

12/21/08

THE OLD TESTAMENT LESSON 2 Samuel 7:1-11, 16

(God makes His dwelling in the midst of His people and David's throne shall endure forever.)

1 After the king was settled in his palace and the LORD had given him rest from all his enemies around him, 2 he said to Nathan the prophet, "Here I am, living in a palace of cedar, while the ark of God remains in a tent."

3 Nathan replied to the king, "Whatever you have in mind, go ahead and do it, for the LORD is with you."

4 That night the word of the LORD came to Nathan, saying: 5 "Go and tell my servant David, 'This is what the LORD says: Are you the one to build me a house to dwell in? 6 I have not dwelt in a house from the day I brought the Israelites up out of Egypt to this day. I have been moving from place to place with a tent as my dwelling. 7 Wherever I have moved with all the Israelites, did I ever say to any of their rulers whom I commanded to shepherd my people Israel, 'Why have you not built me a house of cedar?'"

8 "Now then, tell my servant David, 'This is what the LORD Almighty says: I took you from the pasture and from following the flock to be ruler over my people Israel. 9 I have been with you wherever you have gone, and I have cut off all your enemies from before you. Now I will make your name great, like the names of the greatest men of the earth. 10 And I will provide a place for my people Israel and will plant them so that they can have a home of their own and no longer be disturbed. Wicked people will not oppress them anymore, as they did at the beginning 11 and have done ever since the time I appointed leaders over my people Israel. I will also give you rest from all your enemies. "'The LORD declares to you that the LORD himself will establish a house for you: . . .

16 Your house and your kingdom will endure forever before me; your throne will be established forever."

THE EPISTLE LESSON Romans 16:25-27

(The mystery long hidden has been revealed---Jesus Christ!)

25 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, 26 but now revealed and made known through the prophetic writings by the command of the eternal God, so that all nations might believe and obey him-- 27 to the only wise God be glory forever through Jesus Christ! Amen.

THE GOSPEL LESSON Luke 1:26-28

(The angel Gabriel comes to the virgin Mary and announces that she will become the mother of our Lord.)

26 In the sixth month, God sent the angel Gabriel to Nazareth, a town in Galilee, 27 to a virgin pledged to be married to a man named Joseph, a descendant of David. The virgin's name was Mary. 28 The angel went to her and said, "Greetings, you who are highly favored! The Lord is with you."

29 Mary was greatly troubled at his words and wondered what kind of greeting this might be.

30 But the angel said to her, "Do not be afraid, Mary, you have found favor with God. 31 You will be with child and give birth to a son, and you are to give him the name Jesus. 32 He will be great and will be called the Son of the Most High. The Lord God will give him the throne of his father David, 33 and he will reign over the house of Jacob forever; his kingdom will never end."

34 "How will this be," Mary asked the angel, "since I am a virgin?"

35 The angel answered, "The Holy Spirit will come upon you, and the power of the Most High will overshadow you. So the holy one to be born will be called the Son of God. 36 Even Elizabeth your relative is going to have a child in her old age, and she who was said to be barren is in her sixth month. 37 For nothing is impossible with God."

38 "I am the Lord's servant," Mary answered. "May it be to me as you have said." Then the angel left her.

INTRO - We have Christmas mystery, so to speak, at our home. We were putting out Christmas decorations and as we were unpacking one of our manger scenes we found we were missing two pieces, the stable, and the baby. So, where are they?

I. Did you hear about the mystery in today's epistle lesson from Romans 16?

A. Romans 16, verses 25 and 26 say, **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, 26 BUT NOW REVEALED AND MADE KNOWN THROUGH THE PROPHETIC WRITINGS BY THE COMMAND OF THE ETERNAL GOD, so that all nations might believe and obey him-**

1. For many years God's plan to save the world through Jesus was a mystery.
2. There were clues provided by the prophets of the Old Testament.
3. But, how God would work to save people through the promised Savior was still unknown in many ways. It was A MYSTERY!

B. There is something exciting about being part of a mystery.

1. That excitement and wonder is part of our celebration each Christmas, isn't it?
2. God has sent Jesus in ways that are unexpected, to people unexpected, in a place that is unexpected.
3. Imagine the Messiah, the Lord of the Universe, coming as a baby born in feed trough, imagine the holy birth happening to an unwed mother, with announcements to common laborers.
4. Part of the celebration of Christmas is that God works His love, His salvation in ways that no one would expect.

II. You will celebrate Christmas this week, and I pray it is a celebration of love and joy and faith, but, will the love and joy and faith last?

A. How many times have you heard someone say, "Why can't the kindness and spirit of Christmas last all year?"

1. How many Christmases have wars been stopped for a Christmas cease-fire? Have you ever wished that peace on earth would actually happen all year?
2. There is a peace and joy knowing that God loved us so much to send His Son in such a mysterious way. Do you catch yourself in February or April, or September wishing for some of that peace and joy.

B. God has a purpose more than just peace and joy from Christmas.

1. Our Bible verse says that God acts in a mysterious way now revealed **so that all nations might believe and obey him**, Does your faith and trust in God keep going when Christmas is done?. Are you led to doubt the love of God because of the pain of this life?
2. Real obedience doesn't happen when people are forced to obey, but when they want to serve. Has the mystery of the birth of Jesus continued past Christmas so that you find yourself willingly serving the Lord, rather than yourself, all year long.
3. Do you struggle with disobedience and selfishness.

III. We have had another mystery at our house this Christmas. For the last 7 or 8 days someone has come to our door, rung our doorbell, and run away. When we come to the door we see someone jumping into a car, and there is a gift on our doorstep, with a poem. The poem tells about Christmas, and about how the giver is faster and sneakier than we are. This has been fun, and some of us have actually been a little hesitant to catch the giver. After all, we don't want the fun to stop. But, it has also left us with questions at the source of this mystery.

A. The mystery of God's working, according to our Bible verse, is not only that He sent Jesus in mysterious ways as foretold by the prophets, but that God continues to work in our lives today.

1. This verse does not just talk about **the mystery hidden for long ages past, 26 but**

now revealed and made known through the prophetic writings . According to verse 25 part of God's mysterious working is **Now to him who is able to establish you by my gospel and the proclamation of Jesus Christ,**

2. Part of the mystery of God's working is not only that Jesus came in amazing ways, but that God brings us to faith through His mysterious working.

1. This verse says our faith is established and begun through the Gospel and by the proclamation of Jesus.

2. God works faith in mysterious ways.

3. That working of faith by God is happening today.

A. Who would think that with the simple gathering of God's people, the hearing of the word, speaking of prayers and singing of songs that lives would be changed. But God works through the proclamation of Jesus in worship to bring faith, and bring love and peace and joy. Lives are changed mysteriously by God in faith through worship.

B. Who would think that with the pouring of a little water and the speaking of some words from Scripture that God would work. But, that is what is happening as God gives His Spirit and forgives sins in baptism. And guess what, this is not a one time faith, it is faith that saves people for eternal life in heaven. You are watching that mysterious miracle today.

C. Who would think that God comes to meet people in common bread and wine. But today God comes to us, and gives forgiveness, and strengthens faith, and gives the Christmas blessings of Jesus' coming all over again.

B. How do we catch the secret giver of gifts at our house? Do we even want to catch them?

1. How do we explain the mystery of God's working of faith?

A. We can explain that God works in love, in grace, by the Word and Sacraments, through His Spirit and the Church.

B. But, why try to understand the working of God who is greater than we are.

2. Our lesson for today tells us how to receive and live in the mysterious Christmas love of God.

1. Verse 27 says, **27 to the only wise God be glory forever through Jesus Christ! Amen.**

2. In other words, was we receive the mysterious gift of God's Son, as we receive the gift of faith, and through faith we receive love and peace and joy, the appropriate reaction is praise!

CONCLUSION - Have you ever received an unexpected gift? How do you respond, it's too late to get a gift for that person. This Wednesday and Thursday we will relive the Christmas story the receiving of God's gift, given in God's mysterious ways.

As God mysteriously works in our midst today, and throughout our lives, the most appropriate response is, **27 to the only wise God be glory forever through Jesus Christ! Amen.** And the best praise we can give is simply to let God work in us so that we respond in faith and obedience, all year, all our lives, eternally.