

*Sermon from 01/06/2008  
Epiphany (Revelation) Sunday*

**God's Mystery Revealed**

Texts: Isaiah 60:1-6, Ephesians 3:1-12

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“Reading maketh a full man, conference a ready man, and writing an exact man.”  
Francis Bacon

In 1965, Milton Bradley came out with a board game called *Mystery Date*.

Although, I never played, I can remember the commercials for it.

I think it used dice, and the idea was to open certain mystery doors to reveal who your date would be for the evening.

If you opened the door and it was a good-looking guy, you were all set.

But if you opened the wrong door, there could be (what the game calls) a “Dud” standing there—that’s “Dude” minus the “e.”

And, well, if you opened the wrong door and there was the “Dud” standing there, I guess you weren’t going to have a very nice date.

Apparently, this board game was/is so popular, it has been put back into production again.

Here’s a blog comment from a Mother who was searching to buy this game on Amazon.com

*My 9 year old daughter and I were shopping and she spotted the mystery date game. I could not believe it! I grabbed it and hugged it to my chest! Finally! I had been waiting 30 years to be able to call this game my own. I thought we would play it once and I would put it away to keep for always. NOT! My daughter is an addict. She will not stop playing the game. She even plays it by herself. This game is truly a game that has held it's appeal through the ages. I am so happy they brought it back. Now my daughter can keep the game and play it with her daughter someday. Every little girl should have the Mystery Date game!<sup>1</sup>*

I think a variation of Mystery Date board game was the TV show called The Dating Game—a Chuck Barris production.

Here’s how Wikipedia describes the TV show, The Dating Game—just in case you never watched it.

*The Dating Game is an ABC television show that first aired on December 20, 1965 and was the first of many shows created and packaged by Chuck Barris from the 1960s through the 1980s. For the first few episodes in at the beginning of the ABC run, live music was provided by The Regents. For years it would almost always be*

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<sup>1</sup> [http://www.amazon.com/review/product/B0007V635I/ref=dp\\_top\\_cm\\_cr\\_acr\\_txt/002-6978926-9840809?%5Fencoding=UTF8&showViewpoints=1](http://www.amazon.com/review/product/B0007V635I/ref=dp_top_cm_cr_acr_txt/002-6978926-9840809?%5Fencoding=UTF8&showViewpoints=1)

aired in tandem with another Barris production, *The Newlywed Game*, which premiered on ABC the following year.

Typically, a bachelorette would question three bachelors, who were hidden from her view; at the end of the questioning period, she would choose one to go out with on a date paid for by the show. Occasionally, the roles would be reversed with a man questioning three ladies; other times, a celebrity would question three players for a date for themselves, a co-worker or a relative of theirs. Many celebrities played the game looking for love themselves.<sup>2</sup>

Whether it be a novel, a board game, or a classic TV game show...there's something very tantalizing about a mystery that appeals to our human psyche.

It is, I suppose, the unknown that hooks us.

Mystery produces nail-biting cliff-hangers that keep you glued to the plot line, episode or chapter.

I mean how many of us when we watched the *Dating Game* enjoyed looking at the three girls—or three guys—on the other side of that partition/divide—and secretly you thought that *Bachelorette Number Two* would be the “perfect match” for the good-looking guy behind the other side of the screen?

And wouldn't you just feel just somewhat let down if you thought *Bachelor Number Three* was a real “Dud”—the worst pick—for such a pretty contestant?

Yes, these games are fun—but the fun can only go on for so long until someone says “*You've got to decide...you've got to make a choice.*”

Usually, that person was the host.

In the case of the *Dating Game* it was Jim Lang—and he'd say—say it with me: “*Will it be Bachelorette Number One, Bachelorette Number Two, or Bachelorette Number Three?*”

And then the audience would erupt into wild shouting out of one's, twos, or threes—all in an attempt to influence that final choice of the handsome Bachelor (or pretty Bachelorette).

But some people when it comes to faith...never get a date.

They just can't choose.

Even when the audience is shouting at them, they just can't pick between Scientology, the Mormon Church, Transcendental Meditation (you remember that from the 70s, don't you?),<sup>3</sup> or Jesus.

But the point of a good mystery...is not only the mystery—you know trying to put the various odd-shaped pieces together—it is the *resolution* of the mystery.

In the end, every audience...or every readership demands this resolution of the mystery.

Every literature expert will tell you that without resolution, the whole plot line of the story becomes wholly dissatisfying.

People want to know the answer to “*Who dun it?*”

Women want to know if they're going to get a Hunk or a Dud (that's “Dude” without the “e”).

<sup>2</sup> [http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/The\\_Dating\\_Game](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/The_Dating_Game)

<sup>3</sup> [http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Transcendental\\_Meditation](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Transcendental_Meditation)

Think of the student that works hard all through school and who diligently prepares themselves for an examination.

I mean *eventually* they want to know their grade.

Eventually, they need the unknown, about their academic progress, to be revealed.

And deep down people want to know “*Will the mystery of God ever be revealed?*”

Or must we just accept that our spiritual longing only ends with shrugged shoulders and the unresolved anxiety of “*I dun know!*”

Well Scripture clearly gives us an answer.

Ephesians 6:1-13 says,

*This is why I, Paul, am in jail for Christ, having taken up the cause of you outsiders, so-called. I take it that you're familiar with the part I was given in God's plan for including everybody. I got the inside story on this from God himself, as I just wrote you in brief.*

*As you read over what I have written to you, you'll be able to see for yourselves into the mystery of Christ. None of our ancestors understood this. Only in our time has it been made clear by God's Spirit through his holy apostles and prophets of this new order. The mystery is that people who have never heard of God and those who have heard of him all their lives (what I've been calling outsiders and insiders) stand on the same ground before God. They get the same offer, same help, same promises in Christ Jesus. The Message is accessible and welcoming to everyone, across the board.*

*This is my life work: helping people understand and respond to this Message. It came as a sheer gift to me, a real surprise, God handling all the details. When it came to presenting the Message to people who had no background in God's way, I was the least qualified of any of the available Christians. God saw to it that I was equipped, but you can be sure that it had nothing to do with my natural abilities.*

*And so here I am, preaching and writing about things that are way over my head, the inexhaustible riches and generosity of Christ. My task is to bring out in the open and make plain what God, who created all this in the first place, has been doing in secret and behind the scenes all along. Through followers of Jesus like yourselves gathered in churches, this extraordinary plan of God is becoming known and talked about even among the angels!*

*All this is proceeding along lines planned all along by God and then executed in Christ Jesus. When we trust in him, we're free to say whatever needs to be said, bold to go wherever we need to go. So don't let my present trouble on your behalf get you down. Be proud!*

Scripture resolves the tension: what is mysterious is now made known.

So relax, you can take the guesswork out of God's plan for your life.

At Epiphany we celebrate God's revealing of Himself—what is called the Incarnation.

Epiphany in the early church was one of the great feast days—second only to Easter in its importance.

The third great feast was Pentecost, another day that has drifted into religious backwaters.

And even Easter is greatly watered down today.

Easter used to be celebrated with an all-night vigil the night before and then the celebration continued on for what was called the “Great 50 Days” ending with a huge blowout on Pentecost.

Epiphany, Easter, and Pentecost were the focus of the church.

Nobody even thought about celebrating Christmas until the fourth century.

The experience that Scripture wishes us to have is not only in valuing mystery, but also in resolving mystery.

The Christian faith is only *half a faith* if we dwell on mystery to the exclusion of manifestation.

[say ‘*half a faith*’ with me this morning]

The Christian faith is only half a faith if we pride ourselves on journey without ever naming that we are to reach a Destination.

[Say, ‘*I have a destination*’ with me this morning].

In 2006 the Discovery Channel began to air a show called *MythBusters*.

The purpose behind this show is to reveal if a popular myth (a.k.a. urban legends) is true or not.

After concluding their experiments, *Mythbusters*, will generally say whether the myth has been ‘**busted**’ (proved false), is ‘**plausible**’, or ‘**confirmed**’ (the myth is true).

Here are some of their experiments on popular myths:

*It is possible to pick up radio signals through a tooth filling.* Result: Busted.

*A penny dropped from a skyscraper lands with enough force to either kill a pedestrian on the sidewalk below or embed itself into the sidewalk.* Result: Busted.

*Is it possible for Coke to clean a penny?* Result: Confirmed

*Prisoners successfully escaped Alcatraz prison using an inflatable raft made from rain ponchos.* Result: Plausible.<sup>4</sup>

Now some people when they endeavor to “test” what they see as the myth of God’s incarnation say, ‘*Busted*’—*uh, uh—no way it can happen.*

Other people...well they say, ‘*Plausible*’—*Hmm—yes, perhaps it could happen.*

But ‘Christians’, says Holy Scripture, look at the evidence and declare ‘*Confirmed*’.

You see, here’s part of what I expect: if you’ve been hanging around in any Christian church for let’s say the last few years—you and I ought to have The Message of God’s self-disclosure down pretty pat.

That’s right, we are not religious speculators.

We don’t proclaim ‘opinion’, we proclaim Truth!

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<sup>4</sup> For all these myth busting experiments from Season 1 (and more), go to:  
[http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/MythBusters\\_episodes:\\_Season\\_1#Cell\\_Phone\\_Destruction](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/MythBusters_episodes:_Season_1#Cell_Phone_Destruction)

Our faith, following Christmas, is a 'confirmed' faith.

And maybe I want to be a little bit like Paul—hopefully—he does say *“Follow my example, as I follow the example of Christ”*<sup>5</sup>—that’s all I’m trying to do: follow Paul’s example.

From this pulpit you will not hear the empty philosophical ramblings of a Pastor attempting to disprove or bust the evidence for God’s complete self-revealing in Jesus Christ.

Be it as His birth, at His baptism, or in Cana of Galilee—as the traditional texts of Epiphany read.

From me you will not hear that Jesus was or is *“just another \_\_\_\_\_.”*

From this pulpit you will not hear the options of plausibility.

From this pulpit you will hear *‘confirmed’*—because revelation, manifestation, incarnation, and God’s light all go together.

They are confirmed in the cradle, they are confirmed at the Jordan, and they are confirmed in Cana.

*“the people living in darkness have seen a **great light**; on those living in the land of the shadow of death a **light** has dawned.”*<sup>6</sup>

And what does this light...this light of Epiphany reveal?

It reveals God to us—Immanuel—God with us!

And why is having this light so important?

Because we are so prone to miss It—Him!

We presently live in culture that routinely keeps picking the “Duds”—that’s “Dude” without the “e”...

...and so has lost its own sense of wonder and astonishment of what life can be like when God makes Himself known to us.

If you have faith in your heart that Jesus is the One for you, you will always pick the right door.

Many of us today have seemingly lost that sense of excitement and expectation—that ‘confidence’ that Paul speaks about in Ephesians 3:12.

In the early church, the point of Epiphany was not to remember history...but to be reminded that God appears miraculously to us in places and in ways that we don’t expect—and when God does, God offers us something (a gift—as in the appearance of the Wise Men),

Shows us something (a sign—as in the changing of the water into wine<sup>7</sup>),

Or confirms something (by demonstrating His power—as in Jesus’ baptism in the River Jordan).

If we keep remembering that God seems to thrive on unexpected appearances and if we keep expecting to see God everywhere we turn, we are not too likely to miss it when it happens again.

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<sup>5</sup> 1 Corinthians 11:1

<sup>6</sup> Isaiah 9:2

<sup>7</sup> see John 2.

Questions For Reflection:

1. How many mystery books do you have in your home?
2. How do you look at Jesus: as 'busted', 'plausible' or 'confirmed'?
3. How has God revealed Himself to you in Jesus Christ?
4. How (or in what ways) does our church do its part in sharing the mystery of Christ with others?
5. What is your destination in life?
6. Where has God confirmed Jesus as Messiah in your life?
7. When was the last time you were not expecting Jesus to reveal Himself to you (like to the two on the road to Emmaus) and He did anyway?
8. How long can you live with an open-ended question before you seek an answer to it?
9. If it is plausible that prisoners might successfully escape from Alcatraz prison using an inflatable raft made from rain ponchos, is it possible that revealed Himself in Jesus?
10. Is your faith one of speculation and uncertainty...or freedom and confidence?