

THE BACK OF THE BULLETIN

A Secret Revealed

The distance between a lonely human being and God can be crossed - but only by God. Our probes and scopes and sensors have been put forth into all sorts of places, and one of our best qualities is the unrest we feel when a question remains unanswered. But the question about God is one too far for our apparatus of enquiry; for which reason many a thorough scientist, and many a philosopher, has decided it's not even worth asking. *What's the point, they say, of asking a question I'll never be able to answer?*

God Also Communicates

Well, the point is that perhaps someone else will be able to answer it. If there is a God, we are not alone, and God may be disposed to reveal to us what we're unable to sense for ourselves; or as Jesus once said to Peter, *You are a blessed man: because it wasn't flesh and blood that taught you this truth, but God.* Now, not everyone is *blessed*; blessing involves being singled out for something special, not granted to all. There is a whole range of human experience that just isn't subject to testing and verification, but is its own guarantee: you can't prove that the Parthenon is a sublime building, and you can't prove that Rembrandt's late self-portraits are deeply human, and you can't prove that you love your wife. These things don't work by verifiable scientific factoring. They don't, as it were, proceed from "flesh and blood", but are flights of the spirit. Of course, the Parthenon is also lumps of stone, and Rembrandt's paintings are bits of stretched jute, and oil-paint such as you may buy by the pint. But anyone who tries to understand these august things along that path will have a limited pilgrimage. To taste the truth of the upper storeys of human experience, you will need to learn some secrets. God, I find, is a revealer of secrets.

Is This Creepy Stuff?

Not at all. I'm not suggesting that we're into the malodorous world of popular occult fiction for which people (starved of religion) will pay so much. But what makes that stuff

so attractive is that it holds out the possibility that there's more to the world than the dreary rationalised Gradgrind thing we're offered these days. As believers in God, we see the rules of the world that a scientist can describe as interesting and amazing, but not in the end as the determining truth of the Universe. That is something we see as not being contained within the Universe and its rules. Indeed, God cannot be contained within it, whilst at the same time making it exist. So the Scriptural realisation stands: *if the world is wonderful, how much more the One who made it!*

Reaching The End Of Advent

Advent has its own waiting on God, its refusal to explain our lives away. We waited for Christmas when we were children, with a suspended judgment and an open mind, ready to be amazed by surprises and a feast we have not designed or predicted. What mother hasn't quietly decorated a tree, and led a little child in to look at it, glittering with unlikely winter fruit and flowers, lit from within, and heard the intake of breath and the sudden silence? The childlike experience takes its power from our knowledge that the world can break open and reveal, and take our breath away with its sudden beautiful truth. This is the theme of the Bible, and above all of the Gospel: *the revelation of a mystery kept secret for endless ages, but now brilliantly clear, to be proclaimed amongst the nations, to bring them to faith.* There it is, Paul to the Romans: he believed in God for grinding years of obedience, and then the world cracked asunder, and he saw Christ, and he threw away everything else, to receive him.

Mary And The Angel

Reserved for this year of the Lectionary, the archetypal Advent picture: the Annunciation. A girl meets the messenger of heaven, and is caught up in the wonder of a secret beyond her understanding or calculation; all she can do is to hasten to Elizabeth, and to sing the Magnificat which we echo every evening at Vespers, remembering the mystery of the coming of Christ.

Fr Philip