

The Word is Out!

Luke 2: 21-40

All 5 candles are lit on our Advent wreath, signifying the completion of the Advent season and our time of preparation and expectation of the arrival of Christ. When Keith Makar lit the Christ candle on Christmas Eve, our anticipation changed to celebration. We honored and worshipped the Christ child with our voices and our hearts and thanked God anew for sending His only Begotten Son into the world to save His people from their sins.

We lit candles to remind us that Jesus Christ is the Light of the World, who chose to come to earth so that people everywhere would have no fear of darkness, no fear of evil, and no fear of death. The glow of the candles on Christmas Eve provided light and warmth, and the eternal hope and security in knowing that Christ is our Savior. For a few fleeting moments, nothing else mattered. As the last chorus of Silent Night came to an end, we extinguished our candles, put on our coats, turned out the lights and left this warm church building to find a cold, dark and scary world just outside its doors. What a contrast! It was a stark reminder that when God's people are all inside, the world outside can be a pretty dismal place. God in all His glory was revealed to us on Christmas Eve, and He is seeking to do the same once again this morning. It is likely that at one time or another every one of us has wondered what God looks like. We might even believe what we tell young children when they turn to us for answers- He is here, but you just can't see Him. Even though Scripture tells us that God is invisible (Colossians 1:15), and that God is a spirit (John 4:24). we sometimes wonder whether God exists because we cannot see him (gravity and wind). So just how does the invisible God reveal Himself?

God typically makes Himself known in two distinct ways. One is through His creation, and the other is through His Word, something we might call biblical revelation. Those ways will often overlap. The Bible tells us that God reveals himself naturally through his creation. "Since the creation of the world His invisible attributes are clearly seen, being understood by the things that are made, even His eternal power and Godhead" (Romans 1:20). "The heavens declare the glory of God; and the firmament shows His handiwork" (Psalms 19:1).

The heavens are the work of God's fingers, he has ordained the moon and the stars (Psalm 8:3). Yet, while nature reveals that God exists and declares "his eternal power and Godhead," nature is also limited in what it reveals about God, his attributes, and his will for humanity. Therefore, God will reveal himself in other divine ways. Nature and creation reveals to us that God is real, and His Word reveals to us who He is.

God makes Himself known and reveals Himself through people. The praise chorus we sing from time to time proclaims that truth beautifully. "His name is called Emmanuel, God with us, revealed in us. His name is called Emmanuel. There is no doubt that God wants to make Himself known, considering that God has done so countless times already. He revealed Himself to the shepherds that first Christmas Eve. The Bible tells us that the glory of the Lord surrounded them as the angel delivered the Good News. There is born to you a Savior, who is Christ the Lord. He provided a sign to them, which was the baby Jesus wrapped in swaddling clothes, laid in a manger in Bethlehem. What was their response? They went to see for themselves, and then they went and told many others the Good News. God had no intention of keeping this event a secret.

God makes Himself known through signs and wonders. When God revealed Himself to the Magi of the East. He also provided a sign, a great star in the eastern sky. The wise men saw the star, followed it towards Jerusalem where they supposed the Messiah might be found. They inquired of Herod and the Jewish Sanhedrin where the Messiah, the Christ was to be born. They were told that the Scriptures said it would not be in Jerusalem, but Bethlehem. They continued on their way, following that star until it led them right to the doorstep of the house where Jesus was at. God had no intention of keeping this event a secret. By the way, it probably was no accident that the Magi happened to stop in Jerusalem, as God in His providence revealed to the Jewish leaders that the Messiah had arrived. Sadly their response was one of unbelief, as they chose not to go see for themselves what the Magi had told them about.

God also makes Himself known through the prophets. God revealed Himself to Simeon, giving the Jewish leaders another opportunity to discover the Messiah. Simeon was no run of the mill Israelite. Historians tell us he was a member of the Sanhedrin, one of the temple leaders. His son was Gamaliel, who taught Christ and Paul. Simeon's response is typical of one who has recognized Christ. Look at verses 29-32- peace was with him. No matter what else the world would throw at him, Simeon's future was safe and secure in God's hands. People who know the Savior have no fear of death.

People who know Jesus also believe that God always keeps His promises. When He tells us that he will never leave or forsake us, or that He will be with us until the end of the ages, or that He will send the Holy Spirit to guide, comfort and enable us we can trust that it will happen. The promise of salvation is offered to all God's people. Christ came to be a light to both Jew and Gentile alike.

And just in case you thought God only revealed Himself to men in Biblical times, think again. God was revealed to Anna, who according to verse 39 demonstrated another characteristic of people who recognize Christ. She spoke of Him to all those that looked for redemption in Jerusalem. People who know Christ want others to know Christ. They want to share the Good News that God is with us and is revealed in us.

God doesn't want to keep Jesus a secret, and neither should we. Have you seen Jesus this Christmas season? I hope you all can answer yes. If you can't, it is likely because of one of two things. You haven't looked for Him or you have looked in the wrong place. Or perhaps those people around you have kept the Good News to themselves. I truly hope that isn't the case.

From, all indications, we are headed for some difficult and challenging times ahead. For some, that will be nothing new. Many have already trusted and relied on the Lord to provide. For others, it will be a test of faith. Outside of these church doors lies darkness of the worst kind. Poverty, despair, selfishness, greed, illness, terrorism and hatred abound, and will prevent those without faith from seeing Christ. The faithful will see them as signs that the world needs to see Jesus.

Even during the darkest of darkness, the love and the light of Christ will continue to shine, and it will continue to shine through people like you and the person sitting next to you. God reveals Himself to the world through people like you. When Christ departed for heaven, He left us in His place to fill in for Him until He returns. If people are having a hard time seeing Christ, perhaps it is because we are all in here, when we really need to be out there. I pray that we will go out and be a reflection of His great light. Amen