

Christmas Eve 2022 – Welcome to Mystery

1. “In the beginning, God created the heavens and the earth. Now the earth was formless and empty, darkness was over the surface of the deep...and the Spirit of God was hovering over the waters.”
2. One moment, there was nothing. No physical matter, no four forces in the universe...nothing but the Father, Son and Holy Spirit and those spiritual beings they had created in anticipation of what was about to happen.
3. And then...bang! Every atom and subatomic particle that ever have or ever will exist exploded into existence. All of the rules of the universe came into being at the precise moment the universe itself came into being. Bang!
4. Loosed into the nothingness...we see darkness, storms and chaos. And then...the Spirit of God moved and hovered over the waters. Into the chaos came the Deity.
5. We live in a time where we can see hundreds of millions of light years out into space. The Webb telescope and the Hubble telescope before it have sent us thousands of jaw dropping pictures of the massive universe in which we live...and we will never be able to see more than 5% of it.
6. Why? Dark matter makes up 27% of the universe. Its existence is not doubted, but we have never seen it nor do we expect to. We infer its existence from its gravitational effect on that 5% we can see.
7. And then there is dark energy. It makes up roughly 68% of the universe and is evenly spread throughout the universe.
8. We need to address the term “dark.” In English, the word can mean something negative but that isn’t why we call them dark; we call them dark because they are hidden to us, but their presence is made known in every single action of even the tiniest subatomic particles.
9. They are a mystery...that is understood to some degree. We know just enough about them to count on them and rely on them for

everything from engineering to space travel to cooking to catching a ball. We live and experience all of our lives inside of a vast mystery. And most of us never realize it...

10. But I want you to embrace it tonight of all nights. Why tonight? Let me tell you a story. It will sound kind of science-y, but this is science that tells an amazing story. Listen for awhile and embrace the mystery...because you are part of it.
11. Physicists are smart people and they have worked very hard to learn the traffic laws of the universe, which is what the laws of physics are. While so much of our universe is hidden from us, we do know a few things. We know that neither matter nor energy can be created or destroyed. That means that the atoms that make up the entire universe have been in existence since God spoke and matter came into existence with a bang.
12. Matter is always moving, transmigrating, and it is good that our eyes cannot see it for it would likely drive us mad. Everything that you can see (and all you cannot) is made up of atoms...that have made up other things before they made up what you see. And many trillions of those atoms came together and made...you.
13. There is a very important fact here that I want you to understand: there is, for lack of a better, more concrete term, "organizing principle" in the universe that brings things into being, using building blocks that have been around since that first act of creation. And we have no idea how or why it does that.
14. These mindless particles have no brain. They have no thoughts. They cannot form alliances with other atoms. They are not alive. Remember that: atoms are not alive. And yet, for reasons we will never be able to measure or understand, these atoms leave other work they were doing and come together to make dirt, dogs, oceans...and you.
15. For about 650,000 hours, these atoms will do all they can to keep you alive even though not a single one of them is alive. And then, again, for reasons we cannot grasp, they quit and move on to make other things...and maybe become parts of other people.

16. It gets stranger than that. You are mainly space. The distances from the nucleus of any atom in your body to its first electron and then the next shell, etc. is vast. You can take all of the matter that make up all 7 billion human beings on earth and remove all of the space and it will fit...in a sugar cube.
17. The DNA in a single one of your cells would stretch out to just over 6ft. And if you got it out of all of your cells and stretched it out, it would go around the edge of our solar system. Twice.
18. You are a miracle. And a mystery. For some reason, the universe pulled together to make you. You might be suffering from cancer, depression, a broken or braking family, job loss, worry, or war but – what a mystery – you are here!
19. That means that every single one of your ancestors survived long enough to have children. In a world where people die all the time – war, sickness, accident, disease...your ancestral line is made up of survivors. Congratulations. You won.
20. But...what now? Here we are in this vast empty sea, a universe made up almost entirely of just...space. Something is going on or we would not be here – YOU would not be here.
21. And then...we get a story. A “story” might not seem like much but we are the stories we tell ourselves. And the stories we are told, the stories we inherit from that long line of survivors.
22. They brought us a story of what happened with the Holy Spirit hovered over the chaos of the just created universe. Order, light, and life – all gifts given to us, literally woven into the fabric of the universe – a universe that is, itself, a mystery. We are part of the mystery and we live in a mystery. God gave us a story to help us build meaning and hope in the midst of the mystery.
23. The world is an amazing place but we can see beyond the beauty of sunsets and children’s laughter to something...not right. Something is broken. We’ve tried to fix it with empires, wars, laws,

art, music, poetry and our sheer will, but it is broken. We need outside help. We need inside help!

24. Over the chaos of the world, the Spirit came once again and hovered over a young girl in an insignificant backwater of the Roman Empire. The world would never have known her or assigned her any value at all...but the Spirit came and changed everything.
25. God entered into the story in a new way in Bethlehem of Judea just over two thousand years ago. He had entered the story before, of course, and spoken to prophets and kings and poets...but this was a very different kind of interaction with "story." He was joining the mystery by becoming...us.
26. Atoms were called from whatever they were making and being before to form the endlessly complex set of molecules we call DNA, cells, zygotes, and...a baby. God allowed Himself to be made of atoms just like us and make the journey that every single human being has made: from mother to the planet. A holy journey. A dangerous journey. A mysterious journey.
27. He entered our story and then brought us into His story. Questions? Of course; we all have questions. Why is the universe so big? What's going on out there in the Pillars of Creation, the Crab Nebula, the Horsehead Nebula? Why is so much of what we see so profoundly broken? Who are we?
28. God supplied some of the answers. He gives us our identity in Him and in our mere existence. He gives us responsibility in His laws of love and service and giving. He gives us meaning in adopting us and giving us a home with Him now and forever.
29. He answers maybe 5% of our questions and asks us to trust Him as the author of this story, the designer of this mystery. Remember when I said that we cannot see 95% of the universe but we know it is there because of how it effects the things we CAN see? The same can be said about knowing God. We can't answer very many questions about God but we know He is there because of what we can see. "Faith is the substance of things hoped for, the evidence of things not seen."

30. And then we come back to you. Congratulations. Everything the universe could throw at you to try to kill you or destroy you has failed. You are a survivor, a part of the mystery, a part of the plan...because He entered your story and changed everything.
31. The vast majority of kings and emperors and dictators and despots who ever lived have died out and their family lines have died out. Those who claimed to be more powerful than God are in the dust and there are no children to carry on their name. But you are here. And He is WHY. And He is with you.
32. Let us close our meditation this night with the prayer of Mary, the mother of Jesus, who understood the mystery and entered the story...the story in which we now live.

“My soul glorifies the Lord and my spirit rejoices in God, my Savior. For He has been mindful of the humble state of his servant. From now on, all generations will call me blessed, for the Mighty One has done great things for me – holy is His Name.

“His mercy extends to those who fear Him, from generation to generation, He has performed mighty deeds with His arm; He has scattered those who are proud in their inmost thoughts. He has brought down rulers from their thrones but has lifted up the humble.

“He has filled the hungry with good things and but sent the rich away empty. He has helped his servant Israel, remembering to be merciful to Abraham and his descendants forever, even as He said to our fathers.”

(Luke 1:46-55)