

# CHURCH LEADERSHIP 2

## 1 TIMOTHY 3

My assignment is to work verse by verse through Chapter 3 – *that's my goal* - but I want to begin at the end... Read with me verse 16, *and then we'll pray...*

And without controversy great is the mystery of godliness: God was manifested in the flesh, justified in the Spirit, seen by angels, preached among the Gentiles, believed on in the world, received up in glory.

I'm from a family of all boys. My uncle had all boys. My first child was a boy. I just figured Adams' birthed boys. *I was sure our second child would be a boy...*

But when the eagle had landed and I went to count his appendages I couldn't find the 11<sup>th</sup> toe. *It was a girl!* I was shocked! A little girl was a change of pace.

But now I know I would've missed out on a lot of life had I not had a daughter.

In fact, my wife thinks I'm guilty of partiality. She thinks I favor my adorable, priceless, perfect princess over my three dirty, ratty, nappy, scruffy boys.

For the life of me, *I just don't see how she draws that conclusion...*

My boys are so predictable. I know what they think and what they're about to say... But my Princess, she surprises me. She's a mystery that intrigues me.

I never know what'll make her laugh. She smiles and giggles at the strangest times. I'm not always sure what she's thinks. When we're together it's never dull.

I'm busy trying to get stuff done. She just enjoys spending time with me.

I'll never forget the first time we played Barbies. We dressed them - and then moved them - then undress them - redress them - and then moved them again.

After an hour, I asked my wife, "What's the point here?"  
*When boys play somebody wins and somebody loses.*"  
My little girl is so different from me.

She's a wonderful mystery. And it's the mystique that spices up my life.

But a couple of years ago life changed for me. Daddy's princess once again surprised me. She brought home a college boy she said she wanted to marry.

Again I was shocked! *What did I do wrong?* I'm supposed to turn my little girl over to a boy whose only significant job was feeding the neighbor's dog while they were on vacation? Why would she replace me with a *pretend man?*

*Once again this was a mystery...* My wife was such a help... She explained, "What Natalie sees in Jonathan is as mysterious as what I saw in you...so deal with it..."  
Last October I officiated their wedding. I smiled... *but it still smarts.*

Yet when it finally sunk in that Natalie was serious about this marriage stuff – I got serious about this so-called “*man.*” I spent a year quizzing him and checking him out. I left no stone unturned. *I had a check-list longer than the Jiffy Lube...*

Hey, to turn over my Princess this man would have to pass muster...

And this is how Paul feels about the Gospel - *and the mystique with which it adorns the Church.* He refuses to turn such mysteries over to just anybody!

Because of its mystery he’s as smitten with the Church as I am my daughter. Verse 9 mentions, “**The mystery of the faith.**” Verse 16 “**The mystery of godliness.**”

Godliness is full of mystery... *the surprise of grace - the simplicity of faith – the mystical yet powerful reality of the new birth – all combine to save us for eternity.*

This makes *the Gospel the envy of the angels,* and it makes *the Church the darling of heaven.* “**Without controversy great is the mystery of godliness.**”

And you, my friend, just walk into the blood-bought Church of Jesus Christ and dare to handle this Good News? *Who do you think you are?* So what - that you call yourself a “*pastor*”? God is as impressed with titles as I was when that boy I barely knew said he loved my daughter. Words and titles don’t mean squat.

If you want to *handle the Word and lead the Bride* you’ve got to pass muster.

The Father settles for nothing less! And He too has an extremely exhaustive checklist – it's about as long as the one promised by a Jiffy Lube technician.

1Timothy 3 is the *40 point inspection* God uses on a leader in the church.

Tonight, imagine you've pulled in to a Jiffy Lube to get your *character* serviced.

Every few thousand miles, it's a good idea for a church leader to go through 1Timothy 3 - and get their character greased, and renewed, and topped off...

A regular service will help a man's ministry run smoother and last longer.

Understand three components comprise spiritual leadership – **giftedness, gender, and character**. Paul discusses spiritual *giftedness* elsewhere - and *gender* in chapter 2. But by far, God's priority for a leader is ***character***.

*Yet sadly that's not the trend in today's church.*

As we read through chapter 3 you'll notice little mention of talent. Skill makes you useful, but it doesn't qualify you to *handle the Gospel and lead the Church*.

Listen to a snippet from a leadership conference that attracts thousands of next generation leaders. The speaker is emphasizing the need for talented presenters (**play**). Here's his point, it's not *character, maturity,*

*conversion*, or the *Holy Spirit* that matters – *is the person talented?* That's not what we learn in 1Timothy 3...

God is never pleased when we embrace skill over spiritual fiber and fitness.

Yes, churches need talent, but it has to belong to folks God can bless and use over time. In the long run *talent without character* does far more harm than good.

It reminds me of the talented pastor who embezzled \$50,000 from the church.

The deacons were upset. They encouraged the police to arrest him and bring him back. They wanted to get him back in the pulpit as soon as possible so he could work off what he owed. *I hope you see what's wrong with that picture?*

Agatho, a desert monk from the 4<sup>th</sup> century, put it this way, “*Even if an angry man raises the dead God is still displeased with his anger...*” God can use any man for a moment - but 1Timothy 3 is clear, He measures us by our character!

Through the centuries the Church has often argued and separated over the structure of church government. These debates have spawned denominations.

Here's our mistake... We're rigid when it comes to form, but we compromise in our qualifications. The New Testament is just the opposite. It's flexible when it comes

to structure, but unbending in the caliber of men who fill the form.

The best, most biblical structures are worthless, unless the leaders are godly.

Churches today fill their pulpits with engaging *characters* – but they lack spiritual *character*. A teacher is a *possessor* of faith - *not* just a *presenter*.

*The church is the ship that's sailing to heaven.* The captain and crew need to be people the passengers can trust with their lives. We can look good under the stage lights, but are we the same person off-duty - *when no one but God sees.*

A church leader should never be *out-of-character*.

This is what 1Timothy 3 is about. The Father in heaven loves the Church like I love my daughter. Thus, He leaves no doubt to the kind of leaders He desires.

Verse 1 “**This is a faithful saying: If a man desires the position of a bishop, he desires a good work.** Throughout the New Testament three terms are used to identify the leaders within the church - “**bishops**”, “**elders**”, and “**pastors.**”

Compare Scripture with Scripture and you'll find that all three terms are used interchangeably. In Acts 20 and 1Peter 5 they're applied to the same man.

But each word puts a different spin on the man's character and calling...

The term “elder” points to a man’s age, or in Timothy’s case his **maturity**. “Bishop” means “Overseer.” It refers to what he does - his **ministry**. And “*pastor*” or “*shepherd*” illustrates how it’s to be done - his **methods**.

*Elder* speaks of **maturity**... *Bishop* of **ministry**... *Pastor* of **method**...

Ralph Waldo Emerson once said, “An organization is really just the lengthened shadow of one person.” That’s especially true of churches. The pastor sets the pace. Over time most churches take on the characteristics of their leader.

And again, this is why Paul sets the bar so high for pastors and elders! Church leadership is serious, vital, pivotal work! We’re involved in a high stakes endeavor.

Frankly, pondering the responsibilities of church leadership can be scary.

I’m sure 1Timothy 3 has frightened off a few people. This is why Paul reminds us at the outset that church leadership is “a good work”. It’s a desirable post.

How rewarding it is to be engaged in *spiritual* work - to spend our one and only life on *eternal* endeavors. And the cherry on top... *we work for a great boss!*

Church leadership is a good work, but it is *work!*

It’s rarely 40 hours. You’re always on-call. You live in a fish bowl and often there’s a cat staring at you... On top of hospital calls, and facility issues, and children’s ministry

problems – a Sunday rolls around once every seven days.

That means folks are going to show up to hear you talk for 40 minutes and say something interesting. *Ever noticed life doesn't stop so the pastor can prepare a sermon?* Being a faithful pastor is a tough gig. *It's a good work - but its work!*

And here's the cut of cloth needed for this kind of work...

**"A bishop then must be blameless..."** Not *sinless*, but *blameless*.

We all slip up and sin, but we repent quickly and move on. The word translated **"blameless"** means **"nothing to take hold on."** Job wasn't perfect. He was sinful like the rest of us, but he did nothing to warrant his calamity. He was *blameless*.

There should be no glaring, blatant issue in my life that an outsider could point his finger at, and bring accusation against me or the message.

Here's the question I should ask, **"Are there any current issues in my life that discredit the message I preach, or the Savior I serve, or the church I represent?"**

I'm haunted by a scene from the movie **"Eight Men Out."** It's about the Black Sox Scandal of 1919. Eight Chicago White Sox players threw the World Series.



There's a scene where the great Shoeless Joe Jackson is leaving a building and gets swarmed by reporters. They're shouting, "What did you do Joe? Were you in on the fix?" Suddenly a little boy's voice rises above the din of the crowd.

He's ten years old. Everyone else grows silent. The boy looks at his hero and says, "Say it ain't so, Joe. Say it aint' so." Joe turns and walks away in shame.

I don't want a little boy in my church to say, "Say it ain't so, Pastor Sandy."

Once, St. Francis was walking down the street. A boy reached from the bushes and tugged on his coat. He said, "Please Sir, be as good as we think you are!"

Hey, we can spend all day warning folks not to put their pastor on a pedestal – and some will do it anyway. *Why shouldn't they have leaders they can respect?*

A bishop must also be "the husband of one wife." This phrase is hotly debated.

One group says this bans polygamists from holding office in the church... *Why would you want to put two women through the rigors of being a pastor's wife!*

Others insist this verse teaches that a widower or a single man is barred from pastoral ministry. If that's the case Paul would be disqualifying himself.

Other interpretations eliminate men who've been divorced and remarried.

I don't think any of those interpretations get at the heart of Paul's concern.

According to my trusty volume of Kenneth Wuest's Word Studies a literal interpretation is "a man of one woman," or "a one-wife sort of husband."

Wuest writes, "We speak of the Airedale as a one-man dog.... It is his nature to become attached to only one man. Since character is emphasized by the Greek construction... it's the bishop's nature to isolate and centralize his love."

Here's the idea, **are you a one-woman man?** Or do you have eyes for the ladies? This isn't so much about *marital status* as it is your *moral status*.

*If you're a dad, do you want your daughter settling down with a man who has a lustful eye?* God disqualifies such a man from handling His Word and His Church.

Here's an irony, a man may have been married to the same woman all his life, yet not be "a one woman man." A fascination with pornography – or eyes that roam the church – disqualify him from ministry in the eyes of God.

Whereas, a man who was divorced and remarried, yet he's repented and allowed God to renew his mind... this man has the character of a leader.

This qualification like the rest in Paul's list checks the attitude of the man.

He continues - **“temperate”** or self-controlled. Someone told me when a boxer loses his temper he loses the fight. The same is true of a pastor or an elder.

We can't afford to be impulsive. No knee-jerk reactions or half-baked plans. Our leadership should flow out of God's rest – not our own restlessness.

An elder should be even-tempered - able to steer a steady course. He thinks and waits before he acts. He doesn't have to back up and undo a lot of poor decisions... At times the best decision is the decision you didn't make.

Next in the list, **“Sober-minded”** – this is the man who remembers his perspective is not the only way to see a situation.

Here's a great quote, **“I have a viewpoint. You have a viewpoint. God has view.”** Only God has total objectivity. Wise leaders seek His perspective.

A leader should also be **“of good behavior.”** He behaves appropriately for the situation. He knows when it's time to have fun, and when it's time to be serious.

**“Hospitable.”** He's warm and friendly. A pastor has to love and enjoy people. Once a pastor commented, **“I love the church. It's just the people I can't stand.”**

If people are getting in the way of you preparing sermons, and writing books, and speaking to crowds, and organizing a slick operation you've lost touch.

This is the rub I love about being a pastor of a local church. I'm responsible for a group of folks who live and die - struggle and rejoice - mourn and celebrate. And living among them balances out my theology. It insures a workable, livable, street-level theology – not some pie-in-the-sky, ivory tower kind of philosophy.

Just before I left for this trip I visited a 30 year missionary on her deathbed.

I walked into the hospital room and Ms. Alice was lying in the bed clutching her Bible like a child would a teddy bear. I pried it from her, and read a few Psalms...

And it hit me how weightier and more forceful those psalms sounded in the shadow of a godly woman's death than they do in my study, or in the sanctuary.

God's Word is always powerful, but it shines brightest when framed by real life. It gets its greatest clarity up against the backdrop of human drama. *That's why the people God entrusts to handle the Gospel, are those who love people...*

An elder must also be “able to teach.” Can he unpack complicated truths? A teacher puts the cookies on the bottom shelf so everyone can grasp them.

“Not given to wine...” Verse 8 says the deacon should not be “given to much wine” - *whereas the elder has to be a teetotaler.* A pastor or elder is a decision maker, and he

can be called on at a moment's notice to render a judgment.

He can't take the chance of his senses being dulled or his mind foggy.

*“But Sandy, I live near Napa Valley – one of the best wine-producing regions in the world...” So what... where I'm from we produce the world's best moonshine.*

Think of it this way, does it make you feel any better when the boy who drives *your* daughter home from the prom, tells you he only had a couple of drinks?

As a pastor, the Bride of Christ is a passenger in your car! We handle the Gospel. Our speech should be flavored with grace – not the smell of alcohol.

*“But Sandy, the New Testament teaches that a believer has the right to drink in moderation.” **Rights...?*** You're a pastor and you're worry about your rights?

Get over it - this is leadership! Pastors forego their rights for *the glory of God and the good of others...* If one person stumbles because of a beer in my hand – or a glass of wine on the table – or for that matter, sees me checkout an R-rated movie - it's one too many. Hey, *be as good as the people think you are!*

Don't be **“violent.”** A church leader doesn't push people around. He's not a spiritual bully. He doesn't use force or manipulation to get his way. A pastor or elder knows how to lead people with love and gentle persuasion.

Why is it, some people like to attack other people in the name of God?

During the Crusades it was with swords. Thankfully that's been outlawed.

But it happens in Calvary Chapels with the tongue... Whatever you do, don't put a person in leadership who has a mean streak – who's always in attack mode. If they're attacking someone else today – it'll be you tomorrow.

We should be “peacemakers” and “ministers of reconciliation.”

And neither should a pastor or elder be “greedy for money.”

Once a toddler was playing in the living room and found a quarter in the carpet. Like toddlers do, he stuck it in his mouth, and accidentally swallowed the quarter.

The dad saw what happened, and yelled to his wife in the other room, “*Quick, call the pastor!*” She said, “*You mean 911. Why would I call the pastor?*”

The man answered, “*Because the pastor can get money out of anybody!*”

How can pastors be *greedy* when there're so many *needy* people in the world?

When you have a financial need, or the church is in a money crunch, pull out one of your old sermons about trusting God, *and listen closely to your own advice.*

Don't be violent and greedy, "but gentle, not quarrelsome..."

It's been said, "A troublemaker is a guy who rocks the boat then convinces everyone else there's a storm at sea." Hey, a contentious, argumentative, combative personality disqualifies a man from the role of pastor or elder.

And don't be "covetous." Envy should not live in the heart of a spiritual leader.

For pastors like me, it's probably not as great a temptation for us to envy the neighbor's car, or house, or salary... as it is the neighboring pastor's growing church, and large budget, and new facility. *Wow, if only I had his resources...*

We need to deal with jealousy – it's ugly – it's a spiritual poison.

Verse 4 tells us the elder should be "one who rules his own house well, having his children in submission with all reverence..." You can be a good lawyer and be a bad husband. I won't change doctors just because I hear that my doctor is a lousy dad. But you can't be a good pastor and a terrible husband and father.

A pastor or elder has to "rule his own house well." *Does his wife and kids respect his authority?* You won't be able to rule them if they don't respect you – and they won't

respect you if you're not respectable. Do you love your family?

Years ago it dawned on me, church members are fickle. They leave at the drop of a hat – for the pettiest of reasons. Yet at the end of the day my wife and kids will still be my wife and kids. Men, don't sacrifice your family on the altar of ministry.

A pastor needs to rule his house well and have his kids in submission, but *that doesn't mean they'll be perfect*. A pastor's kid is still a kid. He's going to pull some bone-headed stunts - *like your kids*. One Monday a church member called me to report that she'd caught my son and his girlfriend kissing in the prayer room.

Hey, just because I'm a pastor people think my kids should be perfect. I have to protect my children from that sort of unhealthy expectation and pressure.

My kids didn't sign-up to be pastor's kids. I'm the pastor, not them!

It's not whether the pastor's kids are going to rebel... They're sinners – and all sinners rebel. It is how the pastor responds in the wake of their rebellion. And coming down too hard, *can* be as foolish as not coming down hard enough.

It is amazing though, how a pastor's management of his own home indicates how well he'll manage God's household. Paul adds, **(if a man does not know how to**



rule his own house, how will he take care of the church of God?)

Being a pastor *and* father, I'm often struck with the similarities of the two roles. Like dads, pastors have to rule, *or take charge* – and also love, *or take care*.

Both pastoring and parenting involve an acute sense of timing.

They require the combination of a *strong hand* and a *sensitive heart*

They necessitate a genuineness and humility.

They both call for an abundance of faith in God.

They both demand compassion and good communication.

In numerous ways *family leadership* is great training for *spiritual leadership* – and *spiritual leadership* is good training for *family leadership*...

A pastor or elder is a man who is learning at both...

Verse 6, “not a novice, lest being puffed up with pride he fall into the same condemnation as the devil. Moreover he must have a good testimony among those who are outside, lest he fall into reproach and the snare of the devil.

The snare of the devil is a progression – *he fuels a man's pride - this sets him up for failure – which knocks him off his pedestal – & buries him in condemnation.*

And the person most vulnerable to this snare... is the newbie, the **novice**.

Give a new Christian too much authority, too soon, and it goes to his head.

Baby Christians need time to grow up. Rush someone into an arena before they're ready and you can stunt their growth – or worse, wreck their faith.

This is why baseball players don't go from High School or even College straight to the Big Leagues. There're so many nuances to baseball it takes time to master them. There's "A" ball, then "AA," finally "AAA." You bring a prospect along slowly.

And the same is true with ministry. It too, is laced with little nuances that take time to understand and manage. Don't be overly-impressed by a new believer's talent and skill, and rush them. Teach them to follow and serve – then let them lead. We're saved by faith alone, but Peter tells us, **"Add to your faith virtue."**

Verse 8, **"Likewise deacons..."**

It reminds me of the pastor and deacon who went deer hunting. When they arrived at their usual spot they found a *"No Trespassing"* sign. That's when the pastor remembered that old man's Jones' farm was just down the road.

The deacon balked. **"Yea, but Jones is a mean, nasty, ornery cuss."**

The pastor told him not to worry... When they rolled into the yard the deacon sat in the truck – while the pastor went to the door to get permission to hunt.

When the door swung open, there was Mr. Jones, “Pastor nice to see you! You’re our favorite pastor. When we go to town we slip into your church and listen... What a surprise! Whatever we can do for you, just let us know!”

Obviously, permission to hunt was no problem, but as the pastor walked back to his truck, the farmer made a request. “Pastor, I’ve got a crippled horse by the barn - that needs to be put down. I’m fond of the old boy, and can’t bring myself to pull the trigger. Will you shoot him for me on your way out to hunt?”

As the pastor walked toward the truck he thought he’d have a little fun with the deacon. He jerked his rifle off the gun rack, and snarled, “Nobody is going to talk to me like that...” He aimed his gun at the horse and *blam...* the horse dropped.

Suddenly, he heard, “*blam, blam*”... he spun around and there was the deacon with smoke pouring out of the barrel of his shotgun. The deacon yelled, “Come on pastor - you got his horse, and I got two of his cows – let’s get out of here!”

Hey, pastors or elders - and deacons - make an interesting combination.

Elders look after the spiritual needs of the flock. Deacons oversee the physical needs. The Greek word translated “**deacon**” means “**servant.**” Elder is a role of authority. Deacon is a post for service. I call our deacons - **designated doers.**

In the book of Acts the elders were chosen by Paul and the existing elders - while in Acts 6 the deacons were chosen by the congregation in Jerusalem.

Paul tells Timothy that deacons “**must be reverent,**” or serious about the things of God. Yes, they do a lot of *practical stuff*, but they see it as a *spiritual service*.

They’re “**not double-tongued.**” They don’t speak out of both sides of their mouth. Their word is their bond. A deacon delivers on his promises.

A deacon is “**not given to much wine, not greedy for money, holding the mystery of the faith with a pure conscience.**” A deacon should do nothing to cloud the Gospel of its wonder, or rob the Bride of her beauty and mystery.

That’s why he says of the deacons, something that apparently went without saying with the elders, but was nonetheless true. “**Let these also first be tested.**”

All leaders need to be *proven* before *appointed!*

Here's the golden rule on selecting church leaders – **it's a lot easier to hire them than it is to fire them!** Take your time. *Test them* before you *tap them*.

Once proven **“then let them serve as deacons, being found blameless.”**

Verse 11 reads, **“Likewise their wives...”** Here's an example of how versions of the Bible tend to mix a little interpretation with translation. The Greek text literally reads, **“Likewise the women.”** But the King James translators assumed Paul was speaking of a deacon's wife. *He may've been, but...* there's another possibility...

Other passages suggest there were a female order of deacons in the church. Romans 16:1 calls Phoebe **“a servant of the church”** – it's the word *deacon*.

In our church we have deaconesses – *sisters who serve* the needs of other women. Often in church life, situations arise that need a feminine touch.

It's nice to have the deaconesses around to meet those needs.

I like J. Vernon McGee's observation on this passage.

He suggested the reason women today are clamoring for roles in the church that are reserved for men, is because they've been denied their *rightful* role.

Well, whether Paul is speaking of a deacon's wife – or a deaconess – either way she **must be reverent, not slanderers...** Literally it reads *“not she-devils.”*

Remember the word **“devil”** means **“slanderer.”** And wow, can the she-devils cause damage in a church. I hope your church has a zero-tolerance for gossip.

I've heard it said every statement that rolls off our lips should pass through three gates... And each of these three gates gets a little narrower...

First, **is it true?** Second, **is it needful?** The third and narrowest gate - **is it kind?** If it's not **true** - or **needful** - or **kind**... why am I'm making the comment?

These ladies should also be **“temperate.”** Once, a mother was having her morning devotions. The phone rang, and her 4 year-old daughter answered...

The lady overheard her little girl, **“My mom is having her emotions now. Can she call you back?”** Women *in leadership* should have their emotions *in check*.

And, she should be **“faithful in all things.”** *Including her shopping habits...*

One husband commented, **“My wife should be in Congress - she keeps bringing bills to the house.”** Now was that joke *true* - or *needful* - or *kind*?

Paul jumps back to deacons in verse 12, **“Let deacons be the husbands of one wife, ruling their children and their**

own houses well.” Once again, “If your Christianity doesn’t work at home, don’t try to export it.”

“For those who have served well as deacons obtain for themselves a good standing and great boldness in the faith which is in Christ Jesus...”

Faithful deacons gain the church’s respect and admiration that open up wider doors for ministry. Stephen and Phillip were classic examples. In Acts 6 they both were table waiters – who in Acts 7 and 8 ended up evangelists.

When folks see you sweat on their behalf - you can speak more boldly into their lives. My most effective sermons always follow our Saturday work days. For some reason when folks see me *work* they’re more attentive to my *words*.

We’re almost back to where we started. Why is God so choosy when it comes to people who lead His Church? *Well, it’s because His Church is so strategic!*

The Church is the most important institution on planet Earth. All heaven gawks at the Church. I’ve heard it said, “The Church has many critics, but no rivals.”

Paul tells Timothy in verse 14, “These things I write to you, though I hope to come to you shortly; but if I am delayed, I write so that you may know how you ought to conduct yourself in the house of God, which is the church

of the living God, the pillar and ground of the truth.” Truth is the roof under which God’s family dwells. And there’s safety, joy, peace, love, charity under His roof.

But that roof sits on pillars sunk deep into the ground. The foundation of the truth is the Church. The Church is the lone custodian of God’s Word and truth.

God’s truth is the foundation a society needs to survive and thrive – and nowhere else in the world can biblical truth be found... but in the Church.

Paul writes, “And without controversy great is the mystery of godliness...” Godliness is like this adorable, enchanting, mysterious, beautiful woman.

She has this mystique you find nowhere else. The more you get to know her, the more you realize you’ll never be able to figure her out. Pascal put it, “I love God because I know Him. I adore Him because I cannot comprehend Him.”

Philosopher Mortimer Adler became a Christian at age 82. He explains why...

"I believe Christianity is the only logical, consistent faith in the world. But there are elements in it that can only be described as mystery. My chief reason for choosing Christianity was because the mysteries were incomprehensible.

What's the point of revelation if we can figure God out ourselves?"



Here Paul tries to describe some the Gospel's mystique...

“God was manifested in the flesh...” Imagine, the *Ancient of Days* became a *Child of Time* - the *Infinite* becomes an *infant*. The Gospel begins with wonder.

Jesus was “justified in the Spirit...” Jesus worked miracles, but not of His own hand. He was justified by the Spirit. His faith now becomes our example.

He was “seen by angels...” Jesus often received angelic aid and assistance. But what's even more amazing is that for the 30-plus years He walked the Earth every angel in the cosmos stopped in their tracks, and gazed on His every move.

He was “preached among the Gentiles...” What an unexpected twist. The Bible is a book written by Jews, for Jews, about Jews, with the salvation of the Jews in view... yet immediately, the King of the Jews was preached among the Gentiles.

And “believed on in the world...” A man, who never traveled more than 100 miles from His hometown, has become Lord in every corner of the planet.

And He was “received up in glory.” What began so inconspicuously in a backwoods town called Nazareth – in a Bethlehem stable – in the womb of a young maiden - *crescendos in the clouds!* The risen Lord ascended to glory!

The Son of God **shows up** in the womb of a virgin – He **goes up** to heaven from a hill outside Jerusalem - from *arrival* to *ascension*... great is the mystery.

Let me close with a story. Years ago my dad and I were playing golf. We were joined by another man his age. They were both talking when the fellow asked my dad, “What do your sons do for a living?” Dad replied, “Ah, *they’re both pastors.*”

The man said, “I bet you’re proud of them?” I’ll never forget my dad’s response. He said, “*So far...*” This is why we need to keep bringing our lives in for a service.

*Character* has to be nurtured or its *characteristics* will deteriorate over time.

Indeed, “**great is the mystery of godliness**” - and *godly* must be the men and women who guard it. *Character does count*. May you and I pass inspection!