

Dec 8th 2013: 1Peter 1:20. John 1:1-14:Bethlehem's Startling Truth

There is a verse in 1 Peter chapter 1 that absolutely amazes me and it should amaze every person who cares to reflect upon its meaning. It's verse 20 and it says this:-

He was chosen before the creation of the world, but was revealed in these last times for your sake.

This He is of course THE LORD JESUS CHRIST. The Lord--because He is, with God the Father and God the Spirit, Almighty God--creator and sustainer of all things

Jesus, for He took upon Himself human flesh and was given the name Jesus when He was born as a baby in Bethlehem's stable.

Christ, which means Messiah. The One chosen by God to be the coming Saviour and Redeemer of human kind.

And indeed it is this chosen aspect of Jesus that is one of the most difficult things for our human minds to comprehend. For here we have in black and white before us. In words that were spoken by man but inspired by God. The incredible statement that God the Son was chosen or set apart before the creation of the world to be, according to the verses that precede this verse, the lamb of God. The very One whose precious blood would be sufficient to redeem from empty and hopeless lives into a vibrant and eternal existence, all who trust Him.

For God the Son to be chosen before the creation of the world to be the atonement for the sin that only entered and corrupted after the creation of mankind, was not a difficult thing for our triune God. For He exists outside of time and unlike us His knowledge or power is not restricted or imprisoned by time.

Yet for our finite minds this is a great mystery that should fill us with awe and reverence. For not only was He chosen before the creation of the world but He was revealed in these last times for our sakes.

He knew us before we were born and delighted in us despite the sin He knew would defile us in His presence. And at a predetermined time God the Son left the glory He had with the Father before time began to be born in a stable at Bethlehem for the sake of you and me.

The Apostle John was given by God the Spirit such a wonderful glimpse of this truth that when he came to write down a record of the life of Jesus, he felt compelled to begin at what he knew to be the real beginning. The very beginning of everything, for there Jesus was; God the Word.

So he wrote in John 1:1-2

In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. ² He was with God in the beginning.

And then in v14 (CEV)

***The Word became
a human being
and lived here with us.
We saw his true glory,
the glory of the only Son
of the Father.
From him all the kindness
and all the truth of God
have come down to us.***

Frederick Buechner wrote

The claim that Christianity makes for Christmas is that at a particular time and place God came to be with us Himself. When Quirinius was governor of Syria, in a town called Bethlehem, a child was born who, beyond the power of anyone to account for, was the high and lofty One made low and helpless. The One who inhabits eternity comes to dwell in time. The One whom none can look upon and live is delivered in a stable under the soft, indifferent gaze of cattle. The Father of all mercies puts Himself at our mercy.

Some would say that for God to put Himself at our mercy was an unfortunate thing for Him to do, because the world treats Him, who is the King of Kings so badly—especially at Christmas. The name of Christ is used to define a season that on the whole fails to give God the Son the prominence that His presence demands.

I was walking through a shopping centre recently and saw a portrayal of the nativity that was free standing and encased in a glass bubble, and my excitement at seeing it there quickly turned to despair as I realized that it was set alongside a Santa Clause, reindeer, a Christmas tree. It was

presented as just another Christmas drawcard. Another piece of the Christmas ritual aimed to encourage people to buy rather than to worship.

A Christmas card had this message on the front:

Some people think that Christmas time
Is gifts and grub and booze;
But the best bit is
That Jesus came—
God's Son in human shoes.

I shuddered when I read that because the coming of Jesus is not just the best bit of Christmas. It is the only bit, and to celebrate Christmas without recognizing the fearful and majestic event that is the birth of God become man is to call forth judgment on one's society rather than salvation.

This becomes a real issue when we look again at our text and note the other thing Peter had to emphasize.

He was chosen before the creation of the world, but was revealed in these last times for your sake.

The coming of Jesus as a baby introduced the last times for our world. It may seem strange to say that when it has now been over 2,000 years since His birth but the length of years does not detract from the fact that this period is the last chance people have to accept God's rescue package. It is also our time to live out the glory of the Gospel message before others.

Someone wrote: ***The Lord Jesus Christ whom we exalt at Christmas is not just a baby in a manger. He is not a character in a children's story. He is far more.***

The next time He comes, and we believe it will be soon, He will come unveiled, and it will be abundantly and immediately clear to all the world just who He really is.

The first time He came as a baby. Soon He will come as Sovereign King and Lord.

Now for us who love Jesus and wish to make Him known this concept of living in the last days of God's grace puts a sense of urgency on the way we should personally approach Christmas. For Christmas is our God given chance to pray for the true message to get through and to speak out about the good news of Jesus whenever the opportunity arises.

This year, because of a family who really wants others to connect with Christ this Christmas, we will have our Christmas card placed in over 7,000 letterboxes rather than just over 2,000. Now that is a huge responsibility that falls upon us to pray for each of those areas, streets, and houses, and you will hear more about how you can be part of that next week. But it also demands from each of us a commitment to use our Christmas services this year as messengers of the Gospels. Prepared to seek out others who visit, to invite visitors along, and to be ready to show them the type of love that is behind the Christmas message.

The real story of Christmas is so deep and mysterious that only the Holy Spirit is able to awake a person's spirit to the reality of it for them. Yet we as the followers of Christ have a part to play this Christmas season. We can pray each day through this month that the true message of Christmas will permeate the hearts of those we know and others who have some connection to this place. We can so honour the Christ of Christmas that we are ready to share about Him whenever the Holy Spirit gives us opportunity. We can endeavour to use every part of our Christmas season—the cards, gifts, greetings—to in some way let people know that for us the reason for Christmas is just so special.

Robert Morgan in one of his books wrote: "***I once read of a great European cathedral whose ceiling was adorned with a painting of God, drawn in brilliant colours. But the ceiling was so high and the cathedral so narrow, that it hurt visitors to crane their necks to view the painting. The ingenious rector placed a mirror at ground level, tilted so that worshippers, by looking in the mirror, could study the image of the painting above.***"

No doubt that rector did that because he himself had come to love that painting and he did not want others to miss out on it. We have come to know Jesus and the full significance of the Christmas story. We have trembled in praise and adoration at the truth of God becoming man. We have come to love Him and now we must seek earnestly ways that we can present Him so that others will seek Him and find Him for themselves.

That's not an easy task in our society but it is more necessary today than ever. And it's something that we must do because of what He has done for us. So during this season let us seek whatever way we can to make the message of Christ available to others. And to give ourselves to prayer so that the Holy Spirit will prompt us, and when He does, we will hear Him and do what he leads us to do.

