

“The Mystery Man”

The Introit for Palm-Passion Sunday sounds like a mighty battle cry: “Blessed is He who comes in the name of the Lord! We bless you from the house of the Lord. Lift up your heads, O gates! And be lifted up, O ancient doors, that the King of glory may come in. Who is this King of glory? The Lord, strong and mighty, the Lord, mighty in battle.”

Wow, what a King. It’s no wonder the crowds of people line the road, shouting – “Hosanna, blessed is He who comes in the name of the Lord!” Mighty Lord – “save us, now”!

I always imagine a little boy caught up in all this excitement – trying to get a glimpse of what all this commotion is about. Squirring through the masses to the edge of the road – he sees nothing more than an ordinary looking man, riding into town on a donkey. Really? Is this what all the fuss is about? What a letdown.

You are like that little boy in that you come face-to-face with the mystery of the Incarnation – the mystery of God who comes in the flesh. In the person of Jesus Christ, you see an ordinary man – but what you don’t see, and can’t comprehend – is that this Jesus is true God and true man. He is God-in-the-flesh.

This mystery is revealed to you only by God’s Word – and received only by faith – so that you can rejoice in who God is, and all that He is doing “for you.”

This Jesus who comes riding into town doesn’t seem like much – and what He does that week in Jerusalem seems weak, futile, and a waste of time.

The mystery repeats itself in these days as this same Jesus comes to this little church along the highway – making “Himself nothing, taking the form of a servant” – for you and for your salvation.

He splashes water on baby and the world says “is that it?” He stands His appointed man before you so you can hear God say, “I forgive all your sin” – and the world is offended. He gives you His very Body and Blood – crucified, died, and risen – and the world shakes its head and mocks you for making such a big deal over a little piece of bread and a sip of wine.

It’s easy to forget that Jesus is God in the flesh who has come to serve you. He who takes on human flesh and becomes nothing – is treated as a nothing. Like the chief priests, Pilate, the soldiers, and all who passed by as He was dying upon the cross – Jesus today is mocked, humiliated, spit upon, punched in the face, and persecuted. Even WORSE, He is ignored – and met with unbelief.

The temptation for Christians in reaction to all this is to make Jesus into something that He is not! Easter movies about Christ make Him seem like a super-hero. Easter pageants focus on victory, setting aside the shame of the cross.

What the world sets aside, despises – God puts at the very center of the Christian faith. His Word shines the spotlight on the Good Friday death of Jesus Christ – for this is the one and only sacrifice that atones for the sin of the whole world. God shines the spotlight on His Son who humbled Himself – but the world doesn’t know what to do with a dead Jesus.

But it’s not just THEM – we also struggle with Jesus humbling “Himself by becoming obedient to the point of death, even death upon a cross.” Why would God leave His glorious abode in heaven to become a human being – to walk the path we’ve failed to walk – and then to give up His life into death – for sinners like us?

Because He IS “the Lord, strong and mighty, the Lord, mighty in battle.” He comes to fight for you – taking your sin as His own – and then paying the debt of your sin – which is death.

But therein lies the might and victory of our Christ – that His death destroys death – His death crushes the devil’s head – His death redeems you from all your sin and sets you free. Without the shedding of His blood – there is no forgiveness, life and salvation – for you.

God has gathered you here today to reveal this mystery to you – that God has come in the flesh for you and for your salvation. As you listen to the Passion of our Lord throughout this week – when you hear how He made Himself nothing – know and believe that all this He has done for you.

Today you heard that when Jesus “uttered a loud cry and breathed His last” – the curtain of the temple “was torn in two, from top to bottom.” This too reveals the mystery – showing you that nothing stands between you and God. In the blood of Jesus Christ, God and man are reconciled. All the sin that stands against you, and separates you from God – has been taken away – and in Jesus Christ, you are restored to your heavenly Father.

Dearly beloved, do not let your eyes deceive you, or the experiences of life turn you away – for your King, “the Lord, strong and mighty” – has won the battle that you might be His. In humble faith, let us bend the knee, and rejoice to confess – “Jesus Christ is Lord,” to the glory of God the Father. Amen.

The peace of God which passes all understanding, guards your hearts and minds in Christ Jesus. Amen.