



Colossians 2.¹⁻⁵

¹For I would that ye knew what great conflict I have for you, and for them at Laodicea, and for as many as have not seen my face in the flesh; ²that their hearts might be comforted, being knit together in love, and unto all riches of the full assurance of understanding, to the acknowledgement of the mystery of God, and of the Father, and of Christ; ³in whom are hid all the treasures of wisdom and knowledge. ⁴And this I say, lest any man should beguile you with enticing words. ⁵For though I be absent in the flesh, yet am I with you in the spirit, joying and beholding your order, and the stedfastness of your faith in Christ.

The word, “mystery,” is no stranger to Paul writings. Sometimes he simply uses the word, as we often do, in reference to something that is obscure and difficult to understand or fathom.¹ More often, the word is associated with God and the things of God. Paul speaks of the “mystery of God,” as he does in this passage, of the “myster^{ies} of God,”² of the “mystery of godliness,”³ and of the “mystery of Christ.”⁴ He also speaks of the “mystery of the gospel,”⁵ “the mystery of the faith,”⁶ and even the “mystery of iniquity.”⁷

The “mystery” that most captures Paul’s imagination is that which emanates from God. This “mystery” “in other ages was not made known unto the sons of men,”⁸ but had been “hid from ages and from generations,”⁹ even “kept secret since the world began.”¹⁰ But to Paul and his fellow apostles “it is now revealed... by the spirit”¹¹ and “by revelation,”¹² and “is made manifest to his saints.”¹³

So, what was this mystery, unknown until Paul’s day? Often, Paul has this part of the mystery in mind:

“That the Gentiles should be fellowheirs [in addition to Jews], and of the same body, and partakers of his promise in Christ by the gospel.”¹⁴

¹ See, for example, 1 Corinthians 15.⁵¹

² 1 Corinthians 4.¹

³ Colossians 3.¹⁶

⁴ Colossians 4.³

⁵ Ephesians 6.¹⁹

⁶ 1 Timothy 3.⁹

⁷ 2 Thessalonians 2.⁷

⁸ Ephesians 3.⁵

⁹ Colossians 1.²⁶

¹⁰ Romans 16.²⁵

¹¹ Ephesians 3.⁵

¹² Ephesians 3.³

¹³ Colossians 1.²⁶

¹⁴ Eph. 3.⁶

Before Christ, no nation—not the Egyptians, not the Babylonians, not the Persians, not the Greeks, and no, not even Israel— had so conceived of God as to think Him willing or capable of reaching out beyond themselves and their nation. They were all too contracted and too provincial and too biased in their views. Such a God was too expansive and too inclusive for even their wildest imagination. Maybe, here and there, some imaginative individual might catch a glimpse of possibility (Isaiah, for example), but these remained lone wolves, unable to spread their vision among their own people or extend their vision of God beyond their borders to other peoples.

And so, an even greater mystery unfolded.

“And without controversy great is the mystery of godliness: God was manifest in the flesh, justified in the Spirit, seen of angels, preached unto the Gentiles, believed on in the world, received up into glory.”¹⁵

What kind of God does this? What kind of godliness is this?

Rather than doing as He had done before—speaking and acting in the 3rd person, through prophets, sages, etc.—He, God, spoke and acted in the 1st person. He came to earth Himself, lived openly among humans, and revealed Himself directly and personally.

Oh, what a mystery, what a marvel it is! It is nearly impossible to grasp... “that he would,” for any reason, “descend from His throne divine.”¹⁶ But He did. And it is just such unimaginable expansiveness and willing involvement, participation, and unity with the human race that gives us a steadfast hope that He will involve Himself in our individual lives and translate us into an inclusive society that is as expansive as the cosmos.

Even so, come, Lord Jesus!

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¹⁵ 1 Timothy 3.¹⁶

¹⁶ LDS Hymn, “I Sand All Amazed”