

"Thanks be to God for his indescribable gift!" When Paul calls Christ God's indescribable gift for the Corinthians, he was not simply using exaggerated phrases or polishing his writing with impressive words. In using the word *indescribable*, Paul is stating that he cannot fully express the blessing and value of the Lord Jesus Christ to him and to all mankind. If the Apostle Paul, who was writing under the inspiration of the Holy Spirit, could not adequately convey to our human minds the blessings of the Christ-child where in all the world of orators, musicians, artists, and poets will we find those who can?

Consider some of the ways our Savior is indescribable: *Indescribable in incarnation:* At the manger reason falters, an unutterable mystery that God became man; the creator a creature; the son of God the son of virgin mother. *Indescribable in love:* God not only gave His Son, but gave Him to be shamefully treated and put to death for our sakes. It was a gift not given to the thankful, but ingrates; not to saints but sinners; not to friends but enemies. *Indescribable in blessings:* God's blessings in Christ are beyond limit: complete forgiveness, life to its fullest and everlasting salvation. Words fail to describe the gifting of God's Son to us, nevertheless let us rise

to sing words of our great joy over what God has wondrously done for us -

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Now the birth of Jesus Christ took place in this way. When his mother Mary had been betrothed to Joseph, before they came together she was found to be with child from the Holy Spirit. And her husband Joseph, being a just man and unwilling to put her to shame, resolved to divorce her quietly. But as he considered these things, behold, an angel of the Lord appeared to him in a dream, saying, "Joseph, son of David, do not fear to take Mary as your wife, for that which is conceived in her is from the Holy Spirit. She will bear a son, and you shall call his name Jesus, for he will save his people from their sins." All this took place to fulfill what the Lord had spoken by the prophet: "Behold, the virgin shall conceive and bear a son, and they shall call his name Immanuel" (which means, God with us). When Joseph woke from sleep, he did as the angel of the Lord commanded him: he took his wife, but knew her not until she had given birth to a son. And he called his name Jesus.

Great indeed, O God, is the mystery of our religion, Your Son, Jesus Christ our Lord, the Word who was with You at the beginning and who is truly God, was manifested in the flesh to be our Savior and Redeemer. Thanks be to You, O God, for your *indefinable* gifting of love! Amen. (Luther for the Busy Man, ed. P. D. Pahl, p. 39)

In Christ Jesus, God with us in the flesh, dear fellow-redeemed:

There was never an engagement like this before or since! There have been plenty of brides-to-be who were already expecting a child, who conceived through the bridegrooms-to-be and even other men. Under these circumstances there is still shame associated with this violation of the sixth Commandment with the results that wedding dates are moved up earlier in an attempt to conceal the matter and engagements are broken off over betrayal and distrust.

It would appear that Joseph was not informed about this by Mary but found out much to his surprise. Perhaps it was upon Mary's return from her relative Elizabeth having already been six months along in carrying the Christ Child. Joseph did not want to expose Mary to public shame and humiliation so his plan was to break off the engagement as discreetly as possible. In the midst of this setting of sinners struggling with real emotions by troublesome events that were beyond their control, let us

consider how it was that **A Profound Mystery Quietly Happened Among and For Sinners.**

I

How would you have responded, if you were in the situation which Mary or Joseph found themselves? None of this was anticipated when Joseph proposed, Mary consented and her parents gave their blessings. The life they planned together in Nazareth was no doubt to be a quiet peaceful small-town life raising a family without any notoriety. But suddenly with this unbelievable disruption in their ordinary plans, a flood of emotions no doubt rushed in upon them – shame, humiliation, perplexity, vulnerability, fear, perhaps even anger, dread, despair. That evening when they called upon the name of their Lord in this time of their anxiety, what words did they use in their prayers? Mary was facing uncertain times for her baby and herself with no Joseph as provider and protector. Joseph was perhaps pitying Mary in her naiveté or worse yet delusions of grandeur.

Among us sinners God chose to work His plan of salvation. It was announced to Eve already in the Garden after the fall into sin. The promise was that the Seed of the Woman would come and destroy Satan and his kingdom. Even in that firstborn of the first generation of sinners Eve was looking for God to be at work among them. But instead only the need for God's work among sinners was loudly pronounced as her firstborn murdered her second-born. But you see sin and death were not something that could only be dealt with in the courts of heaven, it had to be confronted here among us where we sinners live and die.

So God sent His Son, born of a woman, born under the law, to redeem us who are born of women and under the law. God needed to become man, but not through a man. His conception in a woman had to be accomplished so that He would be conceived and born without sin. So the Holy Spirit conceived this holy One in the virgin. How can this be, as Mary asked Gabriel? No biological experiment can reproduce this profound mysterious conception. It can only be believed and confessed with marvel and great joy.

II

God is with us as our brother in the flesh. He experienced life in this sin-filled world, tempted just as we are but was without sin. Truly this profound mystery gives everlasting comfort. But it goes far beyond a presence sharing in our miserable existence. Yes, He is among us sinners,

but His work quietly accomplished against the powers of darkness was for us sinners.

You often hear that Christ is the reason for the season, and we certainly can understand that rightly, but in truth the reason of the season is you, the sinner. God would not have taken on human flesh and would not have been born here if it was not for you, my fellow sinners. We needed salvation and there was no other way to extract us from our sin and its everlasting punishment of death.

The angel told Joseph: “you shall call His name Jesus, for He will save His people from their sins.” That is what the shepherds heard as well “For unto you is born this day in the city of David, a Savior, who is Christ the Lord”. Soon you will hear this in the words of our Lord consecrating the elements of bread and wine - “This is My body which is given for you” and “this cup ... is My blood which is shed for you”. So this profound mystery continues to happen quietly among you, but also for you my fellow sinners.

This forgiveness of sins takes place quietly, because all that can be observed by you and others is your multiplication of transgressions. Sins forgiven cannot be observed. The life you now possess also cannot be observed, instead you gradually succumb to death, yet Jesus declares to you based on His work in your place that even though you die, yet you shall live. Through faith in Him, you already possess everlasting life.

When Joseph awoke from the dream in which the angel revealed to him the mysterious working of the Lord in their life, Joseph did as he was instructed - he married the Virgin Mary and after the birth of her firstborn son, he named Him - Jesus. He was no longer filled with fear and anxiety about being united in marriage to this unwed mother. Her condition was not shameful, just the opposite - it was glorious; it was God at work among us and for us, removing from us all shame, all guilt, all condemnation and all punishment.

Rejoice in this profound mystery concerning God's only begotten Son born of the Virgin, which is still quietly at work among you benefiting you even today beyond measure. We who once sat in the darkness of despair in our depravity have been enlightened in heart and mind, so that we might shed the cloak of shame and burst forth singing with the whole company of heaven: “Glory to God in the Highest - Father, Son and Holy Spirit, as it was in the beginning is now and shall be forevermore!” Amen.