

Scripture Reading: I Corinthians 2

“1 And I, brethren, when I came to you, did not come with excellence of speech or of wisdom declaring to you the testimony of God. 2 For I determined not to know anything among you except Jesus Christ and Him crucified. 3 I was with you in weakness, in fear, and in much trembling. 4 And my speech and my preaching were not with persuasive words of human wisdom, but in demonstration of the Spirit and of power, 5 that your faith should not be in the wisdom of men but in the power of God. 6 However, we speak wisdom among those who are mature, yet not the wisdom of this age, nor of the rulers of this age, who are coming to nothing. 7 But we speak the wisdom of God in a mystery, the hidden wisdom which God ordained before the ages for our glory, 8 which none of the rulers of this age knew; for had they known, they would not have crucified the Lord of glory.”

“The Mystery of Advent”

Pastor Steve Macias, who some of you know, and the Saints in Los Altos send their Christian greetings and it is good to be back here at Church of the King. Pastor Liberati did a good job of introducing the Advent season by turning to the Apostle Paul for instruction about the timing, the manner and purpose of the Incarnation of our Savior. I won't quiz you on those points, but if you need to review them, that message is posted on our web page and I hope my sermon title does not have him thinking that I might confuse everything this morning! Lord willing, these messages will complement each other nicely. And so today we will continue to celebrate the glorious Advent season, remembering that is it both the end and beginning of the Church calendar! As Pastor Liberati did last week, I too have chosen a text from the Apostle Paul where he speaks of the wisdom of God in a mystery which can apply to both of the comings of Jesus Christ: His advent & His glorious return!

- **My major focus today will be on the Advent of Jesus where He came as the little baby in Bethlehem to save His people from their sins.**

We need to understand how these advents are mysterious because it is a mystery that has changed us, has changed the world and a mystery that we are to proclaim!

- **We must always remember that neither we nor the Church calendar can leave Jesus in the manger:**

Christmas is followed by Epiphany where we see the work of Jesus revealed and then we come to the Easter season where we see the work of Jesus accomplished or fulfilled!

Just as the angel proclaimed to Joseph: “[Mary] will give birth to a son, and you are to give him the name Jesus, because he will save his people from their sins.”

- **That is the simple message of Christmas!**

That is the message that we are to proclaim to a needy world and we should proclaim it as the angels did to those shepherds on the first Christmas!

"Do not be afraid, for behold, I bring you good tidings of great joy which will be to all people.

11 For there is born to you this day in the city of David a Savior, who is Christ the Lord.

Followed by a heavenly host praising God and saying: 14 "Glory to God in the highest, And on earth peace, goodwill toward men!"

- **Now that all seems pretty straight forward so why would I want to consider how it is a mystery?**

To answer that, we first we need to think a bit about “mysteries.” Mysteries fall into two major categories:

- A mystery can be something I am not able to understand...
- Or a mystery can be something that has not yet been revealed to me.

There are mysteries about the nature and work of God that will never be known to those who are mere creatures. We see this truth in Ecclesiastes where King Solomon proclaims that, “11 [God] has made everything beautiful in its time. Also, He has put eternity in their hearts, except that no one can find out the work that God does from beginning to end.”

- If everything to be known about God was this type of mystery, we would have NO knowledge of Him or His character.

The wonder that should always humble us, is how God has revealed Himself to us in ways that we can understand.

- We must never allow the fact that some of God’s ways are unknowable to keep us from rejoicing in what we do know!

That brings us to the second category of mystery, where something we can understand has not yet been fully revealed to us... The enjoyment of a good mystery novel comes with your trying to figure out what the author knows from the beginning and is now revealing to you over time as you read his or her mystery novel.

In our text this morning we heard the Apostle Paul refer to such a mystery as he speaks about the power of God: “6 However, we speak wisdom among those who are mature, yet not the wisdom of this age, nor of the rulers of this age, who are coming to nothing. 7 But we speak the wisdom of God in a mystery, the hidden wisdom which God ordained before the ages for our glory, 8 which none of the rulers of this age knew; for had they known, they would not have crucified the Lord of glory.”

- What I want us to consider this morning is how the coming of Jesus represents both types of mystery!

Perhaps a simple example from life can help us understand the significance of each and how they relate to the Incarnation of Jesus.

- Let us say we have a young man of 12 or 13 years of age who appears to have a real interest in science and mechanics and sees either as potential career choices.

His parents, as those tasked with his education, would of course want to answer any questions he might have and provide him with good resources and examples to inspire his interest. In time, the boy comes to them saying that he must know about two things or he is finished with these subjects:

- He wants to completely understand gravity and the workings of the internal combustion engine.

Yes, at that point both are complete mysteries to this young inquisitive mind, but they are of different sorts:

- With the engine he can be given courses or books that would explain to him how it works and he can even become a fine mechanic in time with the proper training & experience.

This is a mystery that should be revealed and can be understood.

- What the young man needs is instruction and patience to learn.

The mystery of gravity is of a different sort: There the young man would come to understand, as we all have, that with gravity the more you learn, the more you realize how much more you have to learn. Gravity is not something this young man can fully understand no matter how many teachers he has or courses he takes.

- He can measure it, describe it and even use it, but the understanding of how it works or even just what it is, is simply beyond his limited reach.

Here the young man needs to have the humility to understand his limitations as a mere creature and still be able to go on to be a great physicist who studies God's grand creation.

- This young man could also take two very foolish courses, which are very similar to what sadly far too many do with the Christmas accounts.

When it comes to the mystery of the engine, he can learn to understand it or he could foolishly say I don't have time for all that learning, I just want to dig in and work on some cars.

- NOT the kind of mechanic we would want to have service our cars, and certainly not a good way to approach our study of God's Word!

With regard to the understanding of gravity, he could humbly accept what little can be known... Or he could foolishly say that IF he cannot know EVERYTHING about something so basic then why bother with science!

- Thus, he and the rest of us would lose whatever contributions he could have made in the field of science.

And yes, ignoring the incarnation because it is difficult to understand is why the Christmas season now has so little about the Savior and rather filled with consumerism, wild parties, along with snowmen, reindeer and an overweight guy from the North Pole!

So keep those examples in mind as we unpack the mystery of the Incarnation because both are clearly involved.

- First, we must understand that the incarnation of Jesus is much more than just a cute manger scene!

Yes, those manger scenes and all the other traditions that we have at this time of year can be good reminders of the great work that has been done...

- But we must always keep the incarnation central and understand how important it was!

The coming of God as a man is one of the great mysteries of Christendom, both in the fact that it cannot be exhaustively understood, like gravity, but also in how it was revealed just as we can learn about engines.

- All the way back in the Garden the Savior was promised as the Seed of the woman who would crush the head of the seed of the serpent.

All throughout the Old Testament the Seed of the Woman is pictured as a sacrificial lamb and then the Prophet Isaiah more clearly tells the Saints that Messiah will come as a little babe.

Isaiah 7: "14 Therefore the Lord Himself will give you a sign: Behold, the virgin shall conceive and bear a Son, and shall call His name Immanuel."

Repeated of course by the Angel who proclaimed the birth of Jesus to Joseph: "Behold, the virgin shall be with child, and bear a Son, and they shall call His name Immanuel," which is translated, "God with us." [Matthew 1:23]

The mystery of the Incarnation which we cannot as creatures exhaustively understand is how God can become man: God with us!

- We can describe it and know its power in the same way we do with gravity, but we simply cannot explain how it works as we would a car engine.
- What we do know is that it was a major and powerful moment in history and that is the part of the mystery that was revealed.

The Gospel accounts show us how the incarnation was revealed to those alive at that point in history, and with their accounts all of us can know as well.

This is why the Apostle John wrote near the end of his account that, “truly Jesus did many other signs in the presence of His disciples, which are not written in this book;

31 but these are written that you may believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God, and that believing you may have life in His name.”

- **The revelation of this important event begins with all of the “hints” if you will in the Old Testament about the coming of Jesus.**

On the road to Emmaus, after His resurrection, Jesus told His disciples how they should have known about Him and His work from the Law and the Prophets.

Like the parts of those great mystery novels where you go back & say, ‘I should have known!’ or ‘how did I miss that?’

- **This is how God chose to tell His story and we should rejoice in it!**

But with the coming of Messiah in history, it is time for the real event where all is revealed, like when the great detective gathers everyone together to explain what happened. The Gospel accounts present the life and ministry of Jesus and there the Incarnation is a major focus. Matthew begins with the genealogy of Jesus and presents the incarnation from a Jewish perspective with the revelations to Joseph and the account of King Herod’s wickedness.

- **An early reminder that while He came unto His own, they would ultimately reject Him!**

Luke is writing the orderly account for his Gentile friend Theophilus and as such gives us the most details about the event and firmly grounds it in Roman history with the census of Caesar Augustus.

A reminder that the nation of Israel is in that moment of history the “captive that mourns in lonely exile.” The most powerful presentation of the Incarnation is given by the Apostle John, when he proclaims that “in the beginning was the Word and the Word was with God and the Word was God,” & coming down to verse 14 where he declares, “and the Word became flesh and dwelt among us!”

As we go through the rest of the Advent & Christmas seasons we will sing about and study the many details that were revealed:

The parents of Jesus, the relatives of Jesus, the miraculous conception of the virgin Mary, those faithful shepherds and the angel proclamations. We will remember faithful Saints like Simeon and Anna and see wicked men like Herod and his soldiers.

Now as I said earlier, it is important to see what has been revealed because it is a mystery that has changed us, a mystery that has changed the world and one that we are to proclaim.

As we announce each week in our time of confession and absolution, Jesus has come to save His people from their sins and that has changed US and all who belong to Jesus.

- **We have been transferred from the Kingdom of darkness into His Kingdom of Light for all eternity!**

But the Gospel is not just about ME, or even us collectively as the people of God. Yes the Angel Gabriel assured Joseph that Jesus would save His people from their sins, which He did on the cross and confirmed in the power of His resurrection!

But we also have the proclamations of the other angels to the shepherds. They said that the birth of Jesus brought “good tidings of great joy which will be to all people. Then the angel was joined by “a multitude of the heavenly host praising God and saying:

14 "Glory to God in the highest, And on earth peace, goodwill toward men!"

The message of Christmas is one of Good News, not because it is a cute or clever story about the birth of a baby to poor parents. It is not good news because it is a season where we all seem to get along better...

- **No, it is Good News because God has entered into history to deal with the problem of sin, both in His first Advent and His glorious return as the judge of all the earth!**
- **The Gospel is obviously good news for those who put their faith and trust in Jesus because they can know the joy of forgiveness and look forward to a glorious eternity.**

But we must also remember that it is good news for the rest of the world as well because sin and wickedness are being judged. The blessings of Christendom have impacted not only Christians but the whole world! Even those who loudly reject God and His Gospel are often the same ones who demand justice; the very thing that Jesus came to bring!

The incarnation of Jesus is Good News! Good News of Joy for us and all the world and this is why it is to be shared and shared in all of its fullness...

- **We are to share the story of Christmas and the story of Christmas is the work of Jesus!**

It is a mystery that God had kept hidden until the fullness of time and now it is a mystery that has been revealed and is to be shared.’ “the wisdom of God in a mystery, the hidden wisdom which God ordained before the ages for our glory...

And yes, the Second advent of Jesus, His glorious return, brings the same type of mysteries which I will only touch on to encourage further study and discussion.

The Apostle Paul in teaching us about the importance and power of the resurrection of Jesus points to where history is going because of the work of Jesus: “20 But now Christ is risen from the dead, and has become the firstfruits of those who have fallen asleep. 21 For since by man came death, by Man also came the resurrection of the dead. 22 For as in Adam all die, even so in Christ all shall be made alive. 23 But each one in his own order: Christ the firstfruits, afterward those who are Christ’s at His coming. 24 Then comes the end, when He delivers the kingdom to God the Father, when He puts an end to all rule and all authority and power. 25 For He must reign till He has put all enemies under His feet. 26 The last enemy that will be destroyed is death.”

Paul has revealed a mystery that we can study for the rest of our lives, a mystery that should give us great hope and encouragement to live and share the Gospel!

It is also a mystery that we can never fully understand, but one that teaches us to humbly accept that God is in control, and that in the end we win!

And that is why we can proclaim, “MERRY CHRISTMAS!

Communion Meditation

There were dark and dangerous portions of the Christmas account, which God’s people had to trust Him in the midst of...

Psalm 23 “Yea, though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death, I will fear no evil; For You are with me; Your rod and Your staff, they comfort me. 5 You prepare a table before me in the presence of my enemies; You anoint my head with oil; My cup runs over. 6 Surely goodness and mercy shall follow me All the days of my life; And I will dwell in the house of the Lord Forever.