

## It's a Mystery

*By Linda Rex*

***December 24, 2023, 4<sup>th</sup> Sunday in Advent, Christmas Eve***—I don't know about you, but I love a good mystery, the old-fashioned kind, like in an Agatha Christie novel. As you read the text, you try to pay attention to the clues and guess who the villain is before the author unveils the truth at the end of the story. A good author throws about lots of red herrings to distract us or divert us from the truth, and sends us down rabbit trails which keep us from seeing the true perpetrator of the crime.

I wonder if the reason we love mysteries so much is because God loves a good mystery. Indeed, God is the One who set us all in the middle of life's greatest mystery, and the apostle Paul refers to this mystery in his letters. In our passage for this last Sunday in Advent, Romans 16:25–27, Paul refers to this mystery at the end of his letter to the church in Rome, as he closes with a doxology of praise to God.

Paul says that “the mystery which has been kept secret for long ages past” has been revealed. The prophetic word gave us many clues about this mystery, but it was not fully disclosed until the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ. In Eph. 3:3–9, Paul calls it the “mystery of Christ” which the Spirit revealed to the prophets and apostles, and that it was for many generations, he says in Col. 1:26, hidden in God but was now made manifest to his holy people.

What is this mystery? In Colossians 1:26, Paul puts it this way: “this mystery among the Gentiles [non-Jews], which is Christ in you, the hope of glory.” This is why in Ephesians, he calls it “the mystery of Christ.” The “revelation of the mystery” was the fulfillment of the promise God made over and over, beginning in the garden and on through many centuries to his people ancient Israel, that the Messiah would come and save them.

Even though his people believed this salvation had something to do with land and an earthly kingdom, the Scriptures pointed to a Messiah who would usher in the age of the Spirit, when God would free his people from their proclivity to sin and turning away from him. What was overlooked as well was the many passages which pointed to the redemption and salvation of the nations—people from all nations would be saved and come to worship the Lord.

The mystery revealed to us in Christ is that Father, Son, and Spirit, before time began, determined that all humans God created would be able to share in the divine life and love, and that this would require the self-giving of the Son of God through incarnation, crucifixion, and resurrection. This free gift of love and grace was always in God's plan for every human being, and even though we as human beings did not know this gift was planned for us, God gave us lots of clues along the way, and when the time was right, fulfilled his plan in and through Jesus Christ. Looking again at our passage in Romans, we see that the ability to see this mystery is given to us as a gift. It requires a revelation that only God can give us, and he does this through Christ by his Holy Spirit. We receive it through repentance and faith in Christ.

What you believe about who Jesus Christ is, is important. To see and acknowledge Jesus Christ for who he is as both Lord and Savior opens the way for us to comprehend the mysteries of the kingdom of God, and enables us to grasp this greatest mystery: God has come to us in Christ, joined us in our human flesh, shared an authentic human existence with us, died the death we all die, and rose again, bringing our human flesh into the divine life and love, and sending the Spirit so we all can individually begin to participate in God's life and love by faith in Christ. As we come to faith in Christ, which is a gift God gives us by his Spirit, we begin to see more clearly

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all the clues that led to the revelation of this mystery, and we grow in our understanding of the mysteries of the kingdom.

This Christmas season, my prayer is that you experience in a way you never have before, this mystery of Christ in you, the hope of glory. May you have a profound personal revelation of this mystery and begin to share this good news with others. Merry Christmas!

*Our Father, thank you for the gift of your Son and you Spirit by whom we may come to share life with you now and forever in your love and grace. Grant that we may see in a way we never have before that Christ is in us, and we are in Christ, and Christ is in you, by your heavenly Spirit. Amen.*

*“Now to God who is able to strengthen you according to my gospel and the proclamation of Jesus Christ, according to the revelation of the mystery that was kept secret for long ages but is now disclosed, and through the prophetic writings is made known to all the Gentiles, according to the command of the eternal God, to bring about the obedience of faith—to the only wise God, through Jesus Christ, to whom be the glory forever! Amen.”* Romans 16:25–27 NRSV