

Mystery instead of order

By [Verity A. Jones](#)

February 4, 2016

*To receive these posts by e-mail each Monday, [sign up](#).*

*For more commentary on this week's readings, see the [Reflections on the Lectionary](#) page, which includes Jones's current Living by the Word column as well as past magazine and online-only content. For full-text access to all articles, [subscribe](#) to the Century.*

I am a fan of mysteries. I love watching detectives in movies and on television. I love mystery novels so much that I don't just read them on the beach. But I'm one of those people who doesn't try to solve the puzzle before the end of the story. I like to experience the mystery as it unfolds. I especially love unsolved mysteries, those brainteasers that simply cannot be wrapped up tightly leaving no loose ends. Stories like mountaintop visions of transfigured splendor.

I suppose I love mysteries because they balance my desire for order in daily life. I'm a rational thinker. I make lists of pros and cons when I'm faced with difficult decisions. I'm tempted to analyze almost everything that comes onto my radar screen, everything from why music is pleasing to how volcanoes replenish the earth.

I enjoy a mystery that I can't figure out because things mysterious and unknowable remind me that there is something much grander out there, grander than us mere humans.

Recently, I've been pondering the creation vs. evolution debate. It seems that on both sides of the issue, a lot of people have something in common: little respect for the mystery of creation. Some atheistic evolutionists cannot even entertain the idea that God may have had a hand in making this world, however unexplainable that may be. Meanwhile, some Christians insist on reading Genesis as a literal description--removing all the mystery from the creative power of God.

In order to be a Christian, I have to love mysteries. Because for all the claims Christians make, for all our bold declarations about who Jesus is and what he did, there is profound mystery under it all. For me, respecting the mysteries of the unknowable aspects of God is a discipline of faith. It prevents me from foolishly thinking that I myself am some kind of all-knowing being.

This week's reading from Luke's Gospel describes one of the most mysterious events in the life of Jesus Christ: the moment when, high up on top of a mountain, Jesus is transfigured in front of Peter, James, and John. Jesus' appearance dramatically changes. His clothes becoming dazzling white, whiter than anyone could bleach them. His face shines brightly. And Elijah and Moses appear with him, the two greatest prophets in all of Israel's history.

Peter, James, and John are given a glimpse of the divine reality of Jesus Christ. A vision of his godliness, his holiness. Of course they want to analyze and preserve it for all time. I recognize that impulse to get the particulars right, so that order might be maintained in our crazy chaotic world.

And of course Jesus doesn't allow this to happen. He preserves the mystery. For their sake, and for ours.