

Advent 4  
December 18, 2011

Romans 16:25-27  
363-23-19/28-25

In These Last Days Before Christmas...

- I. Marvel at the mystery of Christmas.
- II. Give glory to your only wise God.

Dear Christian friends,

You can call it the WISDOM THAT COMES **with age** – but I've learned a few things about Christmas. BIG LESSON #1 – if the Christmas cards don't get mailed before Christmas – GUESS what? The world doesn't end! Nobody dies! **Not having** the Christmas sermon done on Christmas Day – THAT'S a problem! **Not having** the cards all mailed – **in all honesty** – that's NO BIG DEAL.

BIG LESSON #2 – we make Christmas a **time of stress**. We do it TO OURSELVES! Who says every ornament on the tree **has to be** in just the right spot? **Who says** it's just not Christmas if we **don't have** any snow?

It's **now just** a few more days until Christmas. In these last days before Christmas let's take a BREATHER. Let's step back – **relax** – sit a minute. Let's do as Paul does here. IN THESE LAST DAYS before Christmas 1)marvel at the **mystery** of Christmas and 2)give glory to your **only wise** God.

**I. Marvel at the mystery of Christmas.**

Do you already know what you're **all getting** for Christmas this year? Maybe you've given mom and dad some pretty strong SUGGESTIONS of what you'd like. Maybe you even gave them a LIST to help them remember. **Maybe** – but will you actually get it? You COULD end up getting something you **never expected** or thought of.

IN THESE last days before Christmas we already know what we're getting FROM GOD for Christmas. We've made this trip to Bethlehem **so many times** before. We've joined the shepherds kneeling at the manger. We've heard the angel proclaiming the **“good news of great joy.”** BEEN there – DONE – that – SEEN it all **so many times** before. It's all so familiar – yet always SO MARVELOUS.

IN THESE last days before Christmas marvel with Paul at the **“mystery”** of Christmas. **“Now to Him who is able to establish you by my gospel and the proclamation of Jesus Christ, according to the revelation of the mystery hidden for long ages past, but now revealed and made known through the prophetic writings.”**

Paul calls the mystery of Christmas **“my gospel.”** Paul's not saying, “THIS is **my** gospel – then there's that other gospel that Peter and the others preached.” Paul's point is that this is the gospel God gave TO HIM for Paul to preach TO THEM.

**“My gospel”** – not just for Paul to preach to others – but for Paul to believe for himself. Remember that the word gospel means “good news.” MARVEL **with Paul** – Christmas is indeed GOOD NEWS – **“good news of great joy”** – FROM God TO you – to me – to the whole world. Christmas is not the **“good news”** that **“unto you is born a BABY”** – although we will find a Baby in the manger. Christmas is the **“good news”** that that little Baby is our SAVIOR – **“unto you is born a SAVIOR.”**

We will marvel at Christmas when we clearly understand our own DESPERATE NEED for Christmas. **If Jesus had simply come** here as our ROLE MODEL we'd be sunk – be going to hell. We CAN'T live up to Jesus' example. We don't measure up to **God's standards** of holiness. Compared

to Hitler I **come across** as a pretty nice guy. Standing next to my holy God I am clearly **“the chief of sinners.”** We can't even MAKE IT PAST the First Commandment – **“You shall have no other gods.”** According to the First Commandment God is to ALWAYS come first in ourselves. WHATEVER GOD SAYS – that's what we are to WANT and DO **with no hesitation**. Anything less is IDOLATRY – putting something ahead of God. **Anything less** is simply unacceptable to God. **Anything less** should mean no Christmas presents from God – no going to **Bethlehem** or **heaven** – just a ONE-WAY TICKET to hell's **eternal banishment** and punishment.

IN THESE last days before Christmas marvel as Paul **“proclaims Jesus Christ.”** HEAR the **“proclamation”** that the Baby Jesus is **“Immanuel”** – GOD Himself with us – the eternal Son of God **born one** of us. HEAR the **“proclamation”** that Jesus is our Savior BY BEING our **substitute** – by taking our place under God's law. **Hear** the proclamation that Jesus is **“the LORD Our Righteousness.”** Jesus credits us and clothes us with His life of perfect obedience to all ten commandments. Hear the proclamation that Jesus **“did not come to be served, but to serve and to give His life a ransom for many.”** HEAR - MARVEL that Jesus **“was obedient unto death, even death on a cross”** – all to pay for every one of our sins **in full**. Hear the proclamation that **“He is risen, just as He said”** – that our Savior is the conqueror of death and hell, sin and Satan. MARVEL – SAVOR – TREASURE – the **“mystery”** of Christmas! Because of Jesus – trusting in Jesus – we are forgiven – we are reconciled with our Creator – we are going straight to heaven when we die.

MARVEL for as Paul explains this is **“the revelation of the mystery hidden for long ages past.”** WE KNOW the real meaning of Christmas. WE SING our Christmas songs **not just for sentimental reasons** but with REAL JOY. We wonder how OTHERS can't see this. HOW can people get all wrapped up in the **tree** - the **presents** – the **parties** – and JUST IGNORE the baby Jesus? **How** can people kneel at the manger and then just leave Jesus there and not take Him back home with them?

Christmas – the **gospel** – is a **“mystery”** – something known ONLY BY **divine revelation**. To the unbeliever Christmas is a BUNCH of nonsense. A virgin having a baby – a baby who supposedly is God Himself. **“Foolishness!”** the unbeliever cries out. “This MAKES NO SENSE!” Yes, this makes no sense – but it's STILL all true.

IN THESE last days before Christmas take the time – sit back – **“ponder”** anew the FOOLISH FACTS of Christmas. Marvel over them and ...

## II. Give glory to your only wise God.

These closing verses of Romans are what we call a DOXOLOGY or “hymn of praise.” IN THESE last days before Christmas give glory to God that He has brought you to believe the **“mystery”** of Christmas. This mystery had been **“hidden for long ages past but has not been revealed”** – revealed BY GOD IN His Word. The gospel was not discovered by HUMAN INGENUITY or **investigation**. The mystery has been revealed **“through the prophetic writings at the command of God.”**

Already in the OT God had **“revealed and made known”** the Christmas gospel. In our Christmas services we will hear many of those OT prophecies. GIVE GLORY to God for the NT fulfillment of those prophecies – for the full revelation of those prophecies. In the BRIGHT LIGHT of their **NT fulfillment** we can better see and understand those OT promises. Isaiah had prophesied that **“A virgin will be with child”** – now we know that **Mary** was that virgin. The prophets had prophesied that **“the days are coming”** – now we know that it was **“in the days of Caesar Augustus, while**

**Cyrenius was governor of Syria.”** Now we have MORE UNDENIABLE PROOF that our God always keeps His promises and always at just the **right time**. IN THESE last days before Christmas give glory to God for His ever faithful Word and promises.

Give glory to God for this **“mystery”** of Christmas has been revealed **“by the command of the eternal God.”** None of Christmas was LEFT TO CHANCE. Christmas was not just a NICE THOUGHT – a good possibility. God made his plans for Christmas **in eternity**. God ordered the prophets to write their prophecies. God carried out His plans - God fulfilled His promises. IN THESE last days before Christmas give glory to God AS YOU SEE God in charge and **in control**. Nobody thwarts God’s **plans** or promises!

IN THESE last days before Christmas give glory to God that His Word has come TO YOU **personally**. Jesus came as the Savior OF ALL people – your Savior – my Savior. God has **“revealed and made known”** this mystery of Christmas **“so that all nations might believe and obey Him.”** Literally it’s **“for the obedience of faith.”** Trusting in Jesus as our Savior we are OBEYING God – we’re doing what God wants us to do. The reverse is also true. Not believing in Jesus – ignoring Jesus – having no time for Jesus we are **then** DISOBEYING God.

IN THESE last days before Christmas give glory to God that YOU have heard AND believe the Christmas gospel and you ARE SO OBEYING God. That obeying is NOT TO SCORE points with God – get A PAT on the back for **being such good** people. That obeying – that trusting in Jesus – is a RECEIVING FROM Jesus all His Christmas presents of love, peace, joy, forgiveness, comfort, hope, strength, eternal life.

IN THESE last days before Christmas give glory to God that NOT ONLY did God bring you to faith in Jesus but He will also keep you in that faith. **“Now to Him who is able to establish you by my gospel and the proclamation of Jesus Christ ...to the only wise God be glory!”** WE NEED God to establish and keep us in the faith. ON OUR OWN we’re no match for the devil – the world – our own sinful natures.

God keeps us in the faith in THE SAME WAY He brought us to faith – THROUGH the gospel in Word and Sacrament. What blessings God HAS FOR US in these days of Christmas. Church today. Two different services on Christmas Eve. Church again next Sunday on Christmas Day. NOT ONLY that – but the Lord’s Supper today – AND on Christmas Day – AND New Year’s Day too – three Sundays in a row! As the Word reveals the Son of God born our Savior – **in the Sacrament** our Savior personally comes to us and invites us, **“Take eat, take drink; this is My body – My blood – given and shed for you for the forgiveness of sins.”** IN THESE coming days give glory to God for these precious means of grace. Give glory to God BY USING ALL these opportunities to grow in your faith – to grow closer to your Savior.

IN THESE last days before Christmas. Keep in mind the DOUBLE EMPHASIS we’ve had throughout Advent. **Yes**, Christmas is coming – but not just Christmas. JESUS is coming again! The Last Day is coming. In these **last days before Christmas** – AND in these **last days of the world** – let’s TAKE THAT BREATH and both marvel at the mystery of Christmas and give glory to our God. Amen.

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