

December 24, 2011

**Christmas Eve**

All Saints' Episcopal Church, Atlanta, Georgia

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Y'all, I love Christmas. I really do. As a staid and serious Anglican, I'm not supposed to crack a smile or play a goofy carol until December 24<sup>th</sup> at the earliest, but I do! I put my tree up with the best of them on Thanksgiving weekend—er—I mean—Advent 1. My kids and I have been listening to John Denver and Muppets Christmas album all month. I walk the Advent walk, too, and I do my level best to read about John the Baptist and be expectant, but secretly, I am a Christmas kind of girl.

Part of what I love so deeply about Christmas, aside from the decorations, good music and good cheer, is the *mystery* of it all.

We are a secular world of answers. Fast ones, good ones, very bad ones, well-researched ones, briefly Wikipediaed ones. We know a lot about a lot in this world, and, thanks to curious brains and phenomenal technology, we are learning in leaps and bounds.

Answers are important. At a very base level, they help fill our human need to order the world. More importantly, they help us fix what we've messed up, cure what is ill, counter what is wrong. From the toddler's constant refrain of "Why?" to the NASA scientist who answers it, we solve puzzles and answer big questions.

Which brings me back to Christmas. Christmas has far more questions than answers. Why an unwed teenager?  
Was she really a virgin?  
Why shepherds?  
Did that star really travel?  
Why was her due date in the middle of a national census?  
Really? There was NO room at the inn?  
And why was there only one inn?

Theologians have been attempting to answer these questions for centuries. Some meaning has been made out of these mysteries but the reality is that we don't really know. And so they stay meaningful mystery. I love that about Christmas.

I love that this is the time of year where we just sit—with no evident discomfort—steeped in that which we do not understand. The reality of it makes no logical sense, even from its premise: God came down to walk as one of us? There is no research we can do to satisfy this puzzle or to justify both sides of this equation. We simply know that the baby Jesus was born of a virgin and laid in a manger. We just know it. We feel it in our bones and we know it is Truth-with-a-capital-T.

There is nothing easy about faith.

There are people who are looking for simple answers, step-by-step guides for how to believe and get into heaven. And there are preachers who are giving it to them. I'm not one of them.

There are people who are looking for proof, perhaps historical or scientific or otherwise, to show that this REALLY happened. And there are scientists and historians who will give proof of one kind or another. I'm certainly not one of those.

In this Google-and-get-it world, in this age of scientific data and hard evidence, faith is getting harder and harder to hold on to.

Faith requires questions and requires, as part of our life's journey, us to struggle with seeking answers that may or may not ever come. In that struggle we grow as Christians, as people who believe in a God who never promised that this would be easy, but promised, through that strange event of birth that we celebrate today, that we would never be alone.

But there is something to be said for occasionally letting go of the search for answers and just resting in the mystery. This kind of faith is not blind, I don't think. It is open. Open to the possibility that God does not follow our rules. That God will not be pinned down by our need for easy answers. The kind of faith that seeks and seeks and seeks but also allows room for acceptance of the mystery, is a faith that is flexible enough to endure the tests and trials that every human being lives through.

Perhaps the greatest mystery among all of these is the great WHY? Why in the world would God have done such a thing as to come down here among our muck and mess? Why would God choose to experience this *stuff* that we go through when God could just as easily keep a distance and do what needs to be done from afar? Why did it take birth and hay and milk and breath and food and dust and arms and legs and blood and death to get this job done? I'm quite sure I don't know.

I have my guesses and sometimes I need to explore those guesses to help me better see God at work in the world. But today, tomorrow and for the next couple of weeks of the Christmas season, I'm not going to seek or guess, I'm just going to sit in the lavish mystery of it. I'm going to practice being okay with *not knowing*. I'm going to practice letting God be God, big and perfect and mysterious.

I invite you to rest with me here in this litany of unanswered questions, in this holy mystery. All we have to know for sure is that God, in the Word made flesh, joined heaven to earth and earth to heaven.

Bring your anxiety and your anger, bring your sorrow and your tears, bring your great unbridled joy, bring all of it to God and rest in this mystery that is Christmas.