

**Mysteries Uncovered, by Daniel H. Kuhn, Jr. A4051218**  
**Romans 16:25-27 and Luke 1:47-55**  
**Elon Community Church, United Church of Christ, 18 December, 2005**

We go to a lot of trouble wrapping Christmas gifts. We purchase tape and paper. We make little nametags. I don't know about you, but I struggle to make neat creases and corners, so the package looks attractive. Why do we do that? Why do we go to all that trouble to wrap presents? Do we do it to create a mystery?

On the receiving side we wonder what is in the box. What is beneath the wrapping? Oh, it is so difficult to be patient and wait until Christmas day to open the gifts and uncover the mysteries. The mystery of the wrapped gift certainly creates more interest than if we were able to see exactly what the gift was ahead of time.

Did the issue of Christmastime mysteries begin with a young woman in Nazareth two thousand and nine years ago? Luke says Mary was "perplexed" when she was approached by an angel named Gabriel. She pondered his greeting that she was a "favored one."

If you were in Mary's place in Palestine in Biblical times, you would not feel "favored" to receive the news that you would become pregnant before you were married. Mary was alone and poor. She became pregnant, and life would have been difficult for her. Girls who became pregnant in ways other than by their husbands were subject to the death penalty in those days. Would her fiancé order her death? Would he issue her a decree of divorce? Girls who gave birth and were unmarried, had to support themselves and their children. Who would take her in? A pregnant teenager would have been a disgrace to her parents. Would she be able to find food for herself and her baby? All of this was a mystery to the frightened young woman.

The announcement from the angel was a mystery for Mary in other ways. Why was she the one chosen to bear this Jesus? Why was his name already given? Why would her son be the one to reign over the house of Jacob? Mary did not know the answers to these mysteries, but she was willing to be God's servant. She among all of the Biblical characters whom God asked to serve, was the one who responded willingly immediately.

When God asked Moses to be God's spokesperson, Moses said he could not do it. He argued that the Hebrews would not believe him. "If they ask me who sent me," he asked, "what shall I say to them?"<sup>1</sup>

God said, "Tell them, 'I am who I am' has sent me."

Moses said, "But suppose they don't believe me?"

God said, "See that staff you're holding? Throw it on the ground and it'll become a serpent. When they see that, they'll believe you."

Moses said, "Oh God, I can't do it. I have a speech impediment."

God asked "Who is it that gives speech to mortals? Is it not I?"

Moses said, "O my Lord, please send someone else."

God, losing patience with Moses' excuses said, "I'll send your brother Aaron along with you."

God asked Isaiah to be God's spokesperson.

Isaiah said he couldn't do it: "Woe is me! I am lost, for I am a man of unclean lips, and I live among a people of unclean lips."<sup>2</sup>

A seraph flew to Isaiah and burned his lips, sterilizing them with a burning coal: "Now your lips aren't unclean!" Only then, did Isaiah accept his assignment.

God asked Jeremiah to be God's spokesperson. God said, "I appointed you a prophet to the nations."<sup>3</sup>

Jeremiah said, "Ah, Lord God! Truly I do not know how to speak, for I am only a boy."

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<sup>1</sup>This exchange is found in Exodus 3:7 ff

<sup>2</sup>Isaiah 6:5

<sup>3</sup>Jeremiah 1:5

God touched his mouth and said, “Now, I have put my words in your mouth.”

God asked Jonah to be God’s spokesperson. Jonah ran in the opposite direction. He even got on a ship going to Tarshish: the end of the known world.<sup>4</sup> He would rather have drowned in the stormy sea than do what God asked him to do. But a large fish caught him and threw him up on dry ground, making a believer out of him.

But, when God asked this unmarried young woman to give birth to a great son, she responded with the words, “Here am I, the servant of the Lord; let it be with me according to your word.” She knew that with God, all things were possible. Her faith uncovered the mystery of the angel’s words. Mary is for us the model of how we are to respond to God’s call to service.

Paul’s letter to the church in Rome ends with what the church calls a “doxology” or a hymn of praise to God. This particular doxology talks about a mystery: It says, “Now to God who is able to strengthen you according to my gospel and the proclamation of Jesus Christ, according to the revelation of the mystery that was kept secret for long ages but is now disclosed.”<sup>5</sup>

What is this mystery now revealed? Why and how was it kept secret? God’s nature was a mystery. It was like a neatly-wrapped Christmas present, just waiting to be opened. Some had God wrapped in a package of fear: God was to be feared and avoided. They thought that if they saw God face to face, they would die.

Others had God wrapped in a package of violence: God was a God of war and hatred. They thought that God willed the slaughter of Canaanites, Jubusites, and Amorites, or anyone else who got in their way.

As Jesus lived his life, as he taught others and as he healed, he carefully unwrapped the Christmas present. Jesus unwrapped the mystery surrounding God. Through his life and teachings, Jesus revealed that God’s nature is one of love and justice for all. This God did not want to be feared or avoided. Jesus called this God “Abba” “Dad.”<sup>6</sup>

This God did not want war, but wanted peace. Jesus taught his followers to turn the other cheek and to not repay evil with evil. This God did not want pride and might. Jesus suffered and died on a cross in humility.

This God invited humanity to join in the continuing act of creation: “To you is born this day in the city of David a savior who is the Messiah, the Lord.”<sup>7</sup> It is no longer a mystery, how we are to live our lives as God’s children: we are to glorify God in all we do and say. As God gave, so are we to give.

Let me tell you about Jane Smith, a middle school teacher in Fayetteville, NC.<sup>8</sup> She kept asking her student, Michael Carter, to pull up his baggy pants. He said, “I can’t. I’m sore. I’m on dialysis. I need a kidney transplant.”

She said, “I have two kidneys, do you want one?” She submitted to a battery of tests, and was found to be a match for Michael. She gave up part of herself so that Michael can have a more abundant life.

Such giving is mystery. It doesn’t make sense. But, such giving is what faith is all about. It is faith in Jesus Christ that uncovers the mystery. The uncovered mystery of Christmas is all about giving. . . not just jewelry, or toys, but the gift of life for others.

May your Christmas be a wonderful and wonder-filled one. May the mysteries of your Christmas gifts be uncovered. May God’s wonderful gift be no mystery to you. Jesus Christ is born and shows us how to live in relation with others and with God. May God’s grace for all be uncovered. Merry Christmas!

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<sup>4</sup>Jonah 1:3

<sup>5</sup>(Rom. 16:25-26

<sup>6</sup>Mark 14:36

<sup>7</sup>Luke 2:11

<sup>8</sup>*Tennessean* 12/18/1999, p. 11A