

In some houses the gifts are making their way under the tree. Gifts wrapped with ribbons and bows. All little mysteries waiting until Christmas. In other houses the gifts are still safely hidden somewhere else. They may already be wrapped or not. But there is no way they're coming out under the tree until Christmas. The temptation is just too great. Little kids and big kids see presents and tend to want to look at name tags, give each a shake, and see which big ones belong to them. They don't care about mystery. They want to know. So in those houses the gifts have to stay hidden till the last possible moment.

There was a time in history when God kept his mystery gift hidden. It wasn't because of the prying eyes of humans or because of jealousy. We don't really know the reason. We know God has his gift. We know he knew what he was going to do. He did give some hints and clues. But no big reveals. No in depth information. No specific identifiers. People wondered and waited. It was a mystery. Some waited patiently while others couldn't wait anymore and gave up. They thought it probably would never happen, thought it was just too good to be true, and insulated themselves from disappointment. Some had no clue God was even keeping hidden a mystery gift.

We live in a time when this gift has been fully revealed. Like Christmas presents sitting opened and everyone has seen what everybody got. There's no secret anymore. And nothing is hidden about what God is going to do next either. Advent is a season of preparing ourselves. Not for God's revealing of a mystery we didn't know at Christmas but rather a mystery date we're still waiting for. Either way the gift is the same. This morning in the second lesson...

God's mystery gift revealed
It's the content of gospel proclamation
It's the reason for glory

I have no memberships to secret clubs. So I don't know any secrets of any secret clubs. Usually the movies or books speak of completing a set of challenges or initiation rites in order to prove worthy of acceptance into a secret club. Only then do you get the secret knowledge. That was the mystery religions of Paul's day. Secret cults that passed down their most sensitive information only to the initiated. One might be a member of a mystery religion, but not actually in until possessing the secret knowledge. No one without that secret knowledge could be counted saved, promised anything good, or even on good terms with the mystery religion god. So gaining access to the secret knowledge was what it was all about. That pursuit offered total control to the mystery religion's leaders. Make people jump through hoops, do what the leaders demanded, and make people think they were earning something great in the process.

God does not operate that way. During the time of the Old Testament God never made anyone jump through hoops or squirm until they could get the secret knowledge. The main thrust of the plan continued to be hidden with only clues for guidance. To the first people, Adam and Eve, God promised a serpent crusher would come. To Abraham God shared that his descendants would be blessed through one very special descendant. To David the promise was that one of his descendants would rule on the throne forever. Through the prophets God revealed where he would be and what he would endure. The mystery gift was revealed slowly, never entirely. Obscure, but not totally hidden.

Like fighter jets going over a stadium during the Star Spangled Banner, God's mystery gift needed to be revealed at just the right moment. For centuries the mystery was obscure. Then the revelation needed to be given, proclamation had to take place. **"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..."** Just like an art exhibit's opening night having the white sheet pulled up, God pulled back the veil completely and revealed his mystery gift in line with the proclamation of Jesus Christ. The mystery is related to Jesus Christ because the coming Savior is the content of the gospel proclamation and the revelation of the mystery. Jesus came at Christmas and the message went out. God unveiled it for the world. The message was proclaimed by people like Paul and it still goes out today. The gospel message is still proclaimed. In the content of that gospel, Christ Jesus, God's power is active. People come to faith.

Some live life thinking the wonderful truth isn't for them. They might feel like their particular sins are too great. They hear on social media posts and in office conversations how terrible one sin is and they wonder if God really does think it's too much to forgive. As people talk behind their back they get a bad impression of Christians, like it's a secret club they're not invited into. If God can't forgive, then maybe their spouse can't or their friends can't either. Have we done this knowingly or unknowingly? It's to our shame if we have. Or we hold out that forgiveness is for people who have it together, members of a church, or members who give offerings. We pretend God's gift is for those who can prove they deserve it by how they live. It's shameful if we held off on proclaiming the gospel message of forgiveness in Christ until we thought someone deserved it. If we lead people to think they can do things to make God pleased we're keeping hidden the mystery gift of God.

The Word reveals God's mystery gift. It's the content of gospel proclamation. A gospel that speaks of God's love to you. Preaching that points you to Christ Jesus. One promised centuries before his birth in the manger. Revealed to shepherds as the Savior of the world. Your Savior, God in the flesh. God come to your world to serve you with his love. Jesus is God's best gift. Not secretly stuffed off to the side where only a few can find him. Not hidden so that knowledge of him stays with only a few. But proclaimed by angels in the fields. Shouted by apostles who died for their proclamation. Openly shared with many so it might come to you. Christ is proof of God's loving kindness to you. Jesus is the total of God's love for you.

Even when it was a mystery Christ was never intended for just one group of people. God is too big to limit salvation like that. God always hinted he would open it further, go global, bring joy to the world. God wanted all people to come to faith. That would give him glory. Praise that would rightly come to him for his awesome achievements. That mystery was **“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...”** Obedience in the act of believing. That’s why the mystery was made known.

Glory belongs to God for his wisdom. For a plan where people don’t pay, but are given a gift from God. **“To the only wise God be glory forever through Jesus Christ! Amen.”** Jesus came as a little child and lived here among us for a time. His life was perfect. God gets glory for this wisdom. You honor him because he sent Jesus to complete all the things you were supposed to do by the Law. Jesus did them perfectly in your place. He sacrificed himself on the cross. His perfect life given for yours. God deserves glory, a recognition in praise because he sacrificed his own Son for you. Jesus rose from the dead and ascended into heaven to rule over all things for your benefit. Again God is to be exalted and declared loving because now Jesus controls all things so you might be safely brought to heaven.

Glory belongs to God now and forever. When you approach him you come through Christ. Mercifully accepted because of your Savior’s work. Pleasing to God in Jesus. It’s not too late to start giving glory to God. Give glory to God by singing his praise. Receive the sacrament he provides by grace. Prepare yourself for his return. Share with someone an invitation. Use one of the DVDs to invite a friend to Christmas Eve. Drop the business card invite into someone’s hand you know. Talk with family or friends about what Christmas really means. Doing these give God glory. You show others he is first in your life. You’re exalting his name before others. Start now and continue into eternity.

There might be a reason to keep the presents of Christmas hidden away. Little reasons that like to snoop in curiosity. But not God’s mystery gift. It’s been revealed. Let’s get the message out. It must be proclaimed because the content of that message is Christ, God’s gift. We give God the glory for this gift. We praise him for sending Jesus. He’s worthy of receiving all the glory for his revealed plan to save us, his promise that Jesus will come again, and for allowing us to approach him through Christ, our perfect redeemer and Savior.