

Sunday, December 20, 2020 – Fourth Sunday of Advent
“Shown”

Romans 16: 25-27

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Grace, mercy and peace to you from God our Father and from our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ, Amen.

It slowly started to become clear, a little bit at a time. If you're back East, the first thing that might come to mind this time of year is your windshield. Especially if you had to park outside like I did through high school, college and seminary. Cold nights would encourage the buildup of condensation on the inside of my windshield each morning, making it necessary for me to blast hot air through the defogging vent so I could see where I'm going. And so I would wait as the fog on the windshield slowly lifted away, showing a little more clearly through the glass until finally, I can see everything and drive on my merry way.

It starts to become clear, just a little bit at a time. It was all very clear, at the beginning. In the beginning God created the heavens and the earth. He said, "Let there be light," and so on and so forth every day of creation until the 6th day when He said, "Let us make man in our image." It was all very clear – God gave humans dominion over His creation. God created male and female for one another. God told them to be fruitful and multiply. And Adam and Eve lived in a perfect relationship with God. It was all very clear. God even walked through the garden in the cool of the day, talking with Adam and Eve, walking with them. They knew God very clearly.

It's hard for us to even imagine what that would have been like, to have known God so clearly – everything God wanted Adam and Eve to know, they knew. And then sin obscured it. Our sin blinds us from knowing God, even leads some to doubt His existence, or at least to question whether He's good, or merciful.

That doesn't stop God from looking after His people. It slowly starts to become clear... but the final picture was still a mystery. Paul calls it a mystery kept secret for long ages – God's plan was in motion and happening, it was there but it wasn't shown to us yet, was it? Not in full.

Our Old Testament lesson today was about King David and his desire to build a great temple for God. It's an understandable sentiment, isn't it, to want a grand place for God and a symbol of His presence with us? But it wasn't God's plan to have David build the temple. Instead, God clears some of the fog for David to see, reveals some of the plot yet to come – it is God who will bless David. A king even greater than David will come from his bloodline, who will rule forever. It was a promise from God – revealing that God had a plan to get rid of the fog, to help us to know Him again, to take away our sin.

That's what this thing is all about. This book is not just historical information about Jesus, or principles to live by. It's not just history of events that happened to people in Israel thousands of years ago. This is our history. It's the story of how God has burned off the fog a little bit at a time. It's the story of how God is revealing the plot to you and to me. It's the story - our salvation **shown**. We are shown what God is doing to take away our sin. As Paul says in our epistle, that's the purpose of the prophets of the Old Testament, like Nathan, to tell everyone that God keeps looking after we His people.

It slowly starts to become clear. Nearly 1,000 years pass after God promises David a king to rule on the throne forever. A lot happened in a thousand years. Israel became the dominant country in the region. Then the country split in two, Israel in the north and Judah in the south. Then along came Assyria, butchering the people of Israel. Then along came Babylon, taking the remaining people into exile and putting an end to an independent Hebrew state. Then came the Persians for a couple hundred years. Then the Greeks for a couple hundred more. Then the Romans. Sixty or so years into Roman rule, 600 years after the last King of Judah, a virgin girl engaged to be married in the tiny city of Nazareth in Galilee is visited by an angel.

It starts to become clearer. The scene is revealed a little more – the angel Gabriel reports, “And behold, you will conceive in your womb and bear a son, and you shall call his name Jesus. He will be great and will be called the Son of the Most High. And the Lord God will give to him the throne of His father David, and he will reign over the house of Jacob forever, and of his kingdom there will be no end.”

Do you see God strengthening Mary through this news of the Gospel? The preaching of the very Jesus that she bore in her womb? The revelation of a mystery kept secret for long ages suddenly unmistakably visible in this beautiful good news?

Can't you just sense the anticipation with Mary at this announcement? The wait is almost over, everything is about to be made clear. God's plan for salvation is on the move, it's happening right now, with us! At just the right time, when He was old enough to be respected and listened to and followed by His people, He really started showing us the plan. He performed miracles, healed illnesses, forgave sins, cast out demons. He preached and taught with authority, engendering the spite and hatred of the religious establishment. The final straw was when He raised a man, dead four days, from the dead. He was arrested, tried, mocked, beaten, spit upon, flogged, made to drag a cross. He was stripped and nailed and he was suffocated. And while he did it all he took the blame for the sin of all people and all creation, all of the punishment onto Him and became sin for us. He settled the score and made us right with His Father again. He made it clear that the plan all along was for God to make the sacrifice. He gave us access like no one has had since Adam and Eve walked and talked with God in the cool breeze in the garden.

How blessed we are to live in these times, to know what we know and to know who we know! We have a clearer picture of what God is doing in our lives today than anyone did before Jesus came. The revelation of that mystery kept secret for long ages has been disclosed through prophetic writings and made known to all nations at the command of the eternal God, and we are the recipients of that gift! We have unbridled access to the Father, to come to Him in prayer any time that we want. A god who adopts us into His family in baptism. Giving us forgiveness at communion. Clearing us up with His Word. God is showing you everything He wants you to know – like it used to be – He is showing you Jesus.

Yes, it is becoming clearer all the time. What we're celebrating later this week is when God made things clearer for us than it had been since we first sinned. God has already forgiven your sin, given you eternal life and brought you into His family. He has shown Himself to you. All this He does to make it even more clear, on the Last Day, when we will see Him without our sin fogging the glass at all. "To the only wise God be glory forevermore through Jesus Christ!" In Jesus' name, Amen.