

Christmas Eve – 2023

Isaiah 9:2-7

Titus 2:11-14

Luke 2:1-20

The James Webb Space Telescope is the largest, most advanced telescope ever built. It was launched on a rocket on Christmas Day 2021, and reached its destination, a solar orbit, a year later. Man is fascinated by the universe and rightly so. The telescope's camera has captured images of a supernova in the Cassiopeia solar system. A supernova is the colossal explosion of a star. This supernova, which supposedly happened 340 years ago, is 11,000 light years from earth. A light year is the distance that it takes light to travel in one year – roughly 6 trillion miles. The images that the telescope captured of this supernova are fabulous – something that happened 11,000 x 6 trillion miles away from us. Do you have a comprehension of the word “big”?

Jupiter is big. Jupiter has a radius that is ten times that of the earth. Our sun is 7 times the radius of Jupiter. One million earths could fit inside the sun. Something called UY Scuti is a star in a distant solar system. UY Scuti is 1700 times larger than our sun. To put that another way, 5 billion of our suns could fit inside the sphere of UY Scuti. Do you know who created all of this? Out of nothing (ex nihilo); God's creative love sprang into action and He brought forth all that is – what is on this planet and everything that is in the heavens. The power, the immense and unending power; God speaks and the universe is brought forth into being. Beauty and purpose and cohesion; a vast array of elements all working together; life and harmony and order and reciprocation; God plans and unleashes His design, unleashes the power to create; it's astonishing. “Let there be light and there was light.” “Let us make man in our image, and God breathed into Adam the breath of life.” God looked upon all that He had made and saw that it was very good.

Tonight we celebrate what is very good. Tonight we celebrate great love. Tonight we commemorate a mystery that startles the mind and makes the heart burn with God's glory. For behold, I proclaim the Good News to you of a great joy that will be for all the people, for there has been born for you today a Savior, who is Christ the Lord (Luke 2:11). Christmas is a mystery. The One whom all the universe cannot contain has located Himself in the infant child of Mary. In that infant all the fullness of the Deity dwells in bodily form (Colossians 2:9). The Infinite God who hung the planets, the Author of Creation, the Eternal Power of Eternal Majesty – He lies humble, a weak and defenseless baby, and lay in a manger. This child – He designed the universe. This child – in Him is all life, all wisdom, endless authority, endless virtue – and He lies vulnerable to earth's elements, vulnerable to our chaotic realm, vulnerable to our distressed race. The angels, with eyes and minds that apprehend the wonder of God's humility, the angels erupt in exaltation: “Glory in the highest to God and on earth peace among men of His favor” (Luke 2:14). Oh, yes, we celebrate. Tonight the world gleams anew. Tonight we are young, we are reborn, we are invigorated with Immanuel – God with us.

God; your mental image of Him, what is it? Father, Son and Holy Spirit; Creator, Redeemer, and Sanctifier. The Great I AM. He is the Alpha and the Omega, the Beginning and the End. Everything that you are and everything you see has come from Him. All of your perceptive

abilities, all of your emotion, music and laughter and love and beauty and truth and holiness – He is the Source, He is the Provider, He is the Author. And this Majestic Giver came to us in the lowliness, the poverty of our flesh. Not in a tract house, not in a cozy delivery room, not in the protected environment of the affluent – Jesus came in at the bottom. The Greatest came into the world in a way that pegs Him as the least. A stable, barnyard animals, a feeding trough – the Most High *chooses* this. God chooses the lowly as His habitation. The Vast and Imperial God of all Creation chooses to be small, chooses the lowest seat. It is a mystery. But it is also astonishingly glorious.

For me; God chooses this for you, because of His love. You needed Him. In this way, you needed Him. Not on some high and distant throne, but in our hay, in our Bethlehem. Sin; God had to come. Love compelled Him. Death had riddled the crown of His creation and He would not stand by. Sin and death and Satan would be confronted. Not by an edict. Not by a lightning bolt or a third party ambassador. God would bring His power and confront sin Himself, confront death Himself. But this power, it was veiled, hidden, buried beneath His human nature. All the power of Creation is in this man and He hungers like the rest of us, He bleeds like the rest of us, He dies like the rest of us. Or so it seemed. It's a mystery; God and man in one person. Jesus of Nazareth, an itinerant rabbi, healing the sick, curing the leprous, giving sight to the blind. Jesus of Nazareth is a walking epiphany, a direct and pure revelation of God. Who is this? Even the wind and the sea obey Him (Matthew 8:27).

One woman knew who He was. She wept knowing who He was. A woman who was simultaneously broken and whole wept tears that were both bitter and joyful. This God, this Divine Man, forgives me. Her sin plagued her. Her sin clung to her like garment she could not take off. Her conscience was bereaved. Her heart ached. And He forgave her. She wept in joy, in appreciation. With a reciprocal love pouring out of her eyes, she wept. She let down her hair, this woman, and she wiped Immanuel's feet with her hair. He knew. Jesus knew what faith dwelt in her heart (Luke 7:36-50). Jesus always knows. The Savior came for her; to take away her sin, to bleed and die for her. Christ's sacrifice was the universe of love. The cross and the Savior's pain was Light Years times Light Years of love – for you. There is nothing bigger. Good News of great joy that will be for all the people. An angel of the Lord was a Gospel herald to shepherds in the field. The world, our magnificent world, has known that joy. You know who rests in that manger. You know who died on that cross. You know who rose from the dead and brings you His steadfast love, His grace, His blessing, His forgiveness, His fellowship, His heaven. You know!

Some hearts are hard. That too is a mystery. Some hearts are impenetrable obsidian, black and ossified and more like granite than flesh. Some folks reject Christmas, reject the Savior. God calls them to repentance. Sometimes the hammer of God breaks the calcified heart and sinners turn back to the Lord. Sometimes the hammer of God is a Gospel so sweet that it breaks down the most recalcitrant unbeliever. A peach is sweet.

A British soldier named Ray Ellis was captured by the Axis forces near Tobruk in World War II. Tobruk is in North Africa. Ray was put in truck in the North African desert and transported for days to a concentration camp in Italy. The truck was so crammed that none of the prisoners of war could sit or even turn around. The men were emptying their bladders and bowels where they

stood. Many died in that truck; standing up. The corpses of those who died each day were taken out of the truck at night. When Ray and his cohort arrived in Capua in Southern Italy they were paraded through the town. Jeering, sneering; the people of the town spit on them; many stepped out of the crowd to slap them. They had been starved. Ray and his comrades were a broken-down group of men. And then somewhere, running out of the crowd, a young girl came and pressed into Ray's hand a big peach. And then she ran back again and hid herself. This man, this beleaguered man, bit into that peach and nothing ever tasted so good. His heart, his soul tasted the peach. He burst into tears. It made Ray realize that when you think that the whole world is against you and everything is going wrong – there is a girl, somewhere, with a peach.

That is Christ in a manger. That is the God of the immense and unending universe coming to us and sharing His life. Sin and death and Satan had taken us prisoner. God presses His Son into the hands of sinners. Nothing ever tasted so good as Christmas. Jesus is the Savior of mankind. His holiness is His treasure. The Son of God lays aside all of His divine prerogatives and takes up the form of a servant. He was born in poverty in order to make you eternally rich. He died bearing your sin and you are forgiven. Death cannot harm you. The Power of Christ's resurrection has been put in you. Such a mystery! It is so glorious and so true and so worth celebrating. No matter what happens to you, Christ is risen and heaven is your home. Veiled in flesh the Godhead see; Hail the Incarnate Deity. Mild He lays His glory by; Born that man no more may die. Let our gladness have no end; for to earth did Christ descend.