

B.A.S.I.C.

Brothers And Sisters In Christ

The Revelation of the Mystery

Great indeed, we confess, is the mystery of godliness: He was manifested in the flesh, vindicated by the Spirit, seen by angels, proclaimed among the nations, believed on in the world, taken up in glory. (1Timothy 3:16 ESV)

A mystery is usually something we don't know. In 1 Timothy 3:16 Paul shows us a mystery that we know but don't understand. Even the very smallest child is capable of knowing who Jesus is and what He has done for us, but the oldest adult even the Apostle John as an old man cannot truly understand how such a thing is possible. God became Man. Jesus carried our sins. Jesus died for our sins. Jesus rose again. All these things and much more about the life and work of Jesus Paul says are a mystery to us. They are not a mystery because we don't know what happened. They are a mystery because these are things that should not be possible. In Jesus that which is impossible is real.

In the gospel reading for the second Sunday in Epiphany we not only see these mysterious things happening but we witness the reactions of those who were there.

29 The next day John saw Jesus coming toward him, and said, "Behold! The Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world! 30 "This is He of whom I said, 'After me comes a Man who is preferred before me, for He was before me.' 31 "I did not know Him; but that He should be revealed to Israel, therefore I came baptizing with water." 32 And John bore witness, saying, "I saw the Spirit descending from heaven like a dove, and He remained upon Him. 33 "I did not know Him, but He who sent me to baptize with water said to me, 'Upon whom you see the Spirit descending, and remaining on Him, this is He who baptizes with the

Holy Spirit.' 34 "And I have seen and testified that this is the Son of God."

35 Again, the next day, John stood with two of his disciples. 36 And looking at Jesus as He walked, he said, "Behold the Lamb of God!" 37 The two disciples heard him speak, and they followed Jesus. 38 Then Jesus turned, and seeing them following, said to them, "What do you seek? " They said to Him, "Rabbi " (which is to say, when translated, Teacher), "where are You staying?" 39 He said to them, "Come and see." They came and saw where He was staying, and remained with Him that day (now it was about the tenth hour). 40 One of the two who heard John speak, and followed Him, was Andrew, Simon Peter's brother. 41 He first found his own brother Simon, and said to him, "We have found the Messiah " (which is translated, the Christ). 42 And he brought him to Jesus. Now when Jesus looked at him, He said, "You are Simon the son of Jonah. You shall be called Cephas " (which is translated, A Stone).

(John 1:29-42)

What does John the Baptist See?

In verse 29 he says "Behold" which immediately draws our attention to the amazing nature of what is before him. He continues, "THE LAMB OF GOD WHO TAKES AWAY THE SINS OF THE WORLD." That is the mystery. Such a thing should not be possible, that God should be man, that God should be walking right there, and that this man-God can carry away all the sins of the World. It is not possible but here it is.

John continues in verse 32 " I have seen." Here we have the word in Greek Tetheamai . The verb itself is

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not as significant as the form which it takes. The word is used numerous times in scripture, mostly as an aorist, and a few times as an imperfect. The aorist and the imperfect are basically equivalent to our past tense namely I saw. Here we have neither the aorist nor the imperfect but the perfect tense. The perfect isn't just a past event but something which started in the past and is continuing even now. John doesn't say, "I saw" but "I saw and I am seeing it now."

This continuing action is emphasized when John says the Spirit "remained upon him." John testifies not simply that the Spirit descended but that it remained upon him. The Baptist saw the Spirit descend and he saw that the same Spirit did not leave but remained with Christ. In what way did John continue to see the Spirit upon Jesus even after the physical dove was no longer there? To answer this we turn to Isaiah who prophesied that the descending Spirit would be a sign of the coming Messiah.

Behold my servant, whom I uphold, my chosen, in whom my soul delights; I have put my Spirit upon him; he will bring forth justice to the nations. ² He will not cry aloud or lift up his voice, or make it heard in the street; ³ a bruised reed he will not break, and a faintly burning wick he will not quench; he will faithfully bring forth justice. ⁴ He will not grow faint or be discouraged till he has established justice in the earth; and the coastlands wait for his law. (Isa 42:1-4 ESV)

John the Baptist continued to see the Spirit upon Jesus because Jesus' life was so obviously one which was led and guided by the Spirit. All these things that Isaiah prophesied Jesus did. It wasn't only John the Baptist that saw this in the life of Jesus but John the apostle as well. The entire Gospel of John is written to show how the Spirit of the Lord lived in the life of Christ. In the first chapter of his Gospel John writes "We beheld his glory." Here John was not referring to what happened on the mount of Transfiguration, but rather every time Jesus touched the life of another with the love and mercy of God. John's Gospels is full of just such accounts. Isaiah says it this way, "a bruised reed he will not break, and a faintly burning wick he will not quench." The Gospel of John shows us the same thing in the account of the adulterous woman, the lame man, the Samaritan woman, Nicodemus and many more.

This is the mystery of Jesus. This is a man who hated sin, confronted it with vehemence, condemned it absolutely and yet did not crush those who were sinners. This knowledge damns us, because we know that is what we should be but we aren't. But then it saves us as well because even though I'm not like that, Jesus is like that, and Jesus is like that for me.

John saw all of this. He saw the lamb who takes away the sin of the world. He saw the Holy Spirit descend and remain upon Jesus. He saw this great mystery, this man who should not exist and yet he does, and what is his response? There is nothing he can do except point and say "look here is the lamb of God who takes away the sins of the World."

What do the Disciples See?

Once should have been enough, he should have said it once and everyone who was following John, all the crowds gathered to be baptized should have left John immediately and followed Jesus. But they don't. John has to say it again the next day and finally two of the disciples follow. We know one of these two is Andrew. We can't say for sure who the second one is but most likely it is the Apostle John himself. The very one who is writing the account.

This is a very simple story. There is no great miracle, no great fanfare, there is nothing except these two simple men. They hear what John says and they go and check it out, "Rabbi, where are you staying." A very simple story and yet here is the beginning of the church. These are the first two people ever to hear the word and follow Jesus. John the Evangelist is perfectly aware of this when he wrote this Gospel. In verse 42 Jesus calls Simon Peter, that is to say the rock, the solid foundation upon which the church is built. This is the story of how the Church began.

These are the first two Christian converts. And starting with these two what great things would come. The largest religion on earth began here. The beginning of much of our modern culture and society began here. And those are just the earthly consequences, greatest of all is the spiritual church that Jesus has built beginning with these two. It all began with the simplest of words, the simplest of stories

"Rabbi where are you staying? Come and see"

It is such a simple thing and because it is such a simple thing it is often easily dismissed and ignored. To

unbelievers it is nothing more than children's stories. To us also it seems like too small of a thing. We act as if the Gospel isn't enough to convert people. We think it is up to us to make some great intelligent argument that will just really prove that we know and that we are right.

Witnessing it isn't complex, its simple, "come and see." The arguments, the science, the logic, that all has its place but really what it comes down to is so simple: "Come and See." Come and see the one who died and rose again. Come and see the mystery for yourself. Come and see the Savior.

That is what Andrew does. Andrew goes and calls his brother Peter. And in this account we have this wonderful example of how to be an effective witness to Christ. "Come and see" simple, you tell people what you have seen. And the Lord works through that word. This is part of the mystery of the Gospel that on the surface it is such a simple thing but the Lord accomplishes the impossible through this simplest of things

What did Jesus See

Andrew brings his brother to Jesus with these same simple words, "Come and See." But what happens when Peter does come and see. He finds a man who already knows his name. Not only knows his name but in fact knows everything about him. Jesus shows Simon that he knows Simon better than Simon knows himself. Jesus says to Simon: "You are Simon," by this he shows that he knows who Simon is, "the son of Jonah," by this Jesus shows that he knows who Simon was, "you shall be called Cephas" by this Jesus shows that he knows who Peter will be. Past, present, and future, Jesus sums up Peters entire life in one short phrase.

The miracle here is not that Jesus knew Simon's name, its not even that he knew everything about Simon. The real mystery is that Jesus knew everything about Simon and still calls him to be a leader in his church.

This Simon is the man that wouldn't even admit he knew Jesus not once but three times. This is the man who constantly and consistently attempted to convince Jesus not to die, even after Jesus had painstakingly reminded him again and again that this was necessary. This is the man who was more worried about fitting in with the Jews in Antioch then in

showing brotherly love to the Gentiles, so that Paul was forced to publicly rebuke him. And these are just the sins and short comings that we know about. Think about what Jesus knew about him, the secret jealousies, the petty hatreds, the selfish ambitions in Peter's heart. But knowing all of this what did Jesus do? He took Simon and set him as the foundation and said to him go build My Church.

This is the mystery, this is the impossible thing that should not be. That Jesus said to Peter go and build my church and that he tells us the same thing. What right do we have to build the church of God? What makes me possibly believe that this is what I should be doing? What gives any of us the idea that we can speak correctly the mystery that is our God, in order to turn the hearts of sinful people to the word of God. It is impossible that any of us should believe that we can do this great thing.

But Christ knows each of us, as he knew Simon, he knows are past and our present and our future, he knows our hearts and our minds, and He says to us, "you are forgiven, you are my child, go I want you to build my Church." That is a mystery, which is unbelievable, that God would give to me this forgiveness and this love.

What do we see

What about us? What have we seen and what have we witnessed when we encounter this mystery? If we are going to say to people "come and see," we need to know what mystery it is that we are bringing them to see.

This is a mystery we experience every week as we encounter Christ at church. The first thing we do in this church is to confess your sins and hear from the pastor by the specific direction of Christ himself the forgiveness of your sins. This is ridiculous and absurd. Such a thing should not be possible. And many, even many Christians reject the idea. That forgiveness is given this freely is a deep mystery. It should be something you have to really work for, it should be something you have to do penance for, it should be, it should be . . . But it isn't.

The people of Jesus day rejected the idea that such a mystery could be possible. "You cannot forgive sins" they say to Jesus. What did Jesus say to them? You don't think I can perform this mystery, well explain this than, "Rise up, take your bed, and walk" he said

don't think I can perform this mystery, well explain this than, "Rise up, take your bed, and walk" he said to the lame man.

This is the mystery that we see here in church and this is the mystery that we speak to others. That God became man. That he died for my sins. And that he rose again. It is simple, and yet it is impossible, and yet it is true. This is the mystery that is our God. Amen.

-Missionary Matthew Ude
