

Divine Understatement

*And they shall see his face; and his name shall be in their foreheads.
– Revelation 22:4 –*

Understatement is sometimes an intentional literary or linguistic device, but in common parlance, it is more frequently the passive result of the disparity in knowledge between speaker and hearer. For instance, a nuclear physicist, in relaying some of his work to someone of lesser schooling in the sciences, may well understate certain items because he does not recognize or simply forgets the lack of specific training in his audience. This makes these aspects of the presentation seemingly incidental, while they are actually of critical import to the general topic being presented.

The Holy Spirit has filled our Bibles with understatements. These are both intentional and meticulously placed in order to elicit our meditation upon the chasm that exists between our mortal finitude and His eternal excellence. The first chapter of Genesis is teeming with examples. One of those is found in 1:16 "...he made the stars also". The unengaged reader misses it. The intellectual mocks it. But the believer stops in awful wonder and ponders. If the vast expanse of the universe, with its galaxies, and blackholes, and supernovas, et. al., is incidental to this God, just how awesome He must be! And that he devotes so much more of His time to explaining the creation of man and woman, how important we must be to Him!

Perhaps the densest utilization of understatement in the Bible occurs in the gospels. Just a few instances to consider would be...

"And he went down with them, and came to Nazareth, and was subject unto them..." (Luke 2:51). Think about it – as a boy, the Son of the Living God obeyed his godly yet fallible parents!

"And he came to Nazareth, where he had been brought up: and, as his custom was, he went into the synagogue..." (Luke 4:16). Stop and ponder. Jesus formed customs or habits – good and right and wonderful holy habits. What an example! What condescension!

"Jesus wept" (John 11:35). Often quoted, frequently repeated, yet do we really understand the depth of meaning in these two words?

"He is not here: for he is risen, as he said" (Matthew 28:6). What restraint by these heavenly visitants. They must have wanted to say more. But the Spirit would leave it for the Apostle Paul to later codify the import of this simply matter-of-fact (!) angelic informative.

Finally, we turn to our text in Revelation. "And they shall see His face." What aeons of anticipation and everlasting joy are encapsulated in those few words, only the true disciple can barely begin to grasp. -- D. Murcek