

H Y M N S

Concerning the Mystery of God

- 1 Christ is the mystery of God;
God is invisible, unshown,
His image man hath never seen,
But Christ the Son hath made Him known.
- 2 Christ is the very Word of God,
He is God's explanation true;
God's full embodiment is He
And God's own image brings to view.
- 3 Image of God invisible,
Effulgence of God's glory fair;
God's fulness ever dwells in Him,
God's testimony He doth bear.
- 4 The Church the myst'ry is of Christ,
For He is now to man unshown;
No man on earth may see Him now,
But thru the Church He is made known.
- 5 The Church is Christ's expression full,
In her Christ dwelleth bodily;
She is His duplication true,
And man in her Himself may see.
- 6 The Church the image has of Christ,
She is His increase and His spread;
Christ's very self is found in her,
The Body, she, to Christ the Head.
- 7 Thus, in the Son the Father is.
And now the Spirit is the Son;
The Spirit of the triune God
Is in the Church and with her one. (*Hymns*, #818)

In this hymn, written by Witness Lee, we are led to enjoy two mysteries, the mystery of God (Col. 2:2) and the mystery of Christ (Eph. 3:4). These two mysteries eventually culminate in a third mystery, the “great” mystery, Christ and the church (5:32). Christ is lauded in the first three stanzas as the mystery of God. In stanzas 4 through 6, the church is appraised as the mystery of Christ. The final stanza blends these two mysteries into the great mystery, Christ and the church. It asserts that the Father God is in the Son, that the Spirit now is the Son, and that the Spirit of the Triune God indwells and is one with the church.

The mystery of God is the central thought in the gospel preached by the apostle Paul. In Colossians 2:2, he declared that he came to announce the mystery of God. At the conclusion of his Epistle to the Romans Paul says that

his gospel, which is the proclamation of Jesus Christ, is according to the revelation of the mystery (16:25). The mystery of God is the intrinsic reality of the gospel—the essential aspect of God's eternal purpose. Unless this mystery is revealed to us, we cannot know God's purpose, and we cannot fully enter into the divine plan of eternity. This hymn explores the mystery of God, the central theme of the divine revelation, and the heart's desire of God, our Creator, Redeemer, and begetting Father.

Christ, the Mystery of God

In the first stanza Christ is exalted as the mystery of God. If we want to know God, we must know Christ. God is invisible, unseen by man, but the Lord Jesus, the Word of God, has become flesh (John 1:1, 14) to “declare” God: “No one has ever seen God; the only begotten Son, who is in the bosom of the Father, He has declared Him” (v. 18). In another place John quotes the Son as saying, “He who has seen Me has seen the Father” (14:9). The Son is God manifested in the flesh (1 Tim. 3:16); in Him and through Him, the invisible, unknown and unknowable God is made visible and known.

We marvel at the mysterious God-incarnate Son manifested that, through Him, we may know our God. But we may not fully appreciate the intrinsic reality of the Son who has made God known to us. Stanza 2 expands on this unveiled mystery by showing that the Son's declaration of God is not merely a telling out of something about God, a presentation of some teaching concerning the existence, nature, and purpose of God. Rather, He is the very Triune God incarnated into and expressed through the Son; the Word who became flesh makes God known in and through His very person. He is the embodiment of God: “Christ is the very Word of God, / He is God's explanation true; / God's full embodiment is He / And God's own image brings to view.” John's description of the Son as being “in the bosom of the Father” (John 1:18) is essential to the very character of the Son's “declaring” of the Father. His being in the bosom of the Father indicates the essential oneness of the Father and the Son—the Son abides in the Father, and the Father abides in the Son (14:10-11). The Father lived through the Son, and the Son lived out the life of the Father. The Amplified Bible underscores the thought in John 1:18 by saying,

No man has ever seen God at any time; the only unique Son, the only-begotten God, Who is in the bosom [that is, in the intimate presence] of the Father, He has declared Him—He has revealed Him, brought Him out where He can be seen; He has interpreted Him, *and* He has made Him known.

The phrase *the only-begotten God* is a variant reading in the Greek New Testament testified by many ancient manuscripts. It indicates that the early church fathers realized the fact that Christ was God begotten in the flesh to make God known to His creatures and in His creatures (first in the man Jesus and then in His many regenerated brothers).

The vision of the Son as the mystery of God is inspiring! He is the image of the invisible God (Col. 1:15) and the effulgence of God's glory (Heb. 1:3). As the image of the invisible God, He shows, exhibits, displays, demonstrates, and manifests the totality of what God is in life, nature, and expression. As the effulgence of His glory and the impress of His substance, Christ expressed God through His human virtues, unlocking, displaying, and demonstrating all of the rich attributes of God's divine being. He conveys the bright shining and the precise essence of the glory of God (2 Cor. 4:4; 3:18): "God's fulness ever dwells in Him, / God's testimony He doth bear."

The Church is the Mystery of Christ

Having extolled the wonderful God-man Jesus as the mystery of God, the hymn turns its attention to the church as the mystery of Christ. Today, stanza 4 declares, Christ is a mystery just as God was once a mystery: "The Church the myst'ry is of Christ, / For He is now to man unshown." Just as God was unseen from eternity, so Christ today cannot be seen by men on the earth. No one living on earth today has ever seen Christ with the physical eye. Yet this wonderful and mysterious person can be seen, contacted, and known through the church. Just as the Lord Jesus unlocked the mystery of the invisible Father, so today the church unveils Christ and makes Him known. Many Christians recognize that the Word of God became incarnated to be a man. But few have the realization that today the church embodies Christ. God and man indwell one another, and this one expression is the church, which is the Body of Christ (Eph. 1:22-23; 1 Cor. 12:12). The Bible calls this unique expression the new man (Eph. 2:15; 4:24; Col. 3:10).

Stanza 5 exultantly resounds this joyous fact: "The Church is Christ's expression full." The Bible declares that man was created in the image and likeness of God and given the charge to multiply, to replenish the earth, and to subdue it and to exercise dominion (Gen. 1:26-28). Man has the capacity to express and to represent God for the carrying out of His purpose on the earth. Man has the capability to contact God, receive God, and live by God. Of course,

through the fall, the ability of man to function by, with, and through God was destroyed by sin. Still, God in His divine economy has never deviated from His original intention. Today the believers are not just God-created and redeemed beings for His expression, but also God-begotten sons who possess the very life and nature of God for His expression. We are the "the fullness of the One who fills all in all" (Eph. 1:23); we are "growing into a holy temple in the Lord" and "being built together into a dwelling place of God in spirit" (2:21-22). Eventually, we will "all arrive at the oneness of the faith and of the full knowledge of the Son of God, at a full-grown man, at the measure of the stature of the fullness of Christ" (4:13). Stanza 5 lingers over this precious contemplation of the church as the fullness of Christ: "In her Christ dwelleth bodily; / She is His duplication true, / And man in her Himself may see." And stanza 6 continues to dwell on this marvelous corporate expression of Christ called the church: "The Church the image has of Christ, / She is His increase and His spread."

Christ and the Church—the Great Mystery

How can the church be the embodiment of the God-man Jesus? How can she be His duplication, His image? Can she really be His increase and spread? The unique way is through Christ who, as the indwelling Spirit, now abides in the believers (John 15:5; Eph. 3:16-17). The church is the extension of Christ because "Christ's very self is found in her, / The Body, she, to Christ the Head." As Christians, we are His Body, and He is our Head. We abide in Him, and He abides in us. While this mutual abiding of the Lord and His elect is the most central and mysterious revelation in the Bible, it is unknown or neglected by the majority of His people. It is the ultimate goal of God's plan. For this, God became a man, passed through human living, died on the cross to deal with all of man's problems including sin, death, the self, the world, and the flesh. Through His death He also destroyed Satan and his works. By His redeeming death He freed man and prepared him as a cleansed vessel to receive and contain Him. In resurrection He became the life-giving Spirit in order to join Himself to men in the believers' regenerated human spirit to constitute them members of His Body (1 Cor. 15:45; 6:17). Through this mutual abiding, Christ and the church are one organic entity—the Head and the Body—fulfilling the longing in the heart of our Savior God that He determined in Himself before the foundation of the world (Eph. 1:4-5; 9-11; 3:9-11). We are a mysterious people! We are the church, His Body, the fullness of the One who fills all in all! We sing our praises and shout our blessings to our God: "The Spirit of the triune God / Is in the Church and with her one." Our God—our begetting Father, our redeeming Savior, our indwelling life—and we are one!

by Gary Kaiser