

Text: Romans 16:25-27.

Fourth Sunday in Advent.

December 20, 2020.

God's grace is revealed in his Son, Jesus! Amen.

Gender reveal parties. I don't remember them even existing twenty years ago. Some people love them! A party! A blessed event! A child! Other people hate them. Another excuse to make me buy you a present. How many husbands have been dragged along, go through the motions, just glad when it's over? At least one gender reveal party was blamed for starting a wildfire when pyrotechnics were used in a dry area. And it's kind of surprising with all the talk about gender being fluid and gender being non-binary that these parties are getting more common. Maybe soon people will look back and say, "That was ever a thing?" Here's the thing about gender. It's determined at the moment of conception. It's just not known until about 22 weeks of pregnancy and even then it takes a careful search for that gender to be made clear and even then those who know have to choose to reveal that gender.

Christmas is also about revealing, but revealing something much more important than the gender of a child. Christmas is God revealing his child, his one and only Son to us. God's Son, God in the flesh. God's Son, God come to earth. God's Son, the holy one taking on sin, so the sinners can wear holiness. Wow. Those are some deep thoughts. I would never have thought about God coming to earth to rescue the people who ruined his creation. I didn't think of it. That's why God had to reveal it. Reveal. Revelation. That's our key word today. God reveals his Son. Better than any gender reveal party. God reveals his Son! We are loved and forgiven. We see the heart and mind of God, in the flesh! God reveals his Son! This revealing makes us strong. It establishes us, confirms us, in accordance with my gospel. Now the word gospel simply means, "Good news." But let's not brush this word, gospel, aside because of its simple definition. When God revealed his Son at Christmas, God sent angels from heaven to sing, "Good news! Of great joy!" A message so wonderful it took heavenly messengers.

But almost every time since, God has used earthly messengers. Paul, the man whom God used to write this Bible book of Romans, refers to this gospel as the message I proclaim about Jesus Christ. Paul wasn't an angel. But he got to proclaim good news. Of great joy. For all the people. The idea behind the words, "message," and, "proclaim," is that of preaching. I know preaching is a naughty word today. Don't preach at me! Spare me the sermon. But at that time, the preacher, or herald he was often called, was held in high regard. The herald was one of the most important people serving the king, because the herald was charged with proclaiming messages for the king. The herald didn't invent his message. The herald simply proclaimed what the king told him to say. The angels didn't invent the good news of great joy. They simply proclaimed with a great company of the heavenly host, the message God gave them to say. Paul wasn't making this message up. He proclaimed the good news that God gave him to say. Me, you. We simply proclaim the good news that God has given us to say. Jesus lived. Jesus died. Jesus rose. What could be a greater privilege than that? To proclaim the message of angels? To preach good news, of great joy, that is for all the people!

Maybe it's easy for us to take that message for granted. And I'm thinking that most of you here could carry on with the rest of that good news, today in the town of David a Savior has been born to you. He is the Messiah, the Lord. That's why this is good news. It's all about Jesus. But this good news wasn't always known. It wasn't always revealed. God kept this mystery hidden for long ages past. Man. There's a lot of big words here. Let's pause. Take a breath and we'll explain what God means.

Revelation. Not just that scary book at the end of the Bible. But showing, making known. Just like a gender reveal party reveals something that has been there, so God at Christmas chose to reveal his Son. God's Son has always existed. Jesus has always been here. But Christmas reveals Christ in a special way. Christmas is God come to earth. God in the flesh. I know I've said that. But, wow. It just boggles the mind. I can't wrap my head around God in the flesh. God is eternal. How does he come in time? God is infinite. How does he become finite? God is the Creator. How does he become a creation? Don't think too long or you'll need some ibuprofen, or acetaminophen.

This is why God calls this a mystery. It's not spooky or frightening. It's just not our natural knowledge to know and understand Christmas. God has to reveal the mystery through preaching and instruction. And even after he does this mystery is only understood by a select group of people. Many years ago, my wife and I had Vicar and his wife over. After rinsing off some dishes, I wiped my hands on a towel. My normally calm wife flipped out! "Don't use that towel! That's the dish towel. Not the hand towel!" I had no idea. Vicar's wife, however, just gave a smug sigh, "Oh yeah, dish towel. Hand towel." As though everyone comes out of the womb knowing the difference! But now, I have been instructed. Now I know the mystery. I'm one of the select few who knows the difference between the hand towel and the dish towel. Our sons still haven't figured it out, even after instruction.

Maybe that was a long way to go to illustrate this concept of mystery. We can't figure out God's plan of salvation on our own. God has to reveal it. And in the 400 years before Jesus' birth, God kept silent. No books of the Bible for 400 years. God kept the mystery hidden for long ages past. People kept searching. They were excited. They were eager with anticipation for Jesus to come. But 400 years? That's a long wait.

And don't we feel the same? Are we still searching the Scriptures, for any clue when Jesus will come again? Or are we tired of waiting? Are we still excited about Christmas? Or is it just another excuse to have to go online and buy some more gifts? Are you still filled with the child's eager anticipation counting down the days by tearing one paper ring off, opening one more door on the calendar? Or are you just glad when it's all over? Has the thought ever crossed your mind that maybe this whole idea of Christmas, God in the flesh, God coming to earth, maybe that's just an outdated notion for a day gone by?

When the bah humbugs creep into your heart, then hear it again. Good news! Great joy! For all the people! Good news! About Jesus Christ! Today. Today. Has been born to you a Savior! A Savior! God loved you so much he couldn't let you stay in your sins. God loved you so much he couldn't stand the thought of heaven without you. And he didn't make you build a stairway to heaven. He came down to earth. Just for you! God revealed his Son. God in the flesh. I won't apologize for repeating that. We need to hear it more often than we need instruction about hand towels and dish towels. God's Son. Our Savior! God in the flesh. God came down from heaven. The holy God treated his perfect Son like the sinner. So the Holy God now wraps up sinners in his Son's perfection. Think about that holy wrapping on this present of perfection. God's holy hands wrapped around you in baptism and wrapped you up in perfection. That's the good news of Christmas! The sins of sinners were placed on the sinless Son of God. That's the good news of Christmas. Your sins are gone. Your guilt is gone. You are good enough for God. He said so. That's the good news of Christmas! That's the revelation of the mystery hidden for long ages past.

But now, now, that mystery is revealed. And this is actually a different word in the original language

than the first revealed. The idea of this is more about something brought into the light, made obvious. Just like the ultrasound, at least usually, makes obvious the gender, so God made obvious his Son. And one key way? God put it in writing. The prophetic writings by the command of the eternal God revealed his Son! There's too many writings to mention. An offspring of a woman to crush the devil's head. A child born in Bethlehem. One pierced for our transgressions. A descendant of David to build an eternal house. One whose bones would not be broken, even in the agony of crucifixion. Very precise. And in writing. God didn't leave the revealing of his Son to chance or feeling. God revealed specific details, in writing, so that those who searched the Scriptures would see his Son.

And now, and now, this Son is revealed to all the Gentiles. The word in the original language for Gentiles is ethnay. Even if you don't know any Greek, can you hear what English word that sounds like, ethnay? If you said ethnic, that's correct. God wants all ethnicities, people from every ethnic background, every race and language and nation and people to know his Son. If there is one book that removes racism, it's the Bible. If there's one group of people to be anti-racism, it's Christians. We want what God wants. We want all people, all ethnic groups, to be saved, so God has revealed his Son to every ethnic group. God wants every ethnic group to come to the obedience that comes from faith. Notice which comes from which. Obedience comes from faith. Faith comes first, then obedience. But if you'd had Bible 101 you remember that faith comes first, then good works. First God gives faith, then he gives us the power to do good works out of love for Jesus.

So now what? What do we do now? God has revealed his Son. God has brought us good news. God has come to earth in the flesh. God has treated the holy one like the sinner and given the sinners his holiness. And God has put this amazing mystery in writing. And God has revealed this to all ethnicities to have faith and do good works. What now?

Praise him! He's the only wise God. Put his wisdom up against any other God, any other creature and there is no comparison. He's the wise one. To him be the glory through Jesus Christ. See, Jesus Christ is the key. A god without Jesus is no god at all, at least not a god that saves from your biggest problem of sin.

To God be the glory. To God alone be the glory. Johann Sebastian Bach, you might have heard of him. Did you know he was a Christian, and even a Lutheran, and a faithful one at that? And at the end of every one of his compositions, he put the letters SDG. This is a Latin abbreviation for Alone, to God, the Glory. It was not just Bach who thought that. Paul wrote that. To the only wise God be the glory. What did the angels sing at Christmas, "Glory to God." What's our ultimate purpose, why do we exist? To give God the glory. To God alone, the glory. God has revealed his Son. Amen.

To the only wise God be glory forever through Jesus Christ! Amen.