

Text: Luke 2: 1-20  
Title: Particles of God  
Date: 12.24.11  
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At a research lab in Switzerland, to a standing room only crowd, scientists recently announced that they were closer to an explanation for everything. They didn't claim to have everything figured out just yet, but as one scientist put it, "I think we're getting very close. We may be getting the first tantalizing hints, but it is a whiff, it is a smell, it's not the quite the whole thing."

The research scientists were talking about the Higgs boson.

Higgs boson is a sub-atomic particle that is believed to be the lynch pin between energy and matter. It's been predicted but never detected. It's what existed a billionth of a second after the Big Bang. To track down the Higgs boson scientists fly protons around a 17 mile ring, at just a smidgen under the speed of light, and then they smash them into one another. In the proton's collision scientists hope to find traces of the particle that will help explain everything.

Now, some of you are already glazed over like a Christmas ham. You came to church for worship and wonder not a high school physics flashback. But, stay with me for a moment...

The Higgs boson is commonly referred to as "the God particle." In part because if they can locate or identify the Higgs boson then there is better evidence to support theories of how creation was created. To quote the project physicist, "Our whole picture of how matter exists within the universe depends on the existence of the Higgs boson."

It is a remarkable endeavor; may God bless them in their pursuit. And, while some scientists detest "the God particle" name, I sort of like the moniker. Scientists are looking for how things came be and how things are held together. I like to think that

they are looking for footprints of the Divine,  
they are looking for traces of the Truth,  
they are looking for particles of God.

I saw the same during my relatively recent trip to Israel. Bethlehem is in the Palestinian West Bank and the Church of the Nativity sits atop the site where Jesus was born. When I was there it was standing room only as pilgrims, from all over the world, squeezed down the narrow steps to get a glimpse of the place where God slipped in....

In a cramped basement grotto you stoop down to see a 14-pointed silver star set into a marble floor, surrounded by silver lamps, and then you are nudged forward to another altar marking the site where Mary laid the newborn baby in the manger. The Orthodox Church manages the birth altar; the Catholic Church manages the manger altar....

But, for almost two thousand years Christians have come to this site believing, hoping, looking for traces of the Divine. When I was there Asians and Ethiopians, Eastern Europeans and Southern Baptists, Brits and Hispanics, Catholics and Pentecostals were all wedged together in the basement hallway, with cameras in hand, hoping to get some sense, some feeling, some evidence that God had been there ~ a tantalizing hint, a whiff, a smell, a particle of God....

And that, dear friends, is part of the wonder of Christmas. We are gathered not because of an idea or a creed. We are gathered not just for candles and tradition and music and family ~ no matter how beautiful. We're gathered together because in a particular place at a particular time God became mass and matter. We're gathered in the faith that God took on protons and neutrons. We're gathered in the mystery that God slipped in among us.

There is a specific context and specific cast of characters:

The bean-counters conducting a census to expand the tax-rolls for Caesar Augustus, the calloused hands of a confused carpenter, the swollen ankles and sore back of a pregnant woman ~ traveling ninety miles by donkey, a feeding trough as a makeshift cradle, the gasp and wince of labor, and a mother peering over her belly for a glimpse of the baby. For, God is umbilically tied to a poor Hebrew girl; God squawks out baby babble.

Henry Langknecht gets at it this way:

*Mary didn't give birth to an avatar or a name or an idea. Mary didn't give birth to a host of representative samples of humanity's diversity. Mary gave birth to one human baby whose annoying specificity warns us and protects us, first from worshipping only our favorite icons, and second from worshipping only the cosmic Christ, the eternal Logos or any other philosophical tag in whose inscrutability we can claim Christmas unity. Jesus already and only looks like Jesus.*

The incarnation (God becoming flesh) is a scandal because of its specificity.

God became this particle and not that particle.

God took male shape not female shape.

God was left handed not right handed.

God was a Hebrew not a Native American.

God was poor, vulnerable, and tossed aside not middle class, powerful, and safe and....

And, the staggering mystery, beyond imagination and fairy tale, is that God would be born as Jesus with the DNA of a teenage mom from a scrub brush town. God would be born as Jesus with the DNA of the Holy Spirit ~ the very breath of divinity coughed out of the lungs of a new born baby boy.

The scandal is the "annoying specificity" of God not just as universal cosmic Christ but God as particular particles. And yet, in the words of Wes Granberg Michaelson:

*The God who brought billions of galaxies into being chose to enter into earthly human life as a vulnerable baby. If this is true then every human life is given a point of contact with the Creator. Then the God who brought everything into being is not some remote and distant force far removed from our daily lives. Rather, then this is a God who does the miraculous in order to be with us; and every human life can be impregnated with the divine presence.*

“Every human life is given a point of contact with the Creator.” I like that; for not only is there the specificity of God in Christ but there is the specificity of God and you.

We’ve already had physics ~ now grammar. Merry Christmas!

When the angel announces the birth of Christ to the shepherds he/she uses an odd twist of language. The angel says:

*Do not be afraid. I bring you good news of great joy that will be for all the people. Today in the town of David a Savior has been born to you...*

In Greek the personal pronoun “you” here is plural. In the south they would say, “I bring all y’all good news....” But, the “you” is also in the dative case.

Dative case?

English doesn’t have a dative case; Greek and many other languages do. The dative case is reserved for things that come directly to another party. The dative would be used when I give a gift to you, or I pull you aside to say something directly to you. The dative is personal in the sense that something is being directed quite specifically your way. The emphasis or exclamation of the dative case is that the action is specific, to you....

So, the announcement of the angel is not a generic all purpose bulletin. The announcement is personalized. This good news is for you. Listen to the announcement again:

*Do not be afraid. I bring you good news of great joy that will be for all people. Today in the town of David a Savior has been born to you; he is the Messiah. This will be a sign to you...*

Bring you...

Born to you...

Sign to you...

The scandal is not just the “annoying specificity” of God but the “annoying specificity” of you. This good news of great joy is for you. God for you. God with you. God beside you. God in you. Each of you. All of you.

Some four hundred years ago Martin Luther put it as a question:

*Of what benefit would it be to me if Jesus would have been born a thousand times and it would have been sung daily in my ears that Jesus Christ was born, but that I was never to hear that Jesus Christ was born for me?*

Particles of God for you.

Now, what’s left out of this physics lesson and grammar lesson is love.

All of this is little more than a clanging gong or a resounding cymbal without the good news that it was love that prompted God to create even with a Big Bang, and love that

prompted God to pursue creation in the particularity of Jesus of Nazareth. It was love that was poured out on the cross and love that rose triumphant over death. It is love that sets a banquet table as a foretaste of a coming feast.

Love for you.

Dear friends, may that love take on mass and matter in our lives and the lives of those we love. May that love be born anew in our hearts and in our enemy's hearts. May that love be realized on city streets, suburban cul-de-sacs, and dusty mountain passes. May that love slip quietly and unmistakably into your particular life even on this particular morning.

Even so, Come Lord Jesus. Amen.