

FIRST CHRISTIAN CHURCH OF DENTON
REV. JOHN BURTON
NOVEMBER 27, 2011

SERMON: CHRISTMAS REVELATIONS
TEXT: LUKE 1: 30-32

“The Angel said to her, ‘Do not be afraid, Mary, for you have found favor with God. And now you will conceive in your womb and bear a son, and you name him 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 ancestor David.’”

“Revelations.” When we hear that word people often think of the coming of the Anti-Christ, lakes of burning brimstone, and cavorting devils; in short, nothing that we associate with Christmas. It is not surprising that we have no revelation carols, no revelation cards by Hallmark, and no designated revelation flowers. Revelation is just not seen as a warm and cozy family event!

But perhaps we miss a key point. If we simply drop the capital “R” then the word revelation means “the disclosure of knowledge to humankind by a divine agent.”

Forget for a moment the last book of the Bible and consider the vast library of all the things God has revealed about God’s own character and purpose!

How can you not glean something of God’s character when you look down into the Grand Canyon, or ponder the fact that every snow flake is unique, or gaze off the cruise ship to the horizon as the sun sets, or hold your minutes old baby in your arms? God is all around us – if we will just look beyond the surface!

Forget what Jerry Falwell and his buddies might say – God is not anti-science. God is in every atom, every fossil, and every galaxy we have yet to discover. And through science we can discover much of who God is! And isn’t that a large part of our life’s work – to understand who God is and what God wants of us?

And yet, the Bible is the richest trove of revelations of God. For what is the Bible if not the history of our relationship with God and our collection of the things that we have learned from and about God!

Collections are fun. My father collected logo golf balls. Some folks collect stamps. Other folk collect art. I even heard tell of one lady who collected wedding rings. Me, I collect contemporary versions of Christmas carols and songs such as:

- Dolly Parton singing "Go Tell It On The Mountain"
- Burl Ives' "Holly Jolly Christmas"
- Jimmy Boyd singing "I Saw Mommy Kissing Santa Claus"
- Bing Crosby's "The First Noel"
- Elvis singing "Blue Christmas"
- And the Singing Dogs' version of "Jingle Bells"

Ok, its nothing highbrow but for some reason I like it! I have about 400 Christmas songs so far - and none of them are "Grandma Got Run Over By A Reindeer!"

We have collected vastly more than 400 revelations about God in our Bible.

- ✦ Genesis teaches us that God has rules that God expects us to obey.
- ✦ Exodus that God hears the cries of his children.
- ✦ Deuteronomy teaches us to love one another as God has loved us.
- ✦ Judges that God expects us not to break our vows.
- ✦ 2nd Samuel teaches us that God can forgive crimes.
- ✦ 1st Kings that God values wisdom.
- ✦ 2nd Kings teaches us that God will save a righteous remnant.
- ✦ Ester that God values self sacrifice.
- ✦ Isaiah teaches us that God will bring peace to the world.
- ✦ And Jeremiah that God is the potter and we are the clay in God's hands.

That just scratches the surface of what we know about God! Any of you who read your Bible could add important revelations to that list! You know that the more we read - the more we discover! The more we discover of God the closer we get to God! The closer we get to God the more we bask in God's love and care! And isn't that really the point - to have an eternal, loving relationship with God?!

I no more have a complete collection of Christmas music than I have a complete understanding of all God's revelations! The good news is that I don't have to! You may have some Christmas music that I don't even know exists - and I am sure that you have specific biblical knowledge and understanding that my life experience and studies have not brought me to, yet. But together, as a Church, we are the sum of all our parts - we each hold, by right of our individual experience and study, unique knowledge about God. Together, what we know about God is vastly more than what any one of us knows.

In the same way we add together the knowledge and wisdom found in the Gospels of Matthew, Mark, Luke, and John. They each have a special point of view, a distinctive audience, and a unique message. Which brings us to God's greatest revelation!

All of the revelations and actions of the Old Testament, thousands of years of recorded relationship with God, lead to the coming of the Holy One. And all the stories of the four Gospels focus on God's great act of self revelation: Jesus!

In Jesus, God comes down to show us what is right, to walk the righteous path in front of our very eyes, to tell us without the aid of intermediaries who God is and what God wants.

- ✓ Shan't we marvel at the very thought that God loves us so much that he came down to earth, taking on the form and nature of a human being, that we might be saved.
- ✓ Aren't we bowled over at the notion that God can be in the world and the world not know it!
- ✓ Isn't it shocking the degree to which God is willing to forgive our sins and give us a second chance.
- ✓ Can we be less than stunned at the degree of God's passion for justice and mercy.
- ✓ And isn't it amazing that the whole world does not bow their knees to Jesus and that Jesus does not demand it - seeking our love rather than merely our obedience.

And that only scratches the surface of what Jesus taught us by his words and deeds!

In Luke's Gospel it tells us: "The Angel said to her, 'Do not be afraid, Mary, for you have found favor with God. And now you will conceive in your womb and bear a son, and you name him 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 ancestor David.'"

It tells us that Jesus comes not as another prophet but as both the Son of God and the long awaited Messiah. Jesus is the act by which God comes into the world to change it forever!

So, Christmas is not just a time to throw parties, give gifts, and eat way too much artery clogging but delicious food. Christmas is our time, a precious time, to cherish and ponder God's greatest revelation: Jesus.

As a church we have set aside a unique opportunity to ponder God's revelation. This Sunday is the beginning of Advent – a season of opening ourselves to the revelation of who God is, what God wants from us, and what God is doing in the world.

How?

First, look to the Bible! Read the prophecies of Isaiah and Jeremiah and the nativity stories of Luke and Matthew.

Second, open yourself through prayer. Invite God in. Be hospitable to the Spirit of Jesus. Be fertile soil for the love of Jesus!

Third, open your heart to all your brothers and sisters, the financially poor and the spiritually poor alike. God has come for all those who have fallen short. Reach out to them and invite them in – into our church family and into God's great family.

Prepare your hearts and make straight your minds for the King of Kings, Lord of Lord, and Prince of Peace is coming. And when it comes it may come as suddenly as the Good News came to Mary – on the flutter of angel wings.