

THE MYSTERY OF CHRIST WITHIN

Colossians 2:6-15

1/24/10

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I got a video email the other day that was awesome. This guy was walking along the sidewalk and he found a stethoscope. He picked it up and put the ear plugs in his ears. He put the end of the stethoscope to the cookie in his hand, he heard the music, "Sugar, Honey, Honey." Leaning against a lamp post he put the end of the stethoscope to the lamp post. He heard the song, "Lean on me." He then put the stethoscope up to a fire hydrant and heard the song, "Who Let the Dogs Out." Then he put it up to his own heart and heard the "Halleluiah Chorus." Then across the screen were the words from Colossians 1:27, "*The mystery which is Christ in you.*" What a surprise that was! I never expected the Halleluiah Chorus coming from within that rather ordinary guy. He was a Christian, Christ lived in him and filled his heart with joy.

Speaking of mysteries, a pregnant woman is a miracle maker. The miracle of a cell dividing and differentiating into an embryo and eventually a into baby is a wonder to behold. Perhaps you have felt the kick of a child within you or with your hand on your mother's or wife's belly. It is amazing! A person is growing inside you!

Can you imagine Mary, the mother of Jesus, watching her belly grow week after week and feeling Jesus stretching and kicking within her? Another person was living within her, the son of God was in her womb.

AS CHRISTIANS, WE TOO HAVE JESUS CHRIST GROWING WITHIN US

At our baptisms, we died to our sinful selves, so Jesus could live within us. Paul wrote in Galatians 2:20, "*I have been crucified with Christ. It is no longer I who live, but Christ who lives in me.*" In a sense, Christ is conceived in us in our baptism. The seed of Jesus is planted in us.

We know that there are no instant saints created when they hit the waters of baptism. Sainthood takes time, a lifetime. I used to have a poster on the door of my office years ago that had a picture of huge icebergs. The caption read, "Be patient, God's isn't finished with me yet." I was 12 years old when I was baptized. It has been 47 years since my baptism. In those years I graduated from seminary, and have spent hours studying the Bible, hours in prayer, hours in small groups seeking to understand how to live the Christian life. And I have preached the gospel since 1972. But God isn't finished with me yet. I still have so much to learn. In Dr.

Sumney's lectures, I am taking notes frantically because I am learning new stuff about the bible. God is still working on my heart too. I have become aware the past few months, just how self-centered I really am. God isn't finished with me yet. Christ is still developing in me.

And I bet Christ is still growing in you too! Don't you still have things to learn about God and about living for Jesus? Don't you still need to learn to love and forgive and to serve? Christ who is in you, is still growing within.

AS CHRIST GROWS WITHIN US CHRIST SHAPES US

That baby in a mother's womb changes the mother's shape. The baby within also impacts the mother's diet, habits, and activities. She may stop smoking, drinking, and wearing her bikini! She may start taking prenatal vitamins and adjust her diet because the baby doesn't like onions but does like pickles and ice cream. The child within her affects her.

Christ within us shapes us to be like Christ. It is not like Jesus takes over our mind and body. We are not talking the invasion of the body snatchers. Christ within us shapes us only as we give him permission. The painting on the cover of the bulletin is Jesus knocking on the door of our hearts. Notice that there is no handle on the outside of the door. The door can be opened only from the inside. We give permission for Christ to enter into our hearts and live through us.

John Killenger writes, *"Christianity is not a matter of rules and regulations, of doctrines and dogmas, or of traditions and prohibitions. Christianity is a matter of the spirit of Jesus living in our spirits, so that we become as simple and loving and faithful and God-oriented as he was."* We Christians don't do the right thing because of our will power, but because Jesus within us is living and loving through us.

WHY WOULD WE INVITE CHRIST TO LIVE IN US?

We want to live our own lives and we want to get our own way. We would invite Christ to live in us because we have come to recognize Christ's extravagant love for us. John Killenger in his book, *If Christians Were Really Christian*, tells of a couple in Texas, who had two children, but decided they wanted to help a child less fortunate than the ones born in their home. They began a trial adoption with a boy Carlos, whose father was unknown and whose mother was a cocaine addict. The social worker warned Bill and Marjorie that the boy was difficult, prone to sulking and violent outbreaks. The couple took the 5 year old into their home. He was a handful. He would throw his food when he didn't like it. He was hostile toward his new siblings. He would go days when he wouldn't talk to anyone. He broke things and soiled his bed at night. As the trial adoption

period was nearing an end, it didn't look like the family could manage Carlos. But Marjorie wasn't willing to give up on him. Realizing that he heard Spanish spoken to him as an infant, she took a course in Spanish and began trying to reach him with new words and phrases she was learning. At first Carlos seemed indifferent, but eventually he began to change. Marjorie even learned Spanish songs and would sing them to him. The family would hear Carlos singing the songs himself.

Carlos' teacher noticed changes too. He started to share toys and interact well with other children. He became curious and eager to learn.

When the Hinshaws formally adopted Carlos, they held a party for him. They had ice cream and cake and Carlos wore a paper crown. His face shone with joy and he thanked everyone. He ran up to his new mother, climbed into her lap, wrapped his arms her neck and said, "I love you mommy." When we think about how far Marjorie went to reach Carlos, we see an awesome love that refused to give up on him.

The Christian gospel is that God loved us so much that he refused to give up on us. He sent his son into the world to save us and Jesus died on the cross in order to reach us. It makes you want to leap into the arms of God and tell him, "I love you Lord. Come into my heart. Rule in me life." And when we do, our hearts will be so full of love and joy, it will be singing the *Halleluiah Chorus*.