

(Ephesians cont....)

With all wisdom and insight he has made known to us the mystery of his will, according to his good pleasure that he set forth in Christ, as a plan for the fullness of time, to gather up all things in him, things in heaven and things on earth. In Christ we have also obtained an inheritance, having been destined according to the purpose of him who accomplishes all things according to his counsel and will, so that we, who were the first to set our hope on Christ, might live for the praise of his glory. In him you also, when you had heard the word of truth, the gospel of your salvation, and had believed in him, were marked with the seal of the promised Holy Spirit; this is the pledge of our inheritance toward redemption as God's own people, to the praise of his glory.

John 1:(1-9) 10-18

(1-9) In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. He was in the beginning with God. All things came into being through him, and without him not one thing came into being. What has come into being in him was life, and the life was the light of all people.

The light shines in the darkness, and the darkness did not overcome it. There was a man sent from God, whose name was John. He came as a witness to testify to the light, so that all might believe through him. He himself was not the light, but he came to testify to the light. The true light, which enlightens everyone, was coming into the world.

(10-18) He was in the world, and the world came into being through him; yet the world did not know him. He came to what was his own, and his own people did not accept him. But to all who received him, who believed in his name, he gave power to become children of God, who were born, not of blood or of the will of the flesh or of the will of man, but of God. And the Word became flesh and lived among us, and we have seen his glory, the glory as of a father's only son, full of grace and truth.

(John testified to him and cried out, "This was he of whom I said, 'He who comes after me ranks ahead of me because he was before me.'") From his fullness we have all received, grace upon grace. The law indeed was given through Moses; grace and truth came through Jesus Christ. No one has ever seen God. It is God the only Son, who is close to the Father's heart, who has made him known.

READINGS COCU 7A Christmas 2 *(all readings from NRSV)*

Few things pack up and disappear so quickly as the Christmas spirit. After what seems like months of preparation, for many people the point of Christmas seems to evaporate after any unwanted presents have been recycled, the last remnants of the turkey have been transformed into a final dish, and the pine needles have been swept from the floor. Few, if any, celebrate the traditional Twelve Days of Christmas now, losing that gradual sense of unwrapping the Divine Mystery that is the Incarnation. The gift of the Christ-Child is not only for Christmas. He is for the whole of the year. Jesus is God's outrageous gift of generosity who has come to address the chasm that yawns between the Divine and the human. Jesus is the bridge of hope and redemption across whom we move from despair to hope, from emptiness to fulfilment and from darkness to light. Jesus, Word made flesh, the physical presence of God, takes us from the reality of the incarnation to the unfolding realisation of who and what God is and does as we approach Epiphany. Apart from God's inspiration and engagement, humanity would have remained stuck in a place far from hope and far from heaven.

What we read of in these passages is the reality of human helplessness and hopelessness which can only be transformed by the unshakeable presence of the living God. When the novelty of secular festivities fades, the celebration of God's inventive appearance and reappearance in the history and experience of humanity shines an inextinguishable light into the darkest of days. *(Rev Dr Derek Browning, Church of Scotland)*

Psalm 147:12-20

Praise the Lord, O Jerusalem! Praise your God, O Zion! For God strengthens the bars of your gates, blesses your children within you, grants peace within your borders and fills you with the finest of wheat.

God's command is sent out to the earth; God's word runs swiftly. God gives snow like wool; God scatters frost like ashes.

God hurls down hail like crumbs - who can stand before the cold? God's word is sent out and melts them;

God makes the wind blow, and the waters flow.

God's word is declared to Jacob,

God's statutes and ordinances to Israel.

God has not dealt thus with any other nation;

they do not know God's ordinances. Praise the Lord!

OR

Wisdom of Solomon 10:15-21

Wisdom Led the Israelites out of Egypt

A holy people and blameless race
wisdom delivered from a nation of oppressors.
She entered the soul of a servant of the Lord,
and withstood dread kings with wonders and signs.
She gave to holy people the reward of their labours;
she guided them along a marvellous way,
and became a shelter to them by day,
and a starry flame through the night.
She brought them over the Red Sea,
and led them through deep waters;
but she drowned their enemies,
and cast them up from the depths of the sea.
Therefore the righteous plundered the ungodly;
they sang hymns, O Lord, to your holy name,
and praised with one accord your defending hand;
for wisdom opened the mouths of those who were mute,
and made the tongues of infants speak clearly.

Sirach 24:1-12: *The Praise of Wisdom*

Wisdom praises herself, and tells of her glory in the midst of her people. In the assembly of the Most High she opens her mouth, and in the presence of his hosts she tells of her glory: 'I came forth from the mouth of the Most High, and covered the earth like a mist. I dwelt in the highest heavens, and my throne was in a pillar of cloud. Alone I compassed the vault of heaven and traversed the depths of the abyss. Over waves of the sea, over all the earth, and over every people and nation I have held sway. Among all these I sought a resting-place; in whose territory should I abide? 'Then the Creator of all things gave me a command, and my Creator chose the place for my tent. God said, "Make your dwelling in Jacob, and in Israel receive your inheritance." Before the ages, in the beginning, he created me, and for all the ages I shall not cease to be. In the holy tent I ministered before him, and so I was established in Zion. Thus in the beloved city he gave me a resting-place, and in Jerusalem was my domain. I took root in an honoured people, in the portion of the Lord, his heritage.

OR

Jeremiah 31:7-14

For thus says the Lord: Sing aloud with gladness for Jacob, and raise shouts for the chief of the nations; proclaim, give praise, and say, "Save, O Lord, your people, the remnant of Israel." See, I am going to bring them from the land of the north, and gather them from the farthest parts of the earth, among them the blind and the lame, those with child and those in labor, together; a great company, they shall return here. With weeping they shall come, and with consolations I will lead them back, I will let them walk by brooks of water, in a straight path in which they shall not stumble; for I have become a father to Israel, and Ephraim is my firstborn. Hear the word of the Lord, O nations, and declare it in the coastlands far away; say, "He who scattered Israel will gather him, and will keep him as a shepherd a flock." For the Lord has ransomed Jacob, and has redeemed him from hands too strong for him. They shall come and sing aloud on the height of Zion, and they shall be radiant over the goodness of the Lord, over the grain, the wine, and the oil, and over the young of the flock and the herd; their life shall become like a watered garden, and they shall never languish again. Then shall the young women rejoice in the dance, and the young men and the old shall be merry. I will turn their mourning into joy, I will comfort them, and give them gladness for sorrow. I will give the priests their fill of fatness, and my people shall be satisfied with my bounty, says the Lord.

Ephesians 1:1-14

Paul, an apostle of Christ Jesus by the will of God, To the saints who are in Ephesus and are faithful in Christ Jesus: Grace to you and peace from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ. Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who has blessed us in Christ with every spiritual blessing in the heavenly places, just as he chose us in Christ before the foundation of the world to be holy and blameless before him in love. He destined us for adoption as his children through Jesus Christ, according to the good pleasure of his will, to the praise of his glorious grace that he freely bestowed on us in the Beloved. In him we have redemption through his blood, the forgiveness of our trespasses, according to the riches of his grace that he lavished on us.