

## Star of Wonder Ephesians 3: 1-12

For the better part of two months, most of us have heard all kinds of seasonal music on our radios, televisions, cd players and smartphones. The songs varied from those that are strictly secular in nature, such as Frosty the Snowman, Jingle Bells and John Lennon's Imagine, to those that are most sacred – Handel's Messiah, O Holy Night, Silent Night, Joy to the World and the foreboding carol we sang earlier- We Three Kings. The music that we hear, the songs that we sing, the gifts that we bring, and the extra effort people make to be polite to one another remind us that Advent and Christmas are the most wonderful times of the year.

But now that the twelve days of Christmas have past, we tend to put the majesty of the season behind us. If we are not careful, we may lose sight of our brightest and most wondrous Star, our Lord Jesus Christ. We look at the signs and symbols of Christmas much like we look at a snowstorm in April- we are tired of them already and want to move on to something else.

Perhaps the main reason for that is those of us living in the 21<sup>st</sup> century no longer experience the mystery of the season. Unlike the Magi of old, there seems little need to follow the Star of Bethlehem for we already know where it ends. Much like reading a mystery novel or watching a scary movie the second or third time, it is not quite as interesting as the first. It's not as much fun to open a package when you already know what is inside, although some of us mystery solvers do enjoy considering the size shape and weight of the box and accurately predicting what is inside before we tear off the wrapping paper.

Some of us don't like surprises, and to avoid being disappointed we make out our wish lists with the exact color, size, and brand of something we want or ask for the gift that fits everyone perfectly-cash. Failing that, we travel to the store, gift receipt in hand, seeking to exchange or return it for something that will make us happy. The busiest shopping day of the year used to be Black Friday, but today it is the day after Christmas, because so many people just can't wait to return their gifts that weren't quite right.

It is part of our human nature to have our desires met and to have all our questions answered, and when we don't get exactly what we want – whether it is something we have just unwrapped from under the tree or a satisfactory answer to a difficult question, we can be disappointed or even angry. And even if we are successful in exchanging it, getting the replacement just isn't as much fun as opening the original on Christmas morning. The mystery is gone.

Speaking of mystery and gifts, imagine her excitement when Mary saw the gifts of gold and Frankincense the Magi brought to her two-year-old son. They were mysterious gifts, gifts fit for a king, not the son of a peasant woman living in the hills of Judea. Then imagine her bewilderment or even fear when she caught a whiff of the container of myrrh, an ointment used for burying the dead. Certainly, she wondered what all of it meant. She would not understand until some thirty years later on that first **Easter Sunday when the mystery of Christmas was partially revealed.**

The stanzas of We Three Kings paint a picture of the mystery of Christmas. The wise men let nothing stop them from following and finding the star of Christmas, Jesus the Christ. They brought Him gold, because He was born a king, a king forever, a king over us all to reign. They brought Him incense, a pleasing aroma raising to God almighty, a symbol of prayer and praising and voices raising in worship to God on high. They brought Him myrrh, its perfume a bitter reminder that the King would be crucified, sorrowing, sighing, bleeding, and dying for the sins of humanity, then sealed in a cold stone tomb. But they also knew He would rise, King and God and sacrifice. Alleluia, Alleluia, Alleluia, sounds through the earth and skies.

The Apostle Paul speaks of this great mystery in the Scripture passage we just heard. In secular terms, a mystery is something secret or unexplainable. When we see the word mystery in the Bible it is typically describing something previously kept hidden or something unexplainable that has been solved with God's help through divine revelation. Unlike a murder mystery or complex crime scene, science and human reason alone are of little help in solving Biblical mysteries. **A Biblical mystery refers to a truth not previously revealed.**

The mystery of Christmas is the mystery of Christ, the miracles of Christ, His birth, death, and resurrection. The mystery of Christ is also the mystery of the Gospel, which is God revealing why He sent His Son into this fallen and hurting world. God's desire is not for us to remain in the dark, but to know Him and His will for our lives. **God's holy mysteries are revealed to those who seek to understand them.** Proverbs 25:2 reminds us that "it is the glory of God to conceal things, but the glory of kings is to search things out". Deuteronomy 29:29 "The secret things belong to the Lord our God, but the things that are revealed belong to us and to our children forever, that we may do all the words of this law".

The mystery or question of how a fallen and sinful people would be reconciled to a holy and perfect God was answered through the birth of His Son Jesus Christ. Though we may not read it on Christmas Eve, Ephesians 3 is as just as much a part of the Christmas story as the accounts of the birth of Christ in Mathew and Luke. In verse 6, we see that God's plan for the redemption and restoration of His creation includes Gentiles, people like you and I, those who were not part of the original covenant promises God made to His people. His plan was made possible through the birth of His Son Christ. Another way of saying that is that **God raised us up through His Son Jesus Christ to be His people.** We see it as a mystery, but Paul describes it as the eternal purpose and the wisdom of God.

Colossians 1:26-27 The mystery hidden for ages and generations but now revealed to his saints. To them God chose to make known how great among the Gentiles are the riches of the glory of this mystery, which is Christ in you, the hope of glory. **God's holy mysteries are revealed to those who seek to understand them.**

The interesting part of the mystery of Christmas it that it wasn't just an earthly mystery but a heavenly one. Look at verses 8-10 with me. The angels in heaven will witness the wisdom and glory of God through the church, the true followers of Jesus Christ. Several other Scriptures (1 Pet. 1:12; 1 Cor. 4:9; Heb. 12:22) confirm that angels witness what occurs on earth. We learn from this this passage that their knowledge of God's divine wisdom is enhanced by what they see in the church. John Wesley said it this way: the church is the theatre of divine wisdom. The question is do we need some acting lessons?

I mention these things because they add another dimension to the mystery of Christmas. Our purpose for being here on earth is to glorify God, and obviously we do that very thing when we celebrate the birth of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ. However, it appears from the Scripture text that when we do that it is not just for our own benefit, but for the benefit of others- perhaps even those we aren't able to see.

So, as we continue to follow our Star of Wonder in this New Year, let us do it with a sense of optimism, let us do it in a way that allows everyone to see the glory of God through us, until such a time when the Star reappears in the sky for His final time.

Amen

## Colossians 1:24-27

<sup>24</sup> Now I rejoice in my sufferings for your sake, and in my flesh I am filling up what is lacking in Christ's afflictions for the sake of his body, that is, the church, <sup>25</sup> of which I became a minister according to the stewardship from God that was given to me for you, to make the word of God fully known, <sup>26</sup> the mystery hidden for ages and generations but now revealed to his saints. <sup>27</sup> To them God chose to make known how great among the Gentiles are the riches of the glory of this mystery, which is Christ in you, the hope of glory.

## 1 Peter 1:10-12

<sup>10</sup> Concerning this salvation, the prophets who prophesied about the grace that was to be yours searched and inquired carefully, <sup>11</sup> inquiring what person or time<sup>al</sup> the Spirit of Christ in them was indicating when he predicted the sufferings of Christ and the subsequent glories. <sup>12</sup> It was revealed to them that they were serving not themselves but you, in the things that have now been announced to you through those who preached the good news to you by the Holy Spirit sent from heaven, things into which angels long to look.

## 1 Corinthians 4:9

<sup>9</sup> For I think that God has exhibited us apostles as last of all, like men sentenced to death, because we have become a spectacle to the world, to angels, and to men.