

Over the last few weeks we have been hearing news of results of a series of experiments taking place using a mysterious piece of equipment, the Large Hadron Collider at Geneva. This monster particle accelerator, with its capacity to produce very high energy particle beams travelling close to the speed of light, capable of simulating conditions thought to have existed at the time of the Big Bang, the very beginnings of our Universe. It was constructed with the aim of investigating the existence of a particle that up to now has only existed in the fevered minds of the theoretical physicist, the Higgs Boson. This particle, whose existence is suggested by the so called Standard Model on which the current understanding of atomic and nuclear structures is based. This Higgs Boson has been called the God-particle, a sort of Holy Grail of Nuclear physicists, would actually explain the whole concept of mass. Failure to find it in the course of these experiments would send theoretical physicists back to the drawing board.

During these last few weeks scientists working at the Large Hadron Collider have reported that they have detected the first possible signs of the illusive Higgs Boson. As one who has held a near life-long passionate belief in the coherence of scientific and religious truth, I have found all this quite exciting. Ernest Walton, the Nobel Laureate, who was Professor of Physics in my time in Trinity once declared that the scientist and the theologian are both seeking after truth; and truth will never contradict truth. He was convinced that the scientist, engaged in the study of the created order, was engaged in a study of nothing less than the work of the Creator.

Those initial results of the experiments conducted in the Large Hadron Collider suggest we are getting glimpses of the fundamental ordering of our physical universe.

The work of the scientist, as Ernest Walton would have recognised, does not provide the sum total of our understanding of truth. As we approach Christmas, the Feast of the Incarnation, we celebrate a fundamental conviction that lies at the heart of the Christ faith. Theologians down through the years have struggled with expressing this but at the heart of it is the message found in the opening section of the 1<sup>st</sup> Letter of John (I am quoting from the Message translation).

<sup>1Jn1:1-2</sup> From the very first day, we were there, taking it all in—we heard it with our own ears, saw it with our own eyes, verified it with our own hands. The Word of Life appeared right before our eyes; we saw it happen! And now we're telling you in most sober prose that what we witnessed was, incredibly, this: The infinite Life of God himself took shape before us.

<sup>1Jn1:3-4</sup> We saw it, we heard it, and now we're telling you so you can experience it along with us, this experience of communion with the Father and his Son, Jesus Christ. Our motive for writing is simply this: We want you to enjoy this, too. Your joy will double our joy!

*1 John 1:1ff*

Stripping aside all theological niceties, what is being said here is that in the person of Jesus, we get a glimpse of God. We get an insight into the nature of God. As I was reflecting at the 9:30 service last Sunday, one of the chants used in worship in the Taize community picks up one of the themes of Psalm 27.

'I am sure I shall see the goodness of the Lord in the land of the living.  
Yes, I shall see the goodness of the Lord; hold firm, trust in the Lord.'

What is the nature of that goodness that I encounter in the person of Jesus? In many ways, in the way in which we celebrate Christmas, we have tamed the Incarnation. It is a lovely family occasion, like everyone else I really enjoy

watching the excitement, the innocence of young children as they talk in hushed tones of their meeting with Santa. It is lovely to see our Churches decorated, to hear the traditional carols and I for one love the Family Service here on Christmas Day. But, without wanting to be a Scrooge, the very festivity of this occasion perhaps blunts the quite radical content of the message this child whose birth we celebrate came to proclaim. That is why I think it very appropriate that on this Sunday before Christmas, in the place of the Psalm we use the Magnificat, the Song of Mary as given to us by St Luke in which a young woman reflects on the child she is to bear.

The traditional images of Christmas, Joseph, Mary, shepherds, wise men gathered around the crib in the warm glow of candlelight are a cherished part of Christmas but they are not the whole story of Christmas. For behind the story of Christmas is the God of the Magnificat, the one who brings down rulers from their thrones and lifts up the humble; who fills the hungry with good things and who sends the rich empty handed away.

This is an example of the timeless quality of the Biblical message. Set as it is in a particular time and culture, it none the less resonates with the situation of our own day. In the world about us we see incredible examples of the arrogance and transitory nature of temporal power. We have seen the ongoing pain of Syria where established power of President Assad shows violent contempt for any who would seek to challenge his right to rule. We see the continuing havoc wrought by individual leaders in the world of corporate finance who through a mixture of greed and incompetence brought their companies to the point of collapse; then as the taxpayer faces up to years of

austerity, these same people, pleading personal poverty, seek to avoid the personal consequences of the damage they have wrought on this State.

In the Incarnation, this God of the Magnificat, comes among us in the child of Bethlehem, comes among us to call us to a new, more authentic way of living before God. And so we prepare to celebrate the coming of him who declared that ‘the first shall be last and the last first’; the one who, as his disciples bickered among themselves as to who was going to be the greatest among them, placed a little child in their midst, declaring that except you become as a little child, you shall not enter the kingdom of heaven.’ He was the one, who on the night of the Last Supper, laid aside his coat, taking on the task of the least of the household servants, washing the feet of his disciples:

Jn 13:12 After he had washed their feet, had put on his robe, and had returned to the table, he said to them, "Do you know what I have done to you? <sup>13</sup> You call me Teacher and Lord--and you are right, for that is what I am. <sup>14</sup> So if I, your Lord and Teacher, have washed your feet, you also ought to wash one another's feet. <sup>15</sup> For I have set you an example, that you also should do as I have done to you. *John 13:12ff*

I spoke at the beginning of gaining glimpses of reality, insights into truths at the heart of our understanding of the physical universe. In the midst of our celebrations, both here and in our homes, may God grant to us a deeper insight into the life and teaching of Christ.

#### **Hymn 150**

- 1 Born in the night,  
Mary's child,  
a long way from your home;  
coming in need,  
Mary's child,  
born in a borrowed room.
- 2 Clear shining light,  
Mary's child,  
your face lights up our way;  
light of the world,

Mary's child,  
dawn on our darkened day.

3 Truth of our life,  
Mary's child,  
you tell us God is good;  
prove it is true,  
Mary's child,  
go to your cross of wood.

4 Hope of the world,  
Mary's child,  
you're coming soon to reign;  
King of the earth,  
Mary's child,  
walk in our streets again.

*Geoffrey Ainger (b. 1925)*