

December 29, 2002
AM Service
Patchogue Church of the Nazarene

“The Secret for Hope in 2003”

Col 1:27

27 To them God has chosen to make known among the Gentiles the glorious riches of this mystery, which is Christ in you, the hope of glory.

Col 1:27b (NLT)

For this is the secret: Christ lives in you, and this is your assurance that you will share in his glory.

What we do know about 2003:

2 Tim 3:1-5

Eph 2:12-13

Matt 24: 4-14

During the dark winter of 1864, at Petersburg, Virginia, the Confederate army of Robert E. Lee faced the Union divisions of General Ulysses S. Grant. The war was now three and a half years old and the glorious charge had long since given way to the muck and mud of trench warfare. Late one evening one of Lee's generals, Major General George Pickett, received word that his wife had given birth to a beautiful baby boy. Up and down the line the Southerners began building huge bonfires in celebration of the event. These fires did not go unnoticed in the Northern camps and soon a nervous Grant sent out a reconnaissance patrol to see what was going on. The scouts returned with the message that Pickett had had a son and these were celebration fires. It so happened that Grant and Pickett had been contemporaries at West Point and knew one another well, so to honor the occasion Grant, too, ordered that bonfires should be built.

What a peculiar night it was. For miles on both sides of the lines fires burned. No shots fired. No yelling back and forth. No war fought, only light celebrating the birth of a child. But it didn't last forever. Soon the fires burned down and... the peace ended and it was back to the darkness, hate and war.

Aren't you glad that although the celebration of Christmas is over we don't have to go back to living in darkness? The world may only have found temporary peace in the holiday ... if they even found any peace at all. And although we too face the possibility of war yet we know the secret of peace in our hearts even while experiencing the trouble of this world. We don't stop celebrating the birth of a Child. For us the fire still burns.

In Scripture *mystery* can mean *a secret divinely revealed*. God has revealed that all people (this including non-Jews) can benefit in heavenly glory and peace. In other words, Eternal life with God that gives peace is open to all people through Jesus Christ. Eternal Life is something that begins immediately upon receiving Jesus Christ, for Eternal Life is being with and knowing God. Currently the relationship is not as perfect

as it will be when we get to heaven (One day we will be in heaven - either through death or the 2nd coming of Christ). 1 Cor 13:9-12 NLT- Now we know only a little ...12 Now we see things imperfectly as in a poor mirror, but then (when we are in heaven) we will see everything with perfect clarity. All that I know now is partial and incomplete, but then I will know everything completely...

Our hope is not for this world to be heaven– but for better world – in heaven

The Good News is that Christ is the Savior of sinners and all sinners/people can be saved from the punishment for sin through faith in Him. And those who accept Jesus will be in possession of the Holy Spirit (The Spirit and power of Christ). This makes us partakers of the divine nature and prepares us for eternal union with God.

He (Paul) preached this present and indwelling Christ as the hope of glory; for no (one) could rationally hope for glory who had not the pardon of his (/her) sins, and whose nature was not sanctified; and none could have pardon but through the blood of his cross; and none could have glorification but through the indwelling, sanctifying Spirit of Christ. (from Adam Clarke's Commentary, Electronic Database. Copyright (c) 1996 by Biblesoft)

Jesus came to bring peace ... with God, and hope of Eternal Life. He did it by putting the love and power of the Holy Spirit in all who believe (a gift received by faith).

God wants to live in you and me and have us enjoy Him forever and the birth of Jesus made it all possible. Isn't it incredible that God wants to put His Spirit in us? Who am I that God would want to have a personal relationship with me? But Jesus always seemed to choose the lowly, the weak the despised and rejected of this world. Jesus was not born in a palace, or a hospital; He was not even born in a home. There was no room for Him among the people so He was born with the lowly animals. And He continued to live His life for the lowly. Those who were sick, deaf, lame were not allowed in the temple area. So Jesus went to them, and touched them and healed them. He touched those who had not been touched (literally) by others. What would have been the response of someone (e.g.) with leprosy when Jesus stretched out His hand to touch them. No one had touched them for years. Would they pull away? Would a tear come to their eye? The religious did not associate with tax collectors, prostitutes and other "sinners." So Jesus ate with them. Would people understand that He was not condoning their life style but transforming them through His love? Certain ethnic groups and gentiles who were rejected and hated, Jesus loved and shared His good news with them too. He taught us to love our neighbor even if our neighbor was our enemy. And we said, "How Lord? How can I be like you?" And He said, "Accept Me into your life and I will live through you."

Have you allowed your personal life to become a "Bethlehem" for the Son of God? He is the Light of the World. And we continue to walk in that light all year long. What a difference 2003 will be if everything that is of the darkness would drive you closer to the center of the light. What a difference 2003 will be if when we come to a major event or turning points in this new year we would not choose to go away from God and toward a more useless Christian life; but we would become more and more on fire for God and do our best for His glory. What a difference 2003 will be if we would not live for ourselves

but would give up the right to self. Don't follow the cravings of your sinful nature. Seek a relationship with God and do what the Spirit of God in you is influencing you to do. Don't think only of yourself, trust God for what you need and reach out to the needy, lowly, reject and despised around you. We can become so focused on ourselves that we don't see the needs all around us. There are so many in this generation that have lost hope.

There was a fascinating conversation on Rush Limbaugh's talk show a while back. Having just completed Tom Brokaw's wonderful book *The Greatest Generation*, a book filled with inspiring stories of the WWII generation, Rush had taken the position that the current generation of young adults, those in their 20's, are, for the most part, a bunch of whiners. He said that while they are constantly whining and moaning about the difficulty of their lives in fact, when compared to the hardships faced by their grandparents' generation, they've actually got it easy. Their grandparents had endured truly devastating events like The Great Depression and WWII. The current crop of young adults, he concluded, doesn't even have a clue about real hardship.

Once Rush had finished his monologue a self-professed member of this younger generation of adults called in to offer a different perspective. Bright and extremely articulate, the 23 year-old caller said that, while The Great Depression and WWII certainly created terrible hardships for the people who faced them that he, nonetheless, believed his generation faced an even greater hardship.

Limbaugh asked, "And what exactly would that be?"

The caller said, "The loss of hope." He said that his experience indicated that many of today's young adults had simply stopped believing that things were going to get better. They didn't expect to live as well as their parents had lived. They weren't expecting a brighter future. They have simply given up hope.

He said, The Great Depression, as terrible as it was, in many cases brought families together as they worked side by side in the hope of saving their families. Most of his friends, he said, grew up in families in complete disarray and have given up the hope of ever having a real family experience of their own.

He said, WWII was a terrible event that obviously cost thousands of America's young men their lives. Then he said, and even though they knew the risks they still enlisted voluntarily by the millions because they saw it as a cause worth dying for. Most of those in his generation, he said, can't imagine anything worth dying for and they're committing suicide in record numbers because many can't imagine anything worth living for.

He said, "Mr. Limbaugh, The Great Depression and WWII created terrible hardships. But I submit to you that the greatest hardship of all is living without hope."
(Tom Marcum, Sermon: Rediscovering the Hope of Christmas)

Because of Jesus, we do not have to live without hope. For this is the secret: Christ lives in you, and this is your assurance that you will share in his glory (Christ in you, the hope

of glory). Believe it, share it. Our hope is a better life in eternity w/God – live for it - die for it. Let His light continue to shine through you. Let the fire of the Holy Spirit motivate you. Pray for one another; encourage one another to love and good deeds. Don't seek to be perfect, rather, seek a relationship with God. Let His power and love (i.e.) His Spirit work in you and through you in 2003 and hold on to your hope of Eternal Life.