

Rev. Seth D. Bode † Sermon 404, 12-20-2020 † Advent 4

“Credo, Domine; adjuva incredulitatem meam,” Mark 9:24.

“Domine, volumus Jesum videre,” John 12:21.

ROMANS 16

²⁵Now to him who is able to strengthen you—according to my gospel and the proclamation of Jesus Christ, according to the revelation of the mystery that was veiled in silence for long ages past, ²⁶but now has been revealed through the prophetic Scriptures and made known to all the Gentiles, in keeping with the command of the eternal God, resulting in the obedience of faith—²⁷to God, who alone is wise, be glory forever through Jesus Christ. Amen.



Children get excited for Christmas, don't they? For that matter, so do adults. Part of the excitement has to do with gifts under the tree. There they are, wrapped in beautiful paper. Some of these presents are for you. You want them. Yet you do not know what is inside. It's a secret.

In our text for today, Paul mentions a Christmas secret. God's inspired writer calls it a mystery. This is something beyond human understanding. God alone makes it known to us. We accept it only by faith.

Of all the secrets of Christmas, the greatest mystery is a person, “*the mystery of God, namely, Christ, in whom are hidden all the treasures of human wisdom and knowledge*” (Col. 3:2-3). Jesus Christ is a mystery. He is the secret to how a person can be saved.

We need to know who the secret is. We need to know the mystery of Christmas because we cannot save ourselves. We need the Savior of the world.

ALL I WANT FOR CHRISTMAS IS YOU, JESUS

1. Say the apostle and the gospel

Paul closes the whole epistle to the Romans with glory to God. This is called a doxology. He gives honor and praise to God. He gives it up for God. He tells it to God in prayer, *soli Deo gloria!* (To God alone be the glory.)

In his doxology, Paul mentions the gospel. The gospel is the good news about Jesus Christ, the good news of Christmas. The soul and center of the gospel is Jesus Christ. The gospel is *the power of God for the salvation of everyone who believes* (1:16). Those who preach the gospel *do not preach themselves* (2 Cor. 4:5), *but Christ crucified* (1 Cor. 1:23).

By the gospel through St. Paul, God establishes the Romans. He strengthens or confirms them. God makes the Romans strong and steadfast in what they believe and do as Christians. By the gospel, believers are able to stand firm in the Christian faith and life.

In fact, the firmness of faith in the heart of the Romans was supposed to match the firmness of the gospel. As the gospel is, so is the firmness of the faith which embraces it. This can only be more good news for those who believe.

Like the Roman Christians, we need that gospel power to establish us. By nature we have no strength at all in our relationship with God. We can easily be shaken in our faith and life, even at Christmas—sometimes especially at Christmas.

One way we can be shaken is by concluding that we already know it all. It's no mystery, the devil may whisper. You've heard the gospel before and you'll hear it again. Why should you think that this time it will be any different? The devil craves the result that God's truth remain a mystery for sinners. Through human experience and emotion, the world would like things to be less sure. Our sinful nature rejoices when sin isn't so clearcut and when there are many presents to open, not just Jesus Christ. Because of the weakness of our sin, we would only fall down into an eternity of bad news.

But I tell you that whenever I approach a lesson as a pastor, I find more than I ever hoped to see. I draw more wisdom thinking about sermon texts and grow in faith with each reading. If I'm seeing new things, is it possible that many if not all our members will see and hear new things?

This is because only God is wise. He is the only wise God. We have the ability to be good or wise as a result of instruction, whereas God is good and wise by nature. God cannot be called wise in the way that human beings are wise, because a wise man merely has a share in wisdom, whereas God is wisdom's

author and source. Not only is Jesus called “wise” in the Scriptures, but Jesus is called “Wisdom” in the Scriptures.

He is so wise that, in the bigger part of our Bible, the Old Testament, for thousands of years people searched His wisdom. They could not wrap their minds around God’s plan of redemption. That is the central point of His wisdom. All they wanted was the mystery that was Christmas—namely, Jesus.

2. Say the law and the prophets

Without the prophets of the Old Testament, we would know nothing about the beginning of the world and ourselves. The prophets reveal to us

- how God called the world into existence out of nothing,
- how He preserves and governs it,
- how man was created good and in the image of God,
- how the first people were tempted by the devil and fell into sin and death,
- and how, from the very beginning, a Redeemer was promised.

What foundation do Paul and the apostles have without the law and prophets? The New Testament is an announcement that the promises of the Old Testament have been fulfilled. Without the law, psalms and prophets, we would not be sure that Jesus is the Savior of the world, whose coming was promised beforehand.

There in the Old Testament we learn

- that He would be descended of Abraham, Isaac, Jacob, Judah, & David.
- when and where He would appear,
- the works He would do,
- and the teachings of the prophets about Him.

We learn that He would be

- the Seed of the woman,
- the Son of the virgin,
- and the Lord of righteousness.

Without the Old Testament prophets, the New Testament apostles would be a building without a foundation or a tree without roots. So when the New Testament teaches us about Christ’s person, His work, and His sermons, we can readily prove this from the books of Moses, the psalms, and the prophets, which say, “*It is written,*” and, “*Have you not read?*” The holy apostles and evangelists

offer proof of Christ's divinity from the Old Testament when they report that "*this was to fulfill*" and "*as the Holy Spirit has spoken.*"

What lies faintly foreshadowed in Old Testament wisdom stands clearly revealed in the New. What lies undone in our lives of sin is clearly completed in the life of God's Son. The wisdom of the Father was made apparent were done by His Son, and nothing was done without Him. So it is plain that the Son is equal to the Father in wisdom also. By His wisdom of following the plan for salvation, Jesus has forgiven our sins. By fulfilling the Scriptures and patterning His life after the promise, Jesus removes our guilt. By being born in Bethlehem's manger, Jesus forgives our sins of leaving the gospel on the pages of the Old Testament. By becoming flesh and blood for us, Jesus forgives our sins of ignoring the Word and sacrament. By teaching the teachers in the temple, Jesus forgives our sins of despising the means of grace. By knowing they would put Him to death on a cross and laying down His life anyway, Jesus forgives our sins of thinking we know it all. What a mystery!

Along with those forgiven sins is a renewed interest to dig into the good book again. Along with Christmas comes excitement to hear the prophecies. To hear the prophecies in Isaiah and how special this Lord is. To discover in Zechariah 2 or Malachi 3 that the Lord Himself is coming to His temple to dwell with His people. To learn with King Herod and the Magi just where Jesus would be born in Micah.

We have been renewed in the message who the secret is ... Does it make you want to burst in Christmas song? Does it make you want to magnify the Lord with Mary? Does it make you delight in this doxology?

Do you ever tell Him? This Advent, have you prayed to Jesus just to tell Him that He is all you want for Christmas? It's not just knowing all we want for Christmas is Jesus. Faith does not just know and then forget how to speak and pray. Faith speaks to the Son of God and tells Him! "All I want for Christmas is you, Jesus." To God alone be glory forever and ever through you, Jesus Christ. Amen.

May God Himself, the God of peace, sanctify you through and through. May your whole spirit, soul and body be kept blameless at the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ. The One who called you is faithful and He will do it. Amen.