

The Majesty of God Revealed to the Prophets December 2, 2012

This morning we begin a series of messages on the theme: *The Majesty of God Revealed*.

The majesty of God speaks of his greatness, of his glory. After King David had established Jerusalem as his capital city, he prepared a tent to be placed for the Ark of the Covenant to reside, signifying the presence of God. The ark was put into its place, sacrifices were offered, and then David appointed a song to be sung commemorating the event. It is recorded in the book of First Chronicles. Part of it goes like this:

Sing to the LORD, all the earth! Tell of his salvation from day to day. Declare his glory among the nations, his marvelous works among all the peoples! For great is the LORD, and greatly to be praised, and he is to be held in awe above all gods. For all the gods of the peoples are idols, but the LORD made the heavens. Splendor and majesty are before him; strength and joy are in his place.
– *I Chronicles 16:23-27*

Splendor and majesty are before him. God is incomprehensible, that is, beyond anything we with finite mind can even conceive. Incomprehensible, and yet, knowable. We know God because he has chosen to reveal himself.

There are many trails we could walk this month – various themes in the Christmas story: the shepherds, the angels, the manger scene. But the path we are going to travel this year is all about God’s majesty revealed.

The Christmas story, of course, is about God’s ultimate revelation of himself – in his Son, Jesus Christ. The Apostle Paul says this about him:

(Jesus) is the image of the invisible God.... In him all the fullness of God was pleased to dwell. – *Colossians 1:15, 18*

So I looked up the word “majesty” on-line at dictionary.com. Here’s what it said:

- Regal, lofty, or stately dignity; imposing character; grandeur
- Supreme greatness or authority; sovereignty
- Christ in Majesty, a representation of Christ as ruler of the universe

This is where we are going with this series – a focus on the greatness, the grandeur, the regal dignity of the One born on Christmas morning. So over the next five Sundays plus Christmas Eve, we are going to consider the *Majesty of God Revealed*:

- To the Prophets
- To Mary and Joseph
- To Simeon and Anna
- To the World
- To You
- Through You

Before we dive in, let's sing a song that speaks of the majesty of God in Christ and our response to that in worship. Listen to some of the words we will be singing:

Light of the World / You stepped down into darkness
 Opened my eyes / Let me see
 Beauty that made / This heart adore You
 Hope of a life / Spent with You

King of all days / All so highly exalted
 Glorious in Heaven above
 Humbly You came / To the earth You created
 All for love's sake became poor

Here I am to worship / Here I am to bow down
 Here I am to say that You're my God

Let's look at *The Majesty of God Revealed to the Prophets*. There are several significant things that God revealed to the prophets about the Christ-child, whose birth we will celebrate in a few weeks.

1) The Christ's Pre-Existence. Micah, whose name means "*Who is like Jehovah?*" was a prophet who ministered from around 735-690 B.C. He was a contemporary of Hosea, Amos and Isaiah. God revealed to him the eternity of the one who would come some 700 years later. In chapter five, verse two:

But you, O Bethlehem Ephrathah, who are too little to be among the clans of Judah, from you shall come forth for me one who is to be ruler in Israel, *whose coming forth is from of old, from ancient days.*

This child would enter into the human race as a baby, whose beginning was not from nine months previously, but from eternity.

2) The Christ's Conception

Turn in your Bible to the Old Testament book of Isaiah and just keep it open there. This "Ancient of Days" had a human beginning, but it was a miraculous beginning.

Isaiah 7:14

Why is this so important? Matthew records in his Gospel account the message that came to Joseph, engaged to his beloved Mary. Mary was found to be pregnant. Joseph made plans to quietly divorce her, sparing Mary the embarrassment and scorn for her perceived moral failing.

An angel of the Lord appeared to him in a dream and said: "Joseph, son of David, do not be afraid to take Mary as your wife; for the Child who has been conceived in her is of the Holy Spirit. She will bear a Son; and you shall call his name Jesus, for he will save his people from their sins.

Every one of us is born into this world from the line of Adam – a sinner under the judgment of God. It is our basic nature. The Scriptures teach that we are born with a sin nature; we are morally and spiritually flawed. This nature is passed generationally in the act of conception. That's why King David, after being confronted with his sin of adultery and cover-up, including murder, wrote: "In sin did my mother conceive me." David didn't mean that the act of conception was somehow sinful. The act isn't sinful; the effect is.

God declared that the penalty for sin is death – spiritual separation from him. Now, I cannot die for your sin; I have my own to be dealt with. I would need to die for mine. If Jesus' conception had been like yours and mine, he too would have a sin nature and been under God's judgment. He could not have died for your sin, but would have to die for his own. That is why the virgin birth is such an important truth of doctrine.

The majesty, the greatness, of God's wisdom, of God's sovereign work in the human conception of the God-man, Jesus. Absolutely boggles my mind and confounds my comprehension.

3) Then we see the majesty of The Christ's Names

Look again at **Isaiah 7:14**.

Immanuel means "God with us." One of the great wonders of God's majesty is that God came to us, that he might be one of us. The Apostle John, in his Gospel

account, bridges this prophetic revelation and its fulfillment with these words in his opening chapter:

And the Word became flesh and dwelt among us, and we have seen his glory, glory as of the Only Son from the Father, full of grace and truth.

The Messiah, God's Son, came and dwelt among us – members of the human race. As perfect man, he lived and experienced all that we do yet without sin. As perfect God, he could bear our sins in his body, paying the price of spiritual death for us. His resurrection from the dead was evidence that he had perfectly satisfied the justice of God, conquered death and the grave, freeing God to now forgive sin.

More about his majestic names are given in chapter nine of Isaiah.

Isaiah 9:6

- **Wonderful** – the English translation makes it seem that “wonderful” is an adjective describing Counselor. But in the Hebrew language of the Old Testament, it is a noun, not an adjective. The Christ is called “Wonderful.” The word means “to distinguish, to separate.” It means something which is unique, distinguished by being different. This Child would be totally unique, distinguished from all else.
- **Counselor** – this Child would need neither counsel nor counselors. This is the One who would possess all wisdom and all knowledge.
- **Mighty God** – In Hebrew, God is “El.” E – L: the last syllable in the name Immanu-el. Again, we have the declaration that this Child would be divine. Throughout the Old Testament, God is often referred to as the Mighty One or Almighty. This would be the Christ's name, his identity.
- **Everlasting Father** – Two revelations here. First, the Christ possesses and inhabits eternity. In his Gospel, John states clearly this distinction of the Messiah. He opens chapter one stating: “In the beginning was the Word.” The word translated “was” means “continually was” or “always existed.” This Word had no beginning; he was always God.

The second revelation in this divine name: he is Father – loving, tender, compassionate, a wise instructor, trainer, provider. Turn over the chapter 57 where the prophet combines these two thoughts. **Isaiah 57:15**

- **Prince of Peace** – a prince who will defeat every foe and bring peace to his people.

God's majesty revealed in the names of the Christ-child.

4) We see God's majesty revealed in The Christ's Character

Isaiah 11:2

God reveals what this Child, the Christ, would be like. Look at these descriptive phrases:

- **The Spirit of the LORD shall rest upon him.** This is a sign of approval, the bestowal of divine virtue. Remember the scene at Jesus' baptism in the River Jordan? The heavens opened up and the Spirit of God descended like a dove, settling on him. And God spoke from heaven: "This is my beloved Son, with whom I am well-pleased."

Jesus' life was one of total dependence upon the Spirit of God. God's Spirit was upon him. Following this statement is a listing of six aspects of the Spirit's presence, given in three pairs:

1) The Spirit of wisdom and understanding. This relates to the powers of the mind. W.E. Vine suggests that "wisdom discerns the nature of things; understanding discerns their differences." The Christ would have the power of discernment and discrimination. We see in Jesus' life his ability to read and understand the thoughts of those he encountered. He knew what was in their hearts, in their minds.

2) The Spirit of counsel and might. This relates to practical activity – the ability to arrive at right conclusions, and the power and ability to carry them out.

3) The Spirit of knowledge and the fear of the Lord. This relates to fellowship with God, a true knowledge of God. It speaks of an enjoyment of the presence of God which refrains from displeasing him. As we read the historical record of Jesus' life on earth, we are in awe of his perfection – in character and conduct.

The majesty of the Christ's character revealed to us through the prophet.

5) The Christ's Mission – Isaiah 9:2-5

The world was a dark place into which the Christ would come. It was a place of despair, of violence, of hatred, of bitterness – all graphically described as "darkness." John describes for us the fulfillment of this Light coming into the world in chapter one of his Gospel:

In him (“the Word”) was life, and the life was the light of men. The light shines in the darkness, and the darkness could not overpower it.

Light dispels darkness; darkness has no alternative but to flee from the light. It is interesting that at the climactic moment of Jesus accomplishing his mission – when all the sins of the world, yours and mine included, were placed upon him at the cross, and the wrath of God in judgment against sin was poured out upon him, darkness covered the land.

Yet the darkness could not overpower the light as God raised him from the dead, gloriously triumphing over sin and death. You see, the true wonder of Christmas is not in the cradle; it is in the cross.

Isaiah, chapter 11, tells us of the impact of his majestic mission – **Isaiah 11:3-5**

Righteousness and justice are the hallmarks of his divine activity. God revealed this mission to the prophet more than 700 years before the first Christmas.

6) Finally, the Christ’s Eternal Reign – God stretches the prophets’ vision way into the future. His majesty is revealed about the triumphal reign of the Christ as he establishes his eternal kingdom. – **Isaiah 9:7**

This is the certainty of his kingdom reign. Its extent? The New American Standard Version reads: “There will be no end to the increase of His government or of peace...”

God revealed more to Isaiah; he gave him a glimpse of what this kingdom reign will be like.

Isaiah 11:6-10

The majestic reign of Christ was also revealed to the prophet Jeremiah. Listen, from chapter 23:

Behold, the days are coming, declares the LORD, when I will raise up for David a righteous Branch, and he shall reign as king and deal wisely, and shall execute justice and righteousness in the land. In his days Judah will be saved, and Israel will dwell securely. And this is the name by which he will be called: “The LORD is our righteousness.”

Just look at that list again – the majesty of God revealed to the prophets concerning the Christ’s pre-existence, the Christ’s conception, his names, his character, the Christ’s mission and his eternal reign.

God’s majesty revealed through the prophets has been the source of inspiration to so many over the centuries. I want to close with a story I have shared before, but it never loses its impact.

One night in 1741, a bent old man shuffled listlessly down a dark London street. George Frederick Handel was starting out on one of the aimless, despondent wanderings which had become his nightly ritual. His mind was a battleground between hope, based on past glories, and the despair for the future. For 40 years, Handel had written stately music for the aristocracy of England and the continent.

When his staunch patroness Queen Caroline died, Handel’s income collapsed. A frigid winter gripped England, and there was no way of heating the theaters, so engagements were cancelled.

As Handel sank deeper and deeper in debt, he lost his creative spark. Nearing 60, he felt old and tired. Now, as he walked alone on the London street, the façade of a church loomed dimly in the dark. He paused before it, bitter thoughts welling up in him.

Hopelessly he returned to his shabby lodgings. Entering, he saw a bulky package on his desk. He broke the seal and clawed off the wrappings. Inside...a Libretto: “A Sacred Oratorio.”

Handel grunted. It was from that second-rate, pampered poet, Charles Jennens. There was also a letter. Jennens expressed the wish that Handel start work immediately on the oratorio, adding: “The Lord gave the word.”

Listlessly, Handel leafed through the oratorio and a passage caught his eye: “He was despised, and rejected of men.... He looked for someone to have pity on him, but there was no man, neither found He any to comfort him.”

With a growing sense of kinship, Handel read on: “He trusts in God...God did not leave his soul in hell...He will give you rest.”

The words began to come alive, flowing with meaning, “Wonderful, Counselor...I know that my Redeemer liveth...Rejoice...Hallelujah.”

Handel could feel the old fire rekindling. In his mind, wondrous melodies tumbled over one another. Grabbing a pen, he started writing. With incredible swiftness the notes filled page after page. Next morning, his manservant found Handel bent over his desk. Putting the breakfast tray within easy reach, he quietly slipped out. At noon, he returned; the tray had not even been touched.

Then followed a most anxious time for the faithful old servant. The master would not eat. He'd take a piece of bread, crush it, and let it fall to the floor – writing all the while, jumping up and running to the harpsichord. At times, he would stride up and down, flailing the air with his arms, singing at the top of his lungs, “Hallelujah! Hallelujah!” The tears running down his cheeks.

“I’ve never seen him act this way before,” confided the servant to a friend. “He just stares at me and doesn’t even see me. He said the gates of heaven have opened wide for him and God Himself was there...I’m afraid he’s going mad.”

For 24 days, Handel labored like a fiend, with little rest or food. Then he fell on his bed exhausted. On his desk lay the score of *The Messiah – The Greatest Oratorio Ever Written*.

Since London would have none of him, Handel took *The Messiah* to Ireland. The Lord Lieutenant had sent him a cordial invitation to come there anytime. Handel would not accept a shilling for this work; the proceeds of its performance must go to charity, he said. It was a miracle that had lifted him from deepest despondency; now let it inspire the world.

In Dublin he merged two choirs and rehearsed the work. Excitement mounted as the date of the first performance neared. All the tickets were quickly sold, and to make more room, ladies were requested to come without hoops and gentlemen without swords. On April 13, 1742, crowds waited at the doors hours before the opening. The response of that first audience was tumultuous.

After the triumph, London was anxious to hear the work. And during the first performance there, a dramatic incident occurred. At the presentation of the Hallelujah Chorus, the King stood to his feet. The crowd then surged to its feet and remained standing until the conclusion. The majesty of God revealed.