Jesu Juva

“The Mystery of God in the Manger”

In the Name of Jesus. Amen.

Some mysteries are meant to be solved, and some are meant to simply be marveled and wondered at.

Mystery novels gives clues and hints so that by the end of the story, you can figure out the mystery. The Scriptures are not like that. There are clues and hints, yes. Prophecies about Jesus. Stories of what He did. But not for us to get it all figured out, or get Him all figured out. But for us to marvel. To marvel and wonder at how great the love and mercy of God for us.

There is a general lack of mystery in our world today. Which I don’t think is a good thing. We have figured out so much that we think we can figure out everything - and that we should. But we have become not richer, but poorer for it. Richer in knowledge but poorer in life. For we need mystery. We need to have a place for mystery in our lives.

For to have room for mystery in our lives is to acknowledge something bigger than us. More than us. God to us. The need to figure everything out, to control everything, to know everything, is the desire in us to be god. To be Lord over everything. But we aren’t, and we can’t. Satan’s promise that you will be like God (Genesis 3:5) is just as false for us today as it was for Eve all those years ago.

Which is not to say that science and knowledge is wrong or bad. It’s not. Mystery does not mean not knowing, but knowing and at the same time acknowledging that there are and will always be things beyond our full understanding and comprehension. Things bigger than us. And that’s okay. And even good.

Advent calls us back to mystery. To things beyond us. Things for us to wonder and marvel at. Things greater and beyond and more than us. Advent calls us to the mystery of God in the manger. And specifically, to these mysteries: The mystery of His love. The mystery of God in the flesh. The mystery of this kind of birth, in poverty and humility. And the mystery of His conception by the Holy Spirit in a virgin. To the mystery of how can this be? And yet, it is.

First, there is the mystery of His love. How can you explain the mystery of love?
Match.com and eharmony may think they have this mystery figured out with their algorithms and compatibility indices. But there is more to love than simply being alike. How else can you explain two people knowing so much or even everything about the other - including all their faults, annoying habits, shortcomings, and failures - and yet still they love each other? And even more and deeper as the years go by? There must be room for mystery here.

And how much more with God. Who in love created us, and then who in love sent His Son to redeem us, even when we rejected Him! eharmony and match.com would never put God and man together - and yet there is God and man together in the manger. Two so completely different, in every way, and yet one flesh. We know it, and yet it remains a mystery.

The mystery of God in the flesh: in human flesh. That in this baby lying in a manger dwells the whole fullness of deity. The whole fullness. Not just a part of God, but all of God. A newborn who can barely see is the God who sees everything. A newborn who is weak and small is the God who is almighty and infinite. A newborn who must learn to walk and talk and eat and drink is the God who knows all things, is keeping the planets in their orbits, and providing food for all creatures. God did not become a super-human man, a super hero, like the gods of Greek and Roman mythology, but a man just like us. Lowly, born in poverty and humility. We know it, and yet it remains a mystery.

The mystery of the God who comes down, all the way down, to us. We men are continually climbing, trying to rise up above all this. Trying to climb up financially, socially, in status, in power. But here is a God not ashamed of human lowliness - He marches right down and right in. He loves the lost, the neglected, the unseemly, the excluded, the weak, and the broken. Folks like you and me. For before Him, we’re all the same, all equal. Before Him, all power fails. Before Him, the high are brought low. Before Him, the rich are poor. Before Him, those who are something take their place with those who are nothing. All fall to their knees the same. Before a child born in poverty and humility. This impossible birth - a baby born to a virgin. We know it, and yet it remains a marvelous mystery.

The mystery of a virgin birth. The mystery of the Holy Spirit. The mystery of His overshadowing. The mystery of such a conception. Mary had room for mystery, and so it was done to her according to the Word of God.

If evolution is how we have figured out life, we have no room for mystery. But is life really just biology? Just cells coming together? Just mutations and chance and then . . . you? Can life really be explained that way? Or is there more? More than we can account for, that exceeds our expectations, that is beyond anything we can make or see or know? Clearly, yes. Yet as we set our eyes up, searching for life on other planets, are we missing the life that has come down? Come down to us, wrapped in swaddling clothes, and lying
in a manger? We know life, and yet it remains a mystery. Or as we sang, *A Great and Mighty Wonder* (LSB #383).

Advent is calling us back to mystery. To this mystery. That right before us is what is beyond us. And yet here for us. For you. A God who not only comes down into the manger for you, but who then ascends the cross for you and dies for you. A God who then rises from the dead for you, ascends into heaven for you, and is coming back for you. A God who comes to you now in water and words and bread and wine - more things that we know, but are at the same time a mystery greater and beyond us. And all this for you. *For you*, which might be the greatest mystery of all. For who are you, who am I, that the Lord of all creation should do this? And yet, He does. We know it, and yet it remains a mystery. A happy and joyful mystery.

If we have no room in our lives for mystery, then we have no room in our lives for this. For Christmas. For hope. For this good and loving and utterly incomprehensible God. Which would make us quite poor indeed.

So Advent is calling us back to mystery. **The mystery of the God in the manger.** That God doesn’t just love the world - He loves you. And for you He was made man. For you He is God in the flesh. A wonderful and marvelous - and mysterious - truth.

In the Name of Jesus. Amen.