

## Mystery Made Plain

### 4th Sunday of Advent – Romans 16:25-27

*preached by the Rector at St. Paul's, Henderson, December 21, 2014*

Lord, take my eyes and see through them. Take my lips and speak through them. Take my soul and set it on fire with love for thee. Amen.

Well, the journey I announced a few weeks ago, our journey through the season of Advent and on to the Feast of the Incarnation, is almost over. Wednesday evening at 5:30 and then again at 10:30, we'll offer our first celebrations of Christmas and another Advent journey will be in the past. That doesn't, however, change the bigger picture, the larger journey of our lives, the even larger journey of the history of humanity's relationship with God, the even more *vast* journey of time itself. Advent, I say one more time, calls us to remember all that journey taken – and the road that lays before each of us who draws the breath of God within the gift of time.

In writing to the Church in Rome, Paul makes reference to the *mystery* of that journey and to the *revelation* of that mystery in the Incarnation, in the *person* of Jesus the Christ.

Things have changed a lot since thirty-(something) years ago, when I traveled back and forth across the continent between home and college. I've already told you about some of the changes in the buses themselves, but it should come as no surprise that advances in technology have had an even greater effect on Greyhound's scheduling and ticketing. Back in the day, I remember that the bus line used to publish booklets with timetables for all their routes printed in page upon page of tiny letters and numbers. I considered it part of the adventure to pick up one of these booklets when I took the city bus to downtown Baltimore to buy my ticket, then spend hours highlighting my cross-country route – with the same highlighter that I *should* have been using more assiduously on my organic chemistry book.

Nowadays, of course, everything is done in cyberspace. Though stations still have a counter where people can buy tickets, and some do, I bought all the tickets for *my* latest trip *online*. When I called at the counter in Clarksville for the first leg of my journey, they printed out the tickets I would need to give to the drivers along the way, but these included only the places and times I would transfer along the way, neglecting the dozens of stops along the way, and there was not a timetable booklet to be found. This lack of information proved to be a source of annoyance to a great number of my fellow travelers, but not to *this* experienced bus rider. I had learned my lesson four years ago when I began my last, two week long, bus-bound retreat among the great uninformed masses. This time, I had carefully saved the full timetable for my journey to a file that I copied to my phone, from which, thanks to the power outlets I've already told you about, I could determine when we would get to what stop along the way – or at least when we were *supposed* to get there.

Once this Boy-Scout-like preparedness became known, I got a lot of requests for information. “What time do we get to Texarkana?” “When's our meal stop tonight?” “Do I have to transfer to get to El Paso?” “How far behind are we now?” I was happy to help of course, and you know me, I was happy to be the one in the know.

But this access to information came in no more handy than for Doug. Doug looked to be in his late-70s or even mid-80s, though my experience was that, in general, people that ride the bus look older than I am used to. Doug got on the bus in Salt Lake City and as he took the seat behind me he was muttering, and then more vigorously ejecting, and then practically shouting a string of expletives that seemed to have no audience but himself. I glanced between the seats and saw that he was fumbling with the accordion fold of his tickets as he once more muttered curse after curse after curse. I shook my head and tried to mind my own business, generally a pretty wise course of action on a bus. With every stop we made as continued the day-long journey across Wyoming, Doug got more and more agitated, something I did not even think was possible.

By the time we stopped at a truck stop in Fort Collins, Colorado, the sun had already set November-early, and as we stepped down from the bus, Doug looked especially confused. “Is this Midway truck stop?” he asked the now equally confused driver. I needed to go inside (mostly because I avoided the on-bus “facilities” as much as possible) so I didn’t hear the rest of the exchange, but apparently it was not very satisfying, because when we got back aboard, Doug let loose a *new* invective stream as he turned his ticket booklet over and over. “Je-sus Christ!” he finally exclaimed, nearly at the top of his voice. “I’m not Jesus,” I said, turning to look the man in the face, “but I’m a *priest* so I kind of take his name as my cue. Can I help you, sir?”

As he looked up at me, the confusion continued in the man’s face. But by the light of his overhead lamp, I can tell you I saw the anger and frustration drain from him. “I just don’t understand,” Doug said quietly, “I’m supposed to be going to the Midway Truck Stop. That’s where my car is so I can drive home. But that’s not what my ticket says. I think I’m going the wrong way.” I asked to see his ticket and then, using the timetable the browser on my phone, I was able to assure him that he was indeed on the *right* bus, that he *would* get to Midway Truck Stop in Columbia, Missouri, before noon the next morning, and that I would be with him, until he got home.

Doug never left my side through our transfer in Denver, and I never left his. Doug seemed to sleep pretty well through most of the night, the comfort challenges I told you about a couple of weeks ago notwithstanding. During our long stop and transfer in Kansas City, Doug paced nervously, until I told him that I would make sure he got on the bus with me, and asked him to sit and rest while I held a place in line. He smiled and sat, nearly dozing in his chair.

Doug knew he was home before we ever exited the Interstate. “There’s my car,” he said excitedly as we pulled into the parking lot, “I’ll be home in ten minutes.” I decided I didn’t need to leave the bus this time, but I *did* stop the aisle traffic long enough to let Doug get his bag from the overhead rack. He stepped past me and as he reached the steps, he turned and smiled quickly. “Thank you,” he said. And he was home.

We have been given this journey to the Feast of the Incarnation to help us remember the coming of Christ, past, present and future. And we have been given the gift of time itself, to give us the room to *live*, to give us the room to *learn*, to give us the room to *love*. We don’t have the timetable for this journey through life – our time may end with the trumpet blast or like a thief in the night. But in Jesus Christ, Paul says, in his Incarnation, and in his Resurrection, God has at last revealed the mystery of our journey, the Good News that in Christ we are bound together in love, and that he will bring us at last safely to our home.