

## **MYSTERY of the INCARNATION**

A Christmas Eve Meditation by James R. Blades

2008

John 1:1-5,10-14,18

*Mystery.* What thoughts does that word conjure up when you hear it?

*Mystery.* Do you think of a secret to be uncovered? A yarn to be unraveled? Something you don't understand, like when you say, "Sure is a mystery to me."

Mystery can mean something else. A mystery may be something wonderful beyond imagining, something that words cannot describe or thoughts contain, a reality so cosmic in its magnitude that the tentacles of our imagination cannot begin to lay hold of it.

The New Testament makes repeated reference to such mysteries:

"The love of God which surpasses knowledge."

"The unsearchable riches of Christ."

"God's unspeakable gift."

"The peace of God that exceeds comprehension."

These kinds of mysteries are not so much codes to be cracked, problems to solve, yarns to unravel; they are things unsearchable, things indescribable; things that surpass knowledge and understanding for their splendor.

This evening, I want to talk to you about what has been regarded across the centuries as the chief of mysteries of the Christian Faith: the mystery of the Incarnation.

"The word became flesh and lived among us."

For twenty centuries, theologians have tried to harness its meaning, fit it into formulations and pin it down into creeds. But it is truth too wonderful to describe, too resplendent to be crammed into a formula:

He whom worlds could not contain  
Is now in Mary's bosom lain.

We live in a cynical age. We tend to disbelieve anything we can't explain; to distrust anything that can't be proved in a laboratory or brewed up in a test tube.

"What science cannot tell us," chirped Bertrand Russell, "mankind cannot know."

“Twinkle, twinkle little star,” sang one scientist, “I know exactly what you are: An incandescent ball of gas, condensing to a solid mass.”

In all our grown-up modern sophistication, have we lost the gift of wonder? Have we lost the capacity to bow in the face of mysteries too vast, realities too wonderful for the mind to envision let alone science to explain?

Albert Einstein said it well: “Everyone who is seriously involved in the pursuit of science,” he wrote, “becomes convinced that a spirit is manifest in the laws of the Universe—a spirit vastly superior to that of man, and one in the face of which we with our modest powers must feel humble.”

Einstein was arguably the greatest mind of this century, but he didn’t lose the capacity to wonder, to bow in awe of mystery. Perhaps that is what made his genius!

“A mystery,” said biochemist Eugene Jolly, “is not a wall against which you run your head, but an ocean into which you plunge. A mystery is not night, it is the sun so brilliant that we cannot gaze at it, but so luminous that everything is illuminated by it.”

Perhaps this is the way we should approach the *mystery* of the incarnation, not trying to explain the unexplainable, define the indefinable: **how** God could become a human being, but observing some of the wonderful realities this mystery throws light on.

This, first of all:

### I. God’s Character.

“No one has ever seen God,” said John. “It is God the only Son who has made him known.”

In the person of Jesus, the *unseen* God came into the *seen*. The *Logos*, the governing power and creative mind behind the universe, became flesh and blood. The character and personality of the Almighty Spirit came out of the abstract and were fused into the warm palpable flesh of a human being.

“In him,” said Paul, “the whole fullness of the deity dwells bodily.”

“He is . . . the exact imprint of God’s very being,” said the writer to the Hebrews.

When we look at Jesus, we see into the very heart of the unseen God.

When Jesus sits down at Jacob’s well in the heat of the day with a shamed woman and we hear Jesus offer her kindness and hope, we see the character of God.

When Jesus shatters the code of purity to become a house guest of Zaccheaus the tax collector and Jesus says, “salvation has come to this house, for this too is a son of Abraham,” we see the character of God.

When Jesus storms into the temple courts with a whip made of ropes, driving out the dishonest money changers who are filching the poor and helpless, we see the character of God.

When Jesus stretches out his hands at the cross and takes upon himself all scathing injustice of a rebellious humanity, we see the character of God.

When we read this night’s accounts of God’s Christ coming into this world a peasant, his birth being announced to the poor and marginalized, we see the character of God.

“In Christ,” said the apostle, “God makes known to us the mystery of his will.”

Here’s something else the incarnation sheds light on: not only God’s character but

## **II. God’s Method.**

“The Word became flesh” wrote John, “and dwelt among us.”

Remember the greeting card tag line: “Care enough to send the very best.” According to the stories we recount this evening, God didn’t just care enough to *send* the very best. God cared enough to step down into this troublous world to deliver it personally.

When the human race got lost, God didn’t just send down a map.

When we are drowning, God doesn’t throw us a book of “Ten lessons how to swim.”

When our world gropes in the darkness not knowing what new crisis the next day or week or year may bring, God does not pitch us a self-help system by which we may save ourselves. No. God intervenes personally. God steps into the bloody stream of human history. That is God’s method. And it is the wonder and mystery of this day we celebrate.

“And you shall call his name Emanuel, which means, *God with us.*”

One day in a busy airport, a mother was trying to comfort her scared little girl, as she was putting her aboard a plane alone to Grandma's cross-country. "Don't be afraid," mother said reassuringly, "God will take care of you and, you know, God is everywhere." "Sure God is everywhere," the little girl shot back, "but right now I need a God who is somewhere."

Yes, and don't we all?

Jesus is the God who is *somewhere*: He is the ineffable become mortal; He is the inexpressible become human. He is the tenderness of God, the righteousness of God, the power of God, the counsel of God, the love of God in flesh and blood.

*"I know not how Bethlehem's babe could in the Godhead be,  
I only know the manger child brought God's love to me."*

Tonight we join the mighty chorus of all who worship and wonder at the cradle. But let us not leave Christ there: for the child became the man who stood toe to toe with this world's malevolent powers; who went to a Cross carrying away our sins; who rose triumphant over the grave and whose Spirit is here this night to bring life and love and purpose and power and hope into our lives. It is our part to let him.

"Look, I am standing at the door knocking," he says. If anyone hears my voice and opens the door, I will come in.

Shall we pray?

*O Holy Child of Bethlehem, descend to us we pray;  
Cast out our sin and enter in, be born in us today.  
We hear the Christmas angels, the great glad tidings tell;  
O come to us, abide with us, Our Lord Emmanuel!*

*Lord Jesus, we do receive you. Come into our hearts. Guide our lives. Bring to our homes, our relationships, our work, and our church, your love, your mercy, your wisdom, your power, your healing, your righteousness!*

*We bow in awe of the miracle we celebrate in this season: that you left the splendor of heaven and were born a human being. Help us to find time, to make time, through all the hustle and bustle to reflect on the wonder of this truth.*

*We pray for those for whom the Christmas season will not be joyous this week. For those who are victims of war. For those who remember loved ones now gone. For those who struggle with sickness or sorrow. For those who are homeless or jobless or penniless or hopeless, who are reminded only of their lack in this season—we pray for them.*

*Finally, O God, make us instruments of your peace, of your healing, redeeming, life-giving presence in this broken and warring world. Help us to reflect your kindness, your care, your justice, encouragement to others around us. Help us to reflect your light and your warmth into the lives of those we touch, so that they may give praise to your name. Amen.*