Manifested in the Flesh

(by Doy Moyer)

Paul through the Spirit provides what early Christians confessed, possibly even sang. He calls it the ***“mystery of godliness.”*** Yet what had been a mystery was revealed and understood through Jesus (**Eph 3:1-6**).

***“Great indeed, we confess, is the mystery of godliness:***

***He was manifested in the flesh,***

***vindicated by the Spirit,***

***seen by angels,***

***proclaimed among the nations,***

***believed on in the world,***

***taken up in glory.”***

(**1 Timothy 3:15-16**)

Let’s reflect for a moment about these phrases:

**He was manifested in the flesh.** God appeared and made Himself known through a body of flesh and blood. ***“And the Word became flesh and dwelt among us, and we have seen his glory, glory as of the only Son from the Father, full of grace and truth”*** (**John 1:14**). He was born through a virgin to bring life and light to a lost world in darkness. He is Immanuel, God with us, who partook of flesh and blood ***“that through death he might destroy the one who has the power of death, that is, the devil, and deliver all those who through fear of death were subject to lifelong slavery”*** (**Heb 2:14-15**).

**Vindicated by the Spirit.** Jesus came in the flesh to die, but by the Spirit Jesus was raised up again and thereby vindicated (or justified). Notice the similarity of these first two phrases to Paul’s point that Jesus Christ our Lord ***“was descended from David according to the flesh and was declared to be the Son of God in power according to the Spirit of holiness by his resurrection from the dead”*** (**Rom 1:3-4**). The purpose for which Jesus came was justified.

**Seen by angels.** After the resurrection, Jesus appeared to many witnesses (cf. **1 Cor 15:1-8**). Yet this phrase speaks of appearing to angels, which indicates that Jesus’ resurrection had a greater cosmic impact. The eternal purpose of God was witnessed not only by humans, but also by principalities and powers in the heavenly places (cf. **Eph 1:19-23; 3:9-11; 1 Pet 1:12**). This phrase may also incorporate the praise and worship of Jesus by angels after His ascension (cf. **Rev 4-5**).

**Proclaimed among the nations.** God’s purpose was to include all nations for salvation. Though he prepared the nation of Israel to be His people, He intended for them to be ***“a light for the nations, that my salvation may reach to the end of the earth”*** (**Isa 49:6**). Jesus sent out His disciples and told them, ***“Go therefore and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, teaching them to observe all that I have commanded you”*** (**Matt 28:19-20**). Consequently, Jesus ***“ransomed people for God from every tribe and language and people and nation, and you have made them a kingdom and priests to our God”*** (**Rev 5:9-10**). The gospel is meant for everyone because God ***“desires all people to be saved and to come to the knowledge of the truth”*** (**1 Tim 2:4**).

**Believed on in the world.** Here is the response to the message of the gospel. While many do not believe, the focus here is on the positive reaction. John’s purpose in writing his account was to record particular signs of Jesus ***“so that you may believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God, and that by believing you may have life in his name”*** (**John 20:30-31**). He stressed that “many believed” in Jesus (**John 2:23; 8:30; 10:42**). Luke records that the preaching of the message also had this effect: “many believed in the Lord” (**Acts 9:42**). The message continues to have this effect today if we will teach it faithfully.

**Taken up in glory.** After His death and resurrection, Jesus returned to heaven in glory. His ascension was witnessed: ***“as they were looking on, he was lifted up, and a cloud took him out of their sight”*** (**Acts 1:9**). In His resurrection and ascension, ***“God has highly exalted him and bestowed on him the name that is above every name, so that at the name of Jesus every knee should bow, in heaven and on earth and under the earth, and every tongue confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father”*** (**Phil 2:9-11**). He is ***“exalted to the right hand”*** of the Father (**Acts 2:33**).

We may join with the voices in heaven: ***“Worthy is the Lamb who was slain, to receive power and wealth and wisdom and might and honor and glory and blessing!”*** (**Rev 5:12**). The implication is also here that Jesus is coming again. He is alive, glorified, and set to return. This return will have two primary effects: judgment and salvation: ***“so Christ, having been offered once to bear the sins of many, will appear a second time, not to deal with sin but to save those who are eagerly waiting for him”*** (**Heb 9:29**).

This is the gospel!