**January 7, 2018**

**Matthew 2:1-12; Ephesians 3:1-12**

Scooby Doo rides around with his team (Fred, Shaggy, Velma, and Daphne) in the Mystery Machine van. For almost 50 years now, these characters have solved mysteries involving ghosts and crooks, clowns and monsters. They unveil haunting figures as grumpy neighbors or greedy businessmen. Regardless of the usually-predictable solution, the team always takes their time interviewing suspects and eyewitnesses.

Other dedicated children’s mystery busters are Encyclopedia Brown and Harriet the Spy, the Hardy Boys and Nancy Drew. Personally, I loved the Boxcar Children. Their outdoor adventures mirrored my own. As we ran through the woods, waded through streams, and rode horses across the Appalachian pastures, my friends and I looked to restore order to the world. (To a 10 year old, muddy footprints leading away from a stream are an opportunity to discover who? why? what and when? A stray piece of fabric in the field, a runaway dog, an unexpected piece of junk are all giant mysteries to solve.)

I have specific memories of finding an old bone in the woods and then spending months going on dinosaur digs around my yard (much to my parents’ chagrin). My friends and I were convinced that we would find the remaining pieces of a wooly mammoth or brontosaurus. This led to a childhood dream of becoming an archaeologist. Like many children, I loved the idea of hunting for treasure, and solving the mysteries attached to those treasures.

Within God’s realm, mysteries are entirely different. They are not something for us to solve. While we may hunt for revelations our whole lives long, we may try to solve the riddles and be the ones to get to the bottom of it all, God’s mysteries are not ours to claim. They are veiled in a cloud of glory, only ever revealed in part. And only ever revealed in God’s good timing; for we never *discover* the truth about God -- *God* reveals the truth to us. God’s mysteries are revealed to those whom we would never expect, but those whom God loves and chooses. God’s mysteries are made known to the meek and lowly, like Mary, to the faithful, like Simeon, to the curious, like the magi, and to the doubting, like Thomas. And when these epiphanies come, we realize that we are the hunted treasure, not the treasure hunters.[[1]](#footnote-1) If you’re coming to church to figure out God’s mysteries, you will be forever frustrated. Faith is a process through which we don’t grow in knowledge, but we grow in trust and hope and love of the Holy and Almighty Triune God.

Yesterday was Epiphany, and today is our celebration of the occasion. It is a day when we, the church, mark the important revelation of Christ to the world. Epiphany is the day when the Gentiles, the foreigners, the magi were invited to see Christ the Savior. It was a day when they lived into hope and faith of a great mystery.

The Wise Men’s journey is as much a story of outsiders – Gentiles – seeking the newborn heavenly King, as it is a story of the long journey belief will take us. They never said the words, “we believe”, and yet their quest and worship became a profound faith statement. For they were willing to go on a journey. They were willing to consider a possibility. And this willingness transformed into belief. They said, “I believe” with their first step away from their homes. They said, “I believe” in the days and weeks and months spent following a star across the sky. They said, “I believe” when they didn’t return to Herod with the news, but went home instead. Their Epiphany, their faith statement, was not a well written theological confession, but a series of actions. Their Epiphany was not a book with answers hidden inside, but a wispy trail begun thousands of years before them. Their Epiphany was a journey… a journey built on questions.

And we are invited onto this same journey. We are invited to an Epiphany. We are also invited to admit the possibility of God’s presence in the world. We are invited to walk towards the hazy figure on the horizon. To do so, we must have a willingness to leave our comfortable homes and follow God’s signs around us and overhead (prophets and stars and simple shepherds)… even though others may think us crazy.

Of course, just because the church celebrates Epiphany doesn’t mean that any one of us actually believes in Jesus, or any points of reformed Christian doctrine. Saying a creed or confession of faith doesn’t mean that we all believe it. We often follow the script without connecting it to our lives. The words might be meaningless or confusing or seemingly irrelevant. The official Epiphany is meaningless without reflecting on God’s presence in our own lives.

Belief is not marked by rich understandings or memorized chapters of Scripture. Belief is not something that we can put in a box and hand out. Belief is an intensely personal journey that will look different in each of us, though the center is the same. The heart of the mystery is the one God, Father Almighty, maker of heaven and earth, of all things visible and invisible. The one Lord, Jesus Christ, only Son of the Father; and the Holy Spirit, the Lord, the giver of Life.

Communion is a place where we sit with the mystery. The meal itself is a sacramental mystery wherein we don’t do anything to make it happen. We don’t prepare the elements. We don’t invite anyone or prevent anyone from partaking. We don’t serve anyone. Instead, Christ sets the Table before us, inviting everyone from north and south, east and west, to come and sit with him. Christ humbles himself to serve us, his treasure. We are the ones whom we loves. We are the ones for whom his heart longs. We are the reason he came. We are the reason for the star. And here at Table the Triune God serves us with heaps of grace. Although we may not find answers here, may we find hope and peace and faith in these familiar tastes. Amen.

1. Feasting on the Word: Year B, vol. 1. Pastoral Perspective by James McTyre. [↑](#footnote-ref-1)