

**1st Timothy 3: 16, “God was Manifest in the Flesh”, Sermon # 45 in the series – A
Sermon for the Christmas Season, Delivered by Pastor Paul Rendall on
December 8th, 2019, in the Afternoon Worship Service,
as a Communion Sermon.**

As we are now beginning to enter into the Christmas Season, I thought that it would be appropriate, if we could for a few Sundays, turn our attention to the Incarnation of our Lord Jesus Christ. There is hardly a greater thing that the human mind can ponder than this truth; that God was manifest in the flesh. In verse 15 Paul says that the church is the pillar and ground of the truth. He would have us to think about the fact the church will only live out her divine calling as the pillar and ground of the truth by remembering that there is a great mystery in the person of Christ Himself. We, as the church, will indeed go about to declare all the truth about Christ which is revealed to us in the Bible, and yet we do not fully understand the things whereof we speak. This is not something that should bother us, for the Apostle says, “Great is the mystery of godliness, or as the Greek word ευσέβεια can be translated – “our devotion”, or “our piety”. Great is the mystery of our devotion. Great is the secret of our piety, Young’s Literal translation says.

And so, we must ask ourselves – How does our confession of Christ as the mystery of our devotion help us to become more godly people? The answer is, that this mystery of His being manifested as both God and Man, although it is something which certainly transcends our ability to comprehend it, actually helps promote godliness in our lives in every way, when we receive this truth, meditate upon, and confess it before men. We who trust in Him, ought to be able to confess Him as God made manifest in the Flesh, before men. This ancient hymn of verse 16 helps us to understand Christ’s mission; of why He came into this world. He came to save us, and to keep us, and to bring us to glory. His mission to this fallen world, shows us much about our own Christian life, and it helps us to understand how we can be transformed by Christ’s grace, in our pilgrimage through this world as well.

So this afternoon I want to open up to you the mystery of godliness in 2 descriptive statements. 1st – God’s being manifested in the flesh began with Christ’s triumphal passage from heaven into this world. And 2nd – The Son of God was manifested in order to build His Church into a godly people. And then 3rd - when we come to the table, we will think about our Communion with Christ as both God and Man and whether it is a comfortable communion to us.

1st – God’s being manifested in the flesh began with Christ’s triumphal passage from heaven into this world.

“Great is the mystery of godliness: God was manifested in the flesh.” Who is this great God and what is He like? Well, the truth about God is a great mystery; even the greatest of mysteries. There is only one true and living God. This God is “Spirit, infinite, eternal, unchangeable in the His Being, wisdom, power, holiness, justice and truth”, it says the Westminster Confession and in our own 1689 Confession. In this Divine Being there are 3 Persons, or Subsistences - The Essence of God is undivided among these 3 Persons. The Father is of none, neither Begotten nor proceeding, the Son is Eternally Begotten of the Father, the Holy Spirit proceeding from the Father and the Son; all 3 Persons infinite, and without Beginning; and therefore, He is but one God. Our 1689 Confession, Chapter 2, Paragraph 3, says – “This God, our God, is not divided in Nature and Being; but rather is distinguished by several peculiar relative properties and personal relations, which doctrine of the Trinity is the foundation of all of our communion with God and comfortable dependence on Him”.

Let me ask you, as we are thinking about this, whether you experiencing a comfortable dependence upon God, as you think about the mystery of the Trinity? Ask yourself whether you are beholding by faith, the mystery of godliness, the Lord Jesus Christ, as the foundation of all of your

communion with God? Your communion with the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit, is all based upon the mystery of the glorious interactions and transactions of the Father and the Son which took place in eternity past in the Covenant of Redemption. These eternal counsels came to their fulfillment in time and space, in the Son's taking upon Himself human flesh in the Incarnation. The Father created all things for His good pleasure, and He is the giver of every good and perfect gift; but the greatest of His gifts was Christ. The Eternal Son was not created, He was manifested. God was manifested in the flesh in the Person of the Son of God, our Lord Jesus Christ, who would become the Mediator between God and men.

The One through whom all things were made, and for whom all things were made, would come into the world through the womb of the virgin Mary, in order that sinners like you and I could be saved. John 1: 1 - "In the Beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God." "The same was in the beginning with God." "In Him was life, and the life was the light of men." "And the light shines in the darkness, and the darkness did not comprehend it." We must confess this truth as the greatest of mysteries; this mystery of godliness; how the perfect Son of God who was pure and perfect light, could come and manifest Himself, and shine in the darkness. And yet men who are guilty, vile, and helpless sinners still could not comprehend His greatness and glory; His mercy and His love, if the Holy Spirit had not shined into their hearts, to give them this knowledge?

The Son of God who is the Perfect, Essential word of God, who perfectly represents the Father, was spoken in the Incarnation. God the Son, the Word, was just as much God as was the Father and the Spirit. In the Godhead, there was a true unity of Essence and Purpose; these 3 Persons of the Godhead, having taken counsel together, they created world, and in the fullness of time, they enacted the redemption of man. The word, the Eternal Son, was in the beginning with God. But He also walked in the garden in the cool of the day, after Adam had sinned, to give the fallen pair a promise. The promise was, that He the Son of God, would take on human nature. He would be joined to a body which was prepared for Him by the Holy Spirit. So that in the fullness of time, a very mysterious work took place in the womb of the virgin Mary. It was a work of the highest order when the power of the Highest overshadowed her, and the Holy Spirit of God fashioned the Lord Jesus in her womb. There in the darkness of her womb was formed the Light of the world. "Veiled in flesh, the Godhead see, Hail Incarnate Deity, pleased as man with men to dwell - Jesus our Immanuel."

Out of heaven, the eternal Son went. Out from the Ivory Palaces of heaven, into a world of woe. Behold His condescension, His love; the great love of God the Father to send him into our fallen and sinful realm. It is not only the basis of our salvation, that God was manifested in the flesh, but it is the real foundation of all of the grace which has brought about our justification and our sanctification; for those of us who have believed in Him. Christ came into this fallen world to live perfectly to the glory of God. He came to lay down His life for us; to die on the cross for our sins. And when He came; He saw our need, and He conquered sin and death. In doing this grand and glorious work, He also purchased all the means by which all of the blessings of salvation would be conveyed to us. He purchased the gift of the Holy Spirit's coming to dwell with us. He ascended and went away to heaven, but He sent the Spirit to do His good work in our hearts.

He not only triumphed over sin and death in terms of His bearing the punishment due our sins, but there at the cross He also won the right of purchase over us altogether. We were bought with a price. We are owned by God; we no longer belong to ourselves. With the offering of His righteous life to take our place under the law, Christ fulfilled it all on our behalf. And then, by the means of His sufferings and death, and His resurrection from the dead, He really and actually triumphed there, over the stubborn resistance of our sinful hearts. It was really so; that when the Father's time came to save us, the Holy Spirit was sent into our hearts, crying "Abba. Father". Christ by His mighty power, through His Spirit's working, broke the power of our reigning sin; He

set the captives free. We who have believed have proved this to ourselves. His blood truly can make the foulest clean; His blood availed, and does avail, for me.

If you have believed in Christ, He has indeed come to live and to dwell in your heart as the hope of glory. He was manifested in the flesh in His Incarnation. But He now dwells in your heart by faith. He is manifested in your soul; in your human nature. And truly we can say – This is the mystery of godliness. It is where it all began for each believer. And so I pray that each of us will give thanks for this, even now, in our hearts.

2nd – The Son of God was manifested in order to build His Church into a godly people.

Even though Christ has been “received up into glory” as our text says, He is still very active in relation to each and every one of His people. He takes a personal interest in them. He ever lives to make intercession for them. When Christ comes into the heart of any believer, He comes in to stay. He comes in to do a great and mysterious work in their hearts; a work which will go on throughout all of their earthly days. It is a work which will be consummated by their being made perfect when they enter heaven. Philippians 1: 6 says: “Being confident of this very thing, that He who has begun a good work in you will complete it until the day of Jesus Christ.” And in 1st Timothy 3: 8 and 9 it says that “Deacons must be reverent, not double-tongued, not given to much wine, not greedy for money, holding to the mystery of the faith with a pure conscience.”

Now, although we are told that this is a “must” for a man who would become a deacon, it is most surely a “should” for all Christians. All Christians should hold to the mystery of the faith with a pure conscience. Truly this is a great mystery; how the life of God comes to live in the soul of man; how Christ and the Father are manifested to the soul, and how we are being transformed by the glory of Christ. Great is the mystery of godliness, that God has commanded light to shine out of darkness in the creation of the world, and that this is the same God who has shone in our hearts to give us the light of the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Christ. Once we behold that glory, once we have the presence of Christ’s glory in our hearts, we want more and more to sanctify Christ in our hearts. We want to reverence Him and hallow His name in relation to the way that we live our lives. We want to keep His commandments, and to have His words living and speaking to us; to have Him manifested in our lives in all that we say and do.

Turn with me over to John 14: 19-24. “A little while longer and the world will see Me no more, but you will see Me.” “Because I live, you will live also.” “At that day you will know that I am in My Father, and you in Me, and I in you.” “He who has My commandments and keeps them, it is he who loves Me, and he who loves Me will be loved by My Father, and I will love him and manifest Myself to him.” “Judas, (not Iscariot) said to Him, ‘Lord how is it that You will manifest Yourself to us, and not to the world?’” “Jesus answered and said to him, ‘If anyone loves Me, he will keep My word, and My Father will love him, and We will come to him and make Our home with him.’” “He who does not love Me does not keep My words; and the word which you hear is not Mine but the Father’s who sent Me.”

Great is the mystery of godliness. A godly man knows that Christ is the way to God because Jesus has said so in John 14: 6. A godly man knows that Christ was willing to suffer for him. He willingly went to the cross and died to make a way for him to come to God. A godly man knows that Christ was raised from the dead and because Christ lives, he lives. Christ is in the Father; He is seated as victorious at the Father’s right hand. A godly man has God’s commandments and keeps them out of love to Christ, who first kept them perfectly on his behalf. He knows that in order to do God’s will consistently it will take more than his own commitment to be faithful. And Christ knows this too. He says in verse 21 – “I will love him and manifest Myself to him. “How can this be?”, a disciple asks in verse 22. Jesus answers, “If anyone loves Me, he will keep my word and My Father will love him, and we will come and make our abode with him.” Come on down front now, and I will give you a few more words of explanation before we partake of the Supper.

3rd – Let’s think now, together, about your Communion with Christ as both God and Man and whether it is a comfortable communion to you.

“And without controversy great is the mystery of godliness: God was manifest in the flesh.” So, what I have been saying to you is, that the Father and the Son making their home in us who believe, is the mystery of godliness which Christ died for. His life was manifested; the eternal life which was with the Father, and which was manifested to the apostles, was then also declared to us, by them, in order that we would have fellowship with the Father and with His Son, Jesus Christ. To have fellowship is to have spiritual communion with each of the persons of the Godhead in your spirit. You are receiving spiritual light and life from our Lord, each and every day. This is perhaps the most mysterious truth, of all of our Christian life. But just because there is great mystery here, it does not mean that there has to be uncertainty, or fear, or perplexity of heart and mind in the life of the Christian.

On the contrary, there can be and there should be, according to the Scriptures, a comfortable communion with Christ that is taking place in your soul, even now as we prepare to partake of these elements. Let me remind you of this: We do not know how the life and light of the Lord Jesus Christ are conveyed to our souls. We cannot see Christ physically, or converse with Him audibly at this time, and yet, our communion is taking place with Him right here and right now, by faith. How vital it is, then, at this time, that we understand that being a godly Christian is not simply being taught the various doctrines and truths of the Bible, as important and vital as they are; it is building from that position of having been taught, and learning to abide in the mystery of Christ Himself being with us.

Christ in us is the hope of glory. Christ Himself is our very life; spiritually speaking. Your life as a Christian is hidden with Christ in God. And so, there is a very sweet mystery to our godliness; to our devotion to Him, which brings comfort to our hearts; that Christ died for me. Paul says in 2nd Thessalonians 2: 16 and 17 – “Now may our Lord Jesus Christ Himself, and our God and Father, who has loved us and given us everlasting consolation (eternal comfort) and good hope by grace, comfort your hearts and establish you in every good word and work.” It is here at the table of our Lord, that He our loving Savior ministers that comfort that, because He gave His body to be broken, and His blood to be shed, that we have the forgiveness of sins. It is because He obeyed God’s law perfectly, that we understand that His perfect righteousness is imputed to us and we wear it as one of the garments of salvation. Surely this will minister comfort to you, dear Christian, at this time as you realize how greatly God demonstrates His love for you, the one who He once saw as a child of wrath, now glorying in His Son, as a saint who walks in the light.