

Trinity Sunday• May 18, 2008
St. John's Lutheran Church, Alexandria, VA
Genesis 1:1 – 2:4a

“Mystery”

Ahh – Sunday afternoon! The perfect time to go home and just crash on the floor of the family room or, maybe, if you're feeling industrious, you can fling yourself out on the couch. Now for some of you, an open Sunday afternoon and evening might feel like a long-lost memory, though every once in awhile, one will come along. On those days and evenings, my brother and I would sit around with Mom and Dad and sometimes watch television shows like *In Search Of*. Leonard Nimoy, famous as Mr. Spock from *Star Trek*, hosted *In Search Of*, a documentary series that explored some of the great mysteries of the world, subjects which have defied explanation. The series investigated topics including Bigfoot, Amelia Earhart, and the giant geoglyphs on the Nazca Plains of Peru. In some ways, it was an early version of *The X-Files*, another series that traded on the allure of mystery. *In Search Of* captivated me with the enduring unknowability of the mysteries it presented.

There's an oddity about the concept of mystery, though. People love mystery – and they can't stand it. Human beings often feel compelled to investigate, to root out the core of a mystery, to solve it – even Scooby Doo rides around in a van called the “Mystery Machine.” We want to know what's going on behind a mystery. But if we think we know the answers, if we think that we've got it all figured out, what happens? As we begin to think that our understanding gives us power over a mystery, **do we fail to appreciate it?**

Our first reading today features *great* mystery – but not for the reasons we might presume. In this first chapter of Genesis, we hear the first account of Creation. Here, God creates day and night, stars and planets, oceans filled with life, and continents covered with creatures. **Creation is not a myth.** This really happened: God did act and create all that exists. **But at the same time, the first two chapters of Genesis have not been given to provide a detailed explanation of how things came to be.** Rather, along with the third chapter, they provide a prologue to the content of the rest of the Bible. In the beginning, God created everything, including human beings, and it was all good. But we did not resist the temptation to “know it all,” and we fell. Everything in Scripture from Genesis 3:14 onward is the account of God working to bring about salvation – to lift up the creation that had fallen.

This weekend, as we celebrate Trinity Sunday, we pay special honor to the mystery of one God in three Persons, Father, Son, and Holy Spirit – not three gods but one God. This is the God who is the primary player in the Bible. This is the God Who created *everything* out of *nothing*, or as it is said in Latin, worked *creatio ex nihilo*. Even in the first few verses of Genesis, Christians see all three Persons at work: the Father, the Spirit, and the Word bring everything into being. (Unfortunately, the NRSV, which we currently use in our worship bulletins, renders the Hebrew in 1:2 as “a wind from God” instead of the clearer “the Spirit of God.”) In everything that God does that goes out from Himself, all three Persons are at work. This is the God Who we worship and confess this weekend in the words of the Athanasian Creed. But even as we confess this God, are we failing to appreciate the mystery of Who He is and what He has done?

God works through creation to care for us each day, but how often do we really think about that? As we go about our lives on this planet, do we thank God for the many trees and plants that continuously recycle the air that we need to breathe? How do we treat the world that God created? Do we take it for granted? Why is it that we often do not reflect upon His work in sustaining the created order until there's an earthquake or a cyclone? Are we failing to appreciate our Creator? God created us, the universe – everything – because He loves us. God gives, man receives. This

mystery confronts us today and every time we gather in worship “in the Name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit.” Freely, out of nothing, God made everything that is. And that’s also how He justifies us fallen, unthankful, “know-it-all” people. *Creatio ex nihilo* is the way that God works. God freely gives life where there is only nothingness, and we see this mystery most clearly in the Person of the Son.

In order to talk about the Son (and thereby, the Father), we have to talk about a man. The Jesus who we preach is the Person of the Son, the Word, become man. The Son became fully and completely human to live and die and rise from the dead for us – this is Who He is. God the Son did not pretend to be a man or temporarily reside in the body of Jesus of Nazareth. The Jesus who died on the cross was both one-hundred-percent divine and one-hundred-percent human – and through his death, he brought forgiveness and eternal life into the world. Again, God brings life where there is no life. Mystery!

It seems like Christians get more than their fair share of mysteries, doesn’t it? This weekend, in Holy Communion, we participate in a mystery where Jesus the Messiah, the Person of the Son, is with us in his real body and blood in, with, and under the bread and wine. The Word of Life, who brought everything into being, comes to be with us. He gives, and we receive. Think about that before you come up to share in this mystery. Take a moment to begin to consider how God is doing *creatio ex nihilo* **in you**, how you will walk away from this experience forgiven and justified, **because God is acting on you**.

We don’t need to go *In Search Of* the mystery of God’s love. As Paul wrote, “The grace of the Lord Jesus Christ and the love of God and the fellowship of the Holy Spirit be with you all.” It’s here, for you.

Amen.