a prophet—all to protect his own interests.
- This scene emphasizes the cycles of misery and cruelty that ensnare the world. Human society inflicts as much harm as demons and death. Leaders' actions have widespread consequences.

God's plan is for all of us to experience the incredible goodness and generosity of God who calls all of us to be reconciled to one another and together with God's creation to be one in God.

God's promise of redemption and reconciliation is offered to all, even to those of us who are most alienated and deformed by sin.

May our faithfulness to the gospel of truth be a witness to the mystery of salvation in Christ. Amen.