

“Revealing the Mystery!”—Romans 16:25-27

The text for this sermon, the theme of which is, “Revealing the Mystery!”, is Romans 16:25-27 → *Now to Him Who is able to strengthen you according to my gospel and the preaching of Jesus Christ, according to the revelation of the mystery that was kept secret for long ages but has now been disclosed and through the prophetic writings has been made known to all nations, according to the command of the eternal God, to bring about the obedience of faith—to the only wise God be glory forevermore through Jesus Christ! Amen.* This is the text.

Dear Brothers and Sisters in Christ Jesus:

Mystery accompanies Christmas especially in the hearts and lives of children. For many people, the wonder, excitement and joy of the Christmas season is bound up in children as they witness their eager expectation to open their presents under the tree. The mystery bound up in that present wrapped with pretty paper can be quite alluring and disturbing at the same time. It’s not unusual to see a child pick up his present under the tree to shake it and feel its weight in an effort to guess what it is. Ever know anyone who found their hidden present, carefully opened it before the proper time to reveal the mystery inside, carefully re-wrapped it and placed it back in it’s hiding place? Uh huh! I thought

so! The mystery of it all was just too much to handle.

Gift-giving is so bound up with mystery at Christmas that the wonder of gift-giving is lost when the person guesses correctly what you got them for Christmas before opening the gift. The joy of receiving is destroyed when you peek beforehand and know what you're getting. However, the mystery revealed at its proper time and place can be a blessing as you receive a gift with joy and thanksgiving.

The anticipation we experience of getting to reveal some "mysteries" at Christmas with opening gifts was actually created by God when He revealed *the mystery* of the ages on that first Christmas Day. In verse 25 of our text Paul refers to *the preaching of Jesus Christ as a mystery* which was *kept secret for long ages past*. This *mystery* was spoken of by God *long ago, at many times and in many ways through the prophets* He had sent to His people. (cf. Hebrews 1:1)

In fact, 1 Peter 1:10-11 even refers to the anticipation they had within them of "Christmas." It says: *Concerning this salvation, the prophets who prophesied about the grace that was to be yours searched and inquired carefully, inquiring what person or time the Spirit of Christ in them was indicating when He predicted the sufferings of Christ and the subsequent glories*. I can picture them sort of "shaking up the Scriptures" in the hopes of seeing the Christ revealed, much like we might shake a wrapped gift to guess what's inside! Notice that those prophets *searched*

*and inquired carefully, inquiring what person or time **the Spirit of Christ in them was indicating**.* They wanted to experience the revealing of this **mystery in God's time and God's way!**

This is very important. They recognized that God is in control of "Christmas," not themselves. This may be a difficult "pill" for us to swallow when we can often get caught up in the feeling that we are somehow the creators of Christmas, acting as if the glory of it all depends on the family traditions or the nature of the anticipated gifts, decorations, dinners, family being together and so forth. In the midst of being the recipients of the Christ **revealed** we need to reveal in our celebrations that Jesus is Lord rather than acting as if we're the creators of Christmas.

This *mystery*, even though it is presented in a "glorious" fashion by our festivities today, was not all that pretty when it was revealed at the right time by God. The circumstances of Jesus' birth were not the "glorious" picture we have in our celebrations and many of our songs. A young girl found pregnant out of wedlock, suspected of infidelity by her fiancé. Then the Christ having to be born somewhere in a small insignificant village, maybe in the open country or a stinky stable, since she had to lay her newborn in a feeding trough for animals.

The most graphic picture of this revelation is the sinful reaction of the people during the time this Gift was being "unwrapped." *When the*

fullness of time had come, God sent forth His Son, (cf. Galatians 4:4) Who entered His public ministry, introduced by John the Baptizer. However, while “unwrapping the gift”—that is, revealing Himself as the promised Savior—John 1:11 says that *He came to His own, and His own people did not receive Him* as the promised Christ. This rejection became so brutal that it took the form of death on a cross. The “glorious” picture of Christmas is constantly clouded over with the curse of sin and its judgment on us sinners.

However, another part of the mystery is that hidden in the rejection and cross is the Gift! The Gift of God’s Son, Who paid the penalty for our sinfulness by His perfect sacrifice for the punishment of our sins, revealing *the mystery* in all it’s fullness! It is God’s love and grace for us broken sinners! When God “unwrapped” this Gift for all people it truly was a *mystery*, one which most people, then and now, could not understand. This is the nature of grace. For example, when someone gives you a gift have you ever said, “You didn’t have to do that.” Such a statement implies that you shouldn’t have received the gift unless you earned it somehow and felt worthy of it. Of course they didn’t have to get you a gift. If they **had** to give it to you it would no longer be a gift. That’s called a business exchange. Maybe they just **wanted** to give it but you didn’t know how to receive it gracefully.

Because we cannot fathom pure grace verse 26 of our text say it has

to be *disclosed* to us *through the prophetic writings*. God gives us the Holy Spirit Who reveals His wonderful grace in Jesus, making Him *known to all nations* through His written Word, so that we can believe and bask in this great *mystery* for us! 1 Corinthians 1:12 says: *We have received . . . the Spirit Who is from God, **that we might understand the things freely given us by God.*** The mystery of Jesus Christ and the salvation He brings you has to be revealed in you *according to the command of the eternal God*. It happens in God's way and in His time by the power of the Holy Spirit working in your heart through His Word!

How humbling all of this is for us frail broken sinners. The revealing of the Person & Work of Jesus through His humiliation, culminating in His death on a cross, caused the centurion who nailed Him there to confess: *Truly this man was the Son of God!* (cf. Mark 15:39) It caused Joseph of Arimathea, who was *a respected member of the council* responsible for crucifying Jesus (cf. Mark 15:43) and *was a disciple of Jesus, but secretly for fear of the Jews* (cf. John 19:38), to now openly express his faith in Jesus as the Christ by giving Him a proper burial. (cf. John 19:42) When the mystery of God's love, grace and forgiveness in Christ is revealed to your sinful heart the Holy Spirit will humble you to see your sin, move you to confess your sin and trust in Jesus for the forgiveness of your sin. This is how, as Colossians 1:27 says, God chooses *to make known how great among you are the riches of the glory*

of this mystery, which is Christ in you, the hope of glory.

Is this opened *mystery*—Jesus, God’s Son coming into our world to take on our flesh and be our Savior—the cause of your joy and excitement this Christmas? As we focus on God’s ultimate *mystery* being revealed in Jesus Christ we do not get all that pretty of a picture of Christmas. Yet the result gives us reason to give God all the glory for our Christmas joy! Verse 26 of our text refers to it as God bringing *about the obedience of faith* in us. Not only does the Holy Spirit bring us to be obedient to God’s Word and believe in Jesus but He also works obedience to God’s commands through us. It is the good works and words which flow as the fruit of faith and give witness to others that the mystery of God’s grace is for them as well!

When we are strengthened in this Gospel fulfillment which God has accomplished in Jesus in His way and in His time then we will recognize God as the One Who causes true joy, anticipation and excitement this Christmas! *To the only wise God be glory forevermore through Jesus Christ! Amen.*

Thanks be to God for His indescribable gift!
(2 Corinthians 9:15 NIV)

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