

The Heavens Declare

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A little over a year ago our kids in St. Louis said to Jan and to me, "You will be here next year on August 21; block out your calendars." "Oh," we replied, "and why is that?" we asked. "Total eclipse of the sun right here on that date," they said. We blocked out our calendars. And we went. And we saw it along with a bunch of our kids and grandkids.



I'd seen partial eclipses before, and I thought I knew what to expect in a total: I'd seen photos; I pretty much understood the science of sun and moon and shadow and all that. But I can tell you, like the old '60s song said, "Ain't Nothin' Like the Real Thing." Wow. If you saw it, you know what I'm talking about: *it was amazing*. The 360 horizon is like dusk. Going up higher the sky turns a deeper and deeper purple. The circle of the sun itself is absolutely black. But the corona, the crown: brilliant, purest white streaking out from the circle of the sun. There's nothing to compare it to, it's a totally unique display.

But a display of what? I kept saying out loud to Jan and the grandkids, "The heavens declare the glory of God, the firmament showeth his handiwork." Indeed and amen. (And yes, in my old age my brain seems to be reverting to the King James Version I learned as a kid.) We just stood in awe at the glory of God the Father almighty, the maker of heaven and earth, and of his Son, by whom all things were made. Wow. Wow!

Now here's the rest of the story. The next night at home Jan and I watched a special about the eclipse on PBS. As part of the explanation of the science, the narrator explained that if the sun and moon were any closer or farther from the earth or from each other there could still be eclipses, but the corona would not be visible on earth. Either the moon would completely cover both the sun and the corona, or it would only partially cover the sun, and again there would be no visible corona. Now get this: the narrator actually said these very words: "By an amazing coincidence of nature, the sun is 400 times bigger than the moon but the moon is 400 times closer to the earth than the sun, so both are perfectly positioned to display the corona on earth." That just seemed too weird, so Jan Googled it and found the exact same words. "By an amazing coincidence of nature." Are you kidding???. Has anyone calculated the odds? Give me a break.

Those of us who believe in one true God who created all things simply shake our heads or even mock such thinking. How can people believe such nonsense? Let that sink in for a moment. ... Then reflect on this: How can we believe in the one true God who both created all things and who sent his Son to save us from sin, death and the devil? It's not that we're so smart that we figured it out. Faith is a gift given by the Holy Spirit through the means of the Gospel. We can only confess and believe the faith because it's been given to us.

So how about all the people around us who believe in that "amazing coincidence of nature" rather than in the Creator of nature? Should we mock them? No. We'd believe such unbelievable things also if not for the Lord's intervention in our lives. And we do well to remember that Jesus died and rose again for all, not just for the believers.

And then we remember the second part of Jesus' mission. The first part is mission accomplished by his life, death on the cross and resurrection. Sin is paid for, Jesus is alive, death is dead, the devil is defeated. The second part of his mission is on-going. He carries out his mission by the work of the Holy Spirit, again through the means of the Gospel, Word and Sacrament. Yes, we feel deep sorrow for those who don't know their Creator and Redeemer, and we want to share the Good News with them. Even more, we remember the immeasurable love of God, who loved the world so much.

We get to enjoy and bask in all kinds of God's displays of his glory, especially the glory of the cross and the empty tomb. We also get to share that joy with those who don't have it yet. It's so good to know our Maker and Redeemer. And it's so good to show him off, both to fellow believers and to those who don't know him yet.

The heavens declare the glory of God, the firmament showeth his handiwork. And the Lord shows the world his nail-pierced hands through his bride, the church. That's us. Thanks be to God.