

The Best Mystery, Revealed

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Advent / Gospel; Sin; Proclamation; Building / 2 Samuel 7:1–11; 2 Samuel 7:16; Psalm 89:1–5; Psalm 89:19–29; Romans 16:25–27; Luke 1:26–38

- › Grace, mercy, and peace be yours from God our Father and from our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ, our Coming Advent King. Amen.

In our household, Legos are a common occurrence amongst the girls. They will build and take apart and build again - with the plan book that came with the Lego set. I enjoy my legos as well, when I get a chance and have the time to build. It's fairly easy to be creative with legos to build something without a plan at least in my mind, but it still needs an idea. However, building with a plan is so much easier.

Now imagine yourself trying to build a house without any plans, without a clear idea of what the owner wants. Even if you manage to establish some sort of ground floor structure, could you be sure that it was strong enough if the plans for the upper floors were kept secret from you? If a house were built that way, would you have confidence to step across the threshold.

Similarly, the natural flesh attempts to establish and strengthen itself spiritually. But unless God tells you exactly what he expects and wants—AND YOU LISTEN TO HIM—unless He tells you exactly what He has done for you!—You could never be sure that your status before him was firmly established. You could never know if your spirit had what was needed—the proper strength—to step across the threshold into God's presence.

On this the Fourth Sunday in Advent, as we stand on the threshold of giving glory to God in the highest in celebration of our Savior's birth, our Epistle teaches us that

God establishes and strengthens you by revealing to you the mystery of the Gospel.

When you live in mystery with respect to God, it is terribly uncertain, and frankly it is quite dangerous! On Thursdays starting over a year ago (and then several months off due to Covid) we have been studying various non-Christian World Religions. It has been eye opening to learn more about these different religions. Each of these World Religions has a glaring difference between Christians and them...and that is they really have no hope.

They think themselves wise, they dream up their own obedience of faith. Each of these religions, whether it be Islam, Jehovah's Witness, Hinduism, Buddhism, or the other countless non-Christian religions put their salvation on their own obedience. They have to do things to earn their way into what they call "salvation." This is unwise for them. They also establish the future of their souls on uncertain "knowledge" of God. There is nothing certain. They believe in false gods.

But our God...he alone is truly wise. He alone is for us as St. Paul tells us as he closes out his letter to the Romans:

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to the only wise God be glory forevermore through Jesus Christ! Amen.

Even Christians try to understand the mysteries of God apart from his revelation. We sometimes develop our own version of the "Obedience of faith," as if our obedience brings us to faith or helps us to the faith. Some Christians will buy into the idea that in order to be saved, you need that moment, that time in your life where someone says, "I decided to follow Jesus," or "I came to Jesus today." Or a Christian might believe the truth that one is saved by grace, but add a little bit of works to that, perhaps they can't accept a true freedom found in Christ.

We may try to establish and strengthen our faith on our own terms. We may hear some preacher on the radio, internet, or TV tell us that can achieve an increase in faith if we give more. They tell us all sort of false hopes that it relies on us. That just can't be. We can't increase our own faith. The disciples prayed, "Increase our faith" to Jesus.

So the result of all such pursuits is, at best, frustration and ignorance—at worst, temporal and even eternal calamity.

The world and even our own sinful flesh regularly try to construct a spirituality based on “secret heavenly designs” we try to discover by our own devices apart from God’s self-revelation. But such building leads only to destruction—like a house of cards that easily falls at the slightest ill wind. For it can neither establish nor strengthen us to receive the things of the only wise God.

Thankfully, you don’t need to discern such secrets, for

God reveals the mystery and He makes it known to you through the proclamation of the Gospel about Jesus Christ. You’ve heard the very first promise of salvation several times during Advent already...

English Standard Version Chapter 3

I will put enmity between you and the woman,
and between your offspring and her offspring;
he shall bruise your head,
and you shall bruise his heel

The prophets revealed portions of it by the command of the eternal God. The prophet Isaiah told us that the Child would be born of a virgin and His name shall be Emmanuel. The Prophet Micah prophesies that our Savior would be born in Bethlehem. The prophet Isaiah prophesied that our Lord would be stricken, smitten, and afflicted. Job proclaims the resurrection of the dead.

Now all this is disclosed and revealed in the incarnate Son, born of the Virgin Mary. Our Gospel reading proclaims the words of Gabriel to Mary.

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31 And behold, you will conceive in your womb and bear a son, and you shall call his name Jesus. 32 He will be great and will be called the Son of the Most High. And the Lord God will give to him the throne of his father David, 33 and he will reign over the house of Jacob forever, and of his kingdom there will be no end.”

The Son of Mary, the Son of the Most High God is truly Jesus...the one who saves, the one who comes to save all people from their sins.

This Jesus, your Jesus, the Son of Mary, the Son of God is the one who lives the perfectly obedient faith and goes to the cross to reveal and establish the gospel for you. This Jesus who the angel announced to Mary that would be born of her would grow up to die for you.

On this day where we hear the annunciation of Jesus begins to reveal the mystery proclaimed long ago. This annunciation followed nine months later by His birth...which we celebrate in just four and five days from now continued to reveal the mystery of long ago. The mystery of the gospel was fully realized at the cross and the empty tomb...the very reason Christ was born for you.

Through this gospel of Christ, God establishes you and strengthens you to his own glory. By the Gospel that declares to you Jesus Christ, God establishes you in the faith. He does this in many and various ways. This Gospel is proclaimed to you from the pulpit. You hear the Gospel when you read His Word at home. God establishes your faith by the gospel mysteriously poured over you in the waters of Holy Baptism. There through the Word of God and the Waters of Baptism, God chose you to be a member of His family. He welcomes you into his family, and there was no coming, accepting, or deciding that you ever did.

By this same Gospel, God strengthens you for godly, obedient living. He continues to strengthen you through the Word proclaimed from the pulpit. You receive the assurance that your sins are forgiven through the gospel that comes to you through Holy Absolution. You are also strengthened when you come to dine at the table of our Lord and are fed by the Gospel in such a mysterious way. We know that what is given is no mystery...it is the true body and blood of Jesus for the forgiveness of your sin.

In this God-given obedience of faith, we give glory to God both now and forevermore.

Just as little as a contractor could successfully build a multi-story home without having a design plan given to him, so little are we (and the world) able to establish and strengthen ourselves spiritually...apart from God's revelation of

the mystery of the Gospel. But in that Gospel that reveals to you Jesus Christ, the mystery of his incarnation, his life of obedient faith, and his substitutionary death on the cross, God established you in the true faith and strengthens you in lives obedient to his holy will. All this is to his glory—which he mysteriously shares with you even now and will share more fully in the revelation of eternity, when Christ returns for his Second Advent.

In the name of Jesus. Amen.

- › Now may the peace of God which passes all human understanding, guard your hearts and your minds and keep them focused in Christ Jesus our Lord and Savior, our Coming Advent King. Amen.