

SERMON (ORDINARIATE AT ST MARY'S GAINFORD, SOLEMN EVENSONG)
Revd Eileen Harrop - Sunday 14th August 2016
The Assumption of the Blessed Virgin Mary

In the course of my Christian life, especially in the recent 10 years or so, many people most of whom I had only a brief acquaintance have said to me: "I wish I had your faith".

Faith and mystery are contingent truths: that is, if there is no mystery there is no faith. If everything is fully known to every person, and everyone understands what is seen in exactly the same way, then there is no mystery and there is no place for faith. It may occur to you that it is absurd to say we can know everything and we all understand everything in the same way.

But is there any reason why we should have mystery? Wouldn't we be better off without it? Imagine: no need for discovery, for invention, for innovation, for imagination, for wonder...everything known. Isn't mystery an aberration? No, mystery is intentional in God's creation.

The ultimate mystery of faith for us in the Church is God's gift to us in Jesus' incarnate life, death, and resurrection. Part of this ultimate mystery is God's blessing on those people who had a special role in revealing Christ, Redeemer and Saviour of the World, to us. One most blessed of such chosen people is Jesus' mother, Mary. God had found in Mary all that was right to bear His only begotten Son into the world in human form. Mary heard and accepted God's bidding. She opened herself to the mystery of faith and became part of it.

The origin of creation continues to be a mystery; scientists and astronomers continue to seek tangible understanding of how the world came into being. Yet for us who have taken the step of faith, we have gained the understanding not of 'how', but of 'why' the world came into being.

Out of the nature of God and issuing from the Creator's love, all that is good, beautiful, glorious, full of wonder and splendour, could not be contained. In God's generosity, He created all that is to be shared and given increase. By faith, we enjoy this mystery of creation not only by what is known and seen, but by what is unknown and to be discovered from generation to generation.

Our God of mystery is also the God of miracles. Miracles, like faith, is contingent on mystery. Miracles are amazing things that happen; unexpected things that enable salvation and hope to the benefit of someone or many. By the very nature of what science is and what scientists do, the ways in which miracles happen gain understanding over time. By their endeavours, more of the life that God created is understood. There is no contradiction between those who have faith and science. Faith is the openness to mystery that also celebrates its revelation.

Last Sunday some of our churches remembered Jesus' Transfiguration. During that occasion, 3 disciples (Peter, James, and John) saw Elijah, Moses, and Jesus speaking together on the mountain top. That was a mystery since Elijah and Moses had, centuries previously, been assumed to heaven according to the Scriptures. Not knowing how to react in his amazement, Peter tried to extend that experience. He suggested erecting shelters for them. But just as God did not intend for that moment of mystery to remain, so too, the understanding to all mystery will be made known in God's perfect time.

The apostle Paul told the early Christians in Corinth: "Behold I tell you a mystery; we will not all sleep, but we will all be changed, in a moment, in a twinkling of an eye, at the last trumpet; for the trumpet will sound, and the dead will be raised imperishable, and we will be changed. For this perishable must put on the imperishable, and the mortal must put on immortality".

Today the Feast of the Assumption of the Blessed Virgin Mary celebrates this mystery of the resurrection of the body. There are no specific details or record of Mary's death in the canons of the Bible. But in the holy catholic and apostolic church of the Anglican Communion we are guided to gain theological understanding by Scripture, Reason, as well as Tradition. The Roman Catholic church by its tradition has honoured Mary with assumption to heaven of body and soul. As redeemed beneficiaries of God's mercy, we (in One body) share His promise of Resurrection. By Mary's moment of obedience in accepting God's will, by her openness to the mystery into which she was called, Jesus came into the world and broke the hold of sinful nature over us. Let us be confident of our faith and by faith receive the joys of abundant life, and the hope of resurrected life in Christ Jesus our Lord. Amen