

The Majesty of God Revealed to the World Christmas Sunday, December 23, 2012

Our message series this month is *The Majesty of God Revealed*. The first topic focused long before the birth of Christ by seeing how God's majesty was revealed to the prophets. God gave them a glimpse into the future when the fullness of his majesty would be displayed in Jesus. The Apostle Paul links the majesty of God the Father with that of God the Son when he writes to the Christians in Colossae and says:

(Jesus) is the image of the invisible God, the firstborn of all creation...in him all the fullness of God was pleased to dwell. – *Colossians 1:15, 19*

From the prophecies we moved hundreds of years later to the fulfillment and explored *The Majesty of God Revealed to Mary and Joseph*. To both of them was revealed something about the majesty of the Christ-child as to his identity and his mission. Mary was told that this Holy Spirit-conceived child would be great and be called the Son of the Most High. He would sit on the throne of David and his kingdom reign would never end.

The angel who appeared to Joseph told him that this Child should be named Jesus for he would save his people from their sins. Mary and Joseph trusted the word of God and did what they were told to do.

Last week we jumped forward forty days following the birth of Christ. Mary and Joseph took the baby up to Jerusalem to fulfill the requirements of the Law regarding the redemption of the firstborn and the rite of purification.

While there, they encountered two people to whom God's majesty had been revealed by way of promise. They would live to see the "consolation of Israel" – the Messiah, God's promised One. They acknowledged that this One before them was the salvation of all who would believe, Jew and Gentile.

Now this morning on Christmas Sunday, we continue by considering *The Majesty of God Revealed to the World*. We pan out and want to look at the big picture. The promises made beginning all the way back in Genesis, chapter 3, of a Redeemer, and reiterated throughout prophetic history, now reaches its apex in what we call The Incarnation – God becoming man.

It is important for us to look beyond the event in Bethlehem to see what was behind it all. Joseph Bayly captures this in a piece titled *Praise God for Christmas*.

Praise Him for the incarnation,
for the Word made flesh.
I will not sing of shepherds
watching flocks on frosty nights,
or angel choristers.

I will not sing of a stable bare in Bethlehem,
or lowing oxen,
wise men trailing star with gold,
frankincense, and myrrh.

Tonight I will sing praise to the Father
who stood on heaven's threshold
and said farewell to His Son
as he stepped across the stars
to Bethlehem and Jerusalem.

And I will sing praise to the infinite, eternal Son,
who became most finite, a baby
who would one day be executed for my crime.

Praise Him in the heavens,
Praise Him in the stable,
Praise Him in my heart.

This is *God's Majesty Revealed to the World*. Let's play reporter/journalist this morning and consider the topic by asking basic questions. I'm going to throw a lot of Scripture up on the wall this morning for the sake of time rather than have you turn in your Bible.

1) The first question is **WHO?** Who is this Child?

This question seeks the identity of this baby. In 1865, William Chatterton Dix wrote a poem titled *The Manger Throne*. It was later set to the music of *Greensleeves*, a 16th century English melody. We know the song today as *What Child is This?* Listen to some of the words before we sing them.

What child is this, who, laid to rest,
On Mary's lap is sleeping?
Whom angels greet with anthems sweet,
While shepherds watch are keeping?

This, this is Christ the King,
Whom shepherds guard and angels sing:
Haste, haste to bring him laud,
The babe, the son of Mary.

What Child Is This

The writer of the New Testament book of Hebrews follows the thread of God's majesty revealed by writing in the opening words:

Long ago, at many times and in many ways, God spoke to our fathers by the prophets, but in these last days he has spoken to us by his Son, whom he appointed the heir of all things, through whom also he created the world.

He is the radiance of the glory of God and the exact imprint of his nature, and he upholds the universe by the word of his power. After making purification for sins, he sat down at the right hand of the Majesty on high. – *Hebrews 1:1-3*

This Christ-child is the visible expression of the majesty of God, the glory of God, the greatness of God.

2) The second question is **WHAT?** The “what” has to do with the purpose of his coming. God gave a gift, a wonderful gift to the world. Why? Because the world was in such desperate need of the gift of salvation, of redemption.

J.I. Packer writes:

The Christmas message is that there is hope for a ruined humanity – hope of pardon, hope of peace with God, hope of glory – because at the Father's will Jesus Christ became poor, and was born in a stable so that thirty years later He might hang on a cross.

Paul, the apostle, wrote to the Christians in Rome: “For all have sinned and fallen short of the glory of God.” Every one of us lives under judgment for our sin. The penalty, Paul goes on to say, is death – spiritual death – separation from God.

The wonderful message of the majesty of Christmas is “good news of great joy.” God did something for us we could not do for ourselves. Only God could die for sins such that his death would be perfect satisfaction of the justice of God, freeing him to forgive sinners.

3) The next question is **WHEN?** Paul answers that question in his letter to the Galatians:

But when the fullness of time had come, God sent forth his Son, born of woman, born under the law, to redeem those who were under the law, so that we might receive adoption as sons. – *Galatians 4:4-5*

Christmas is all about God's timing. Christmas is about "coincidences:" the census, going to Bethlehem. It's like all the little coincidences and circumstances that happen in our lives. One of the great things we will see in heaven is how God used the little things to bring about his divine purpose in his divine time.

John Maxwell tells some stories that illustrate this truth. A discouraged Christopher Columbus walked by a monastery one day. He was thirsty, so he went in for a drink of water. He sat down and as he was being refreshed with a drink of water, an old monk listened to his story of how he wanted to go on an expedition to find another land. When it was all over, Christopher Columbus went on, but that old monk was a personal friend of Queen Isabella, and he was the one who convinced her to finance the expedition of Christopher Columbus. The discovery of America started with a drink of water in a monastery.

Abraham Lincoln was out in back of his store one day rummaging through an old barrel. He was just kind of poking around and reached down, and he felt a couple books in his hand. He pulled them up and saw that they were Blackstone's Commentaries on the laws of England. Something happened to Abraham Lincoln that day. He began to read those books and that led to him becoming a lawyer. This totally changed his direction in life. He got into politics and later became the President of the United States. It all started with him rummaging around in a barrel. Coincidences.

John Calvin was going down to Italy. War broke out and the road he was going to take to Italy was blockaded so he went to Geneva. Anybody who studies the life of John Calvin knows that was a change in his life that literally has changed millions of lives.

George Whitfield was a bartender working for his brother in England. He couldn't get along with his brother's wife so he left. It was out of that experience that he turned to God, went to Oxford and became part of the Holy Club with John Wesley and, literally, changed England and turned it around for Christ. Coincidences.

More than three hundred specific prophecies were fulfilled in the first coming of Jesus, including the very place where he would be born. The “when” was God’s coincidence.

All of the Christmas details were part of God’s divine plan. Everything came together to accomplish his divine purposes in his predetermined timing. The majesty of God was revealed at exactly the right time.

4) Then we have to ask **HOW**? This is the arena of mystery. When I say “mystery,” I don’t mean mysterious, you know, something spooky, cryptic or mystical. This word, as used in the Bible, refers to something that we cannot naturally understand and whose meaning would remain hidden, unknown apart from God choosing to reveal it.

Perhaps the greatest mystery is how God became man. This event we call the Incarnation. The Apostle John opens his Gospel account of the life of Jesus this way:

In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. He was in the beginning with God...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. – *John 1:1-2, 14*

Perhaps the most definitive formulation of this great mystery was done at a church council – the Council at Chalcedon, held in 451 A.D. In part, it speaks of the union of “full Deity and perfect humanity...without mixture, change, division, or separation in one Person forever.” In theological terms, it is called “the hypostatic union.” Try that term out on some of your friends; they will be so impressed.

We have no frame of reference in the natural world to equate this to that we might understand it. It is only by God graciously revealing this mystery to us that we might have some comprehension and knowledge of this union, however incomplete and imperfect it might be.

In John’s explanation the Incarnation involves a “stepping down,” a condescension. Paul describes about this mystery of condescension in Philippians, chapter two. He says of Jesus:

...although He existed in the form of God, did not regard equality with God a thing to be grasped (*i.e. clung to*), but emptied Himself (*i.e. laid aside His privileges*), taking the form of a bond-servant, and being made in the likeness of

men. Being found in appearance as a man, He humbled Himself by becoming obedient to the point of death, even death on a cross. – *Philippians 2:6-8*

This is the mystery of the Incarnation; it is the wonder of God stepping out of eternity into time for you and for me. Listen to some of the words of the song Chris and Matt are going to sing. The song is titled *How Many Kings*:

Cause how many kings, stepped down from their thrones?
How many lords have abandoned their homes?
How many greats have become the least for me?
How many Gods have poured out their hearts
To romance a world that has torn all apart?
How many fathers gave up their sons for me?

How Many Kings – Chris & Matt

5) The last question, a question that cries out for an answer is **WHY?**

Why would God come to earth? Why would he be conceived in the womb of a teenage girl and born in an obscure village? Why would he live among the people of the human race, those he came to save? And why would he go the Cross to die for our sins?

Why? The Scriptures state the simple reason in a very familiar verse to anyone who has been around church very much:

For God so loved the world, that he gave his only Son, that whoever believes in him should not perish but have eternal life. – *John 3:16*

Someone has looked at this verse in this way:

Because his nature is love, God loved the world
Because God loved, God gave
Because God gave, his Son died
Because the Son died, God's justice is satisfied
Because God's justice is satisfied, God can forgive
Because God can forgive, man can believe
Because man believed, he can have eternal life

God truly loves you. That is why Jesus came. The focus of his love, though, to be honest, is not on the cradle; it is on the Cross. He came to die. But it all started in a village called Bethlehem.