

Today codes are used all over the place, often we speak of # coding, the written words that create our computer programs and websites. In World War II the British broke the German Enigma code allowing them to understand the Germany's communication and plans. Many people think Revelation is written in code and they say, "If we could only brake Revelation's code we would be able to know God's plans." But that is not the case. Listen to this audio#... that was the unbroken code of World War II, now does anyone know? It is the Navajo language. The Navajo nation of Native Americans served in World War II, mainly in the Pacific, by using their language as code. The Navajo language frustrated and confounded the Japanese forces over and over again. But if you were a Navajo hearing the communications it would be clear. The same is true with Revelation, as people of faith we speak the language.

The last book in the Bible, Revelation, is often portrayed as a book that tells the future; if only we can decipher the code. Many try to create scenarios of the future by pasting together various verses taken from the Bible—most commonly from Revelation, Thessalonians, Danial—this is what the Left Behind creates did. But Revelation, and all the Bible, is best read as a whole. The six visions described in Revelation speak the language of faith & love, in particular to a people of faith in hard times.

When we pick up a book or magazine or read something online the first thing we do, often unconsciously, is identify what kind of writing it is. Is this the *Wall Street Journal* or *The National Enquirer*? Is this a history book

written by a respected professor or is this a historical fiction written by someone who benefits from a particular interpretation of the historical events they are writing? The writer of Revelation was writing to seven real churches with real issues in a particular time in history and the writer had a goal: faith, hope and love. Revelation also follows a particular genre of writing—that of an ancient "apocalypse" in which a person goes on a journey into heaven and then returns with an urgent message to the community. That's what Revelation is; a message of truth and hope and love to create and renew faith. The message of Revelation is—only the one true God, know best in Jesus, is worthy of our worship... and not the Roman emperor. In its time this was a radical message; a political message.

The root meaning of apocalypse is *apo* "from" and *kalyptos* "covering." Revelation is uncovering the truth about the Roman Empire—it is not the great eternal power it claims to be—Rome must not be worshiped. Revelation is about what to worship and it makes vibrant connections between worship and justice, between liturgy and political transformation.

Singing is a profound source of hope in Revelation. One of the spiritual giants of our time Kathleen Norris puts it this way,
"Revelation takes a stand in favor of singing. It proclaims that when all is said and done, of the considerable noises human beings are capable of, it is singing that will endure. A new song and light will remain. I find this a cause for hope."

Revelation is filled with scenes of worship. In all fifteen hymns are sung in Revelation, and all of the hymns are giving encouragement to God's people on earth. After the gospels and psalms no other book in the Bible inspires more of our hymns; songs like: Holy, Holy, Holy; Worthy is the Lamb; Battle Hymn of the Republic; All Hail the Power of Jesus Name... to name just a few. So for the next seven weeks as we read Revelation, we will sing songs that get their words and imagery from Revelation.

Revelation also emphasizes Jesus as the slain and risen Lamb of God who is praised by# "every creature in heaven and on earth and under the earth and sea" (Rev 5:13). Revelation envisions a liturgy where animals and all living things join us in singing praises to God. To live out this main point of Revelation our worship will use songs and languages from many nations and cultures of our earth. In hearing and learning and singing these songs we are reminded how great and wonderful and all encompassing our God is. We join in the hymn of all creation!

I said earlier that Revelation follows the genre of apocalypse, however it strays from all other apocalyptic writing in one surprising way. In most apocalyptic writing the main character would take the form of something strong and mighty like a lion, but Jesus is introduced as a lamb, in fact literally it would be translated as little lamb. Jesus is depicted as the most vulnerable, as a slaughter victim. Many places in scripture we see Jesus identify with or standing with the least and the lost; Revelation says Jesus is the little Lamb. Jesus is the least and the

lost... then where should be today? What should we do today, if Jesus is the least and the lost.

The most central metaphor of Revelation is Jesus as "the Lamb who was slain." This casting of Jesus as a lamb signals to us not to interpret the imagery of Revelation literally, but metaphorically. Just as Jesus was not literally a four-legged lamb, so Revelation's other symbols and numbers should not be read literally either. Revelation's profound truth is not a series of predictions to be decoded, but a deeper-than-literal truth—a journey into God's vision of hope for our world. Revelation is the last book of the Bible but leads us into a new beginning... a journey in Jesus' faith, hope and love.