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## *Breathe Deeply and Rejoice*

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### **A Sermon by the Very Reverend Sam Candler**

*"Mary treasured all these words and pondered them in her heart." (Luke 2.19)  
"And the Word was made flesh and dwelt among us." (John 1.14)*

You know, a mighty wind rushed through here last night!

A few of you were here. You witnessed the grand magnificence of Christmas Eve! Maybe if you weren't here, you watched the glory and splendor of Christmas Eve on television. It was marvelous, spectacular, as it usually is.

Yes, Christmas Eve was like a beautiful wind of passion and excitement. The Christmas spirit penetrated our souls and swept us forward. We made our way to church! We made our way to various outreach projects and service events! We made our way to pageants and parties! We made our way to the homes of family members, to the homes of friends, even to the homes of strangers! The Cathedral of St. Philip sang "Glory to God in the Highest"!

Even if you were not at a church on Christmas Eve, or not even watching a television, surely you felt the energy and excitement of Christmas Eve around the world. Maybe you felt it in your families, in your neighborhoods, in the shops and malls, and restaurants of the world.

The wondrous story of Mary and Joseph, the story of shepherds in the fields, the story of angels singing Gloria was told and retold yesterday. And the story closed with these remarks about Mary. "The shepherds returned. Mary treasured all these words and pondered them in her heart."

Mary treasured all these words and pondered them in her heart.

I always consider Christmas Day the day which begins to fulfill these words about Mary. "Mary treasured all these words and pondered them in her heart." Christmas Day, as you all know, is different from Christmas Eve. The beauty and power and mystery are still with us, but the hype is gone. The flashing energy is gone. The emotional bubble of Christmas Eve is glorious, to be sure, but sheer emotion does not get the world very far.

Christmas Day is for those who treasure all these words and ponder them in our heart.

Many of us love the excitement of Christmas Eve, the energy of expectation, even the scurrying and rushing about. But many of us also love this morning, Christmas morning. Today is the actual day of Christmas, but it is a day which feels much like the day after. Christmas Day feels like the day after Christmas, maybe a bit deflated.

Today, our houses are still decorated, but they seem to be resting, catching their breath. The kitchen is a bit messy, but it is no longer the grand buffet; it resumes its humble place of daily service. Children and spouses have returned to their favorite chairs and sofas in the family room.

Today, and in the days after Christmas Day, our grand Cathedral of St. Philip stands proud and strong, still decorated; but its great chambers are resting. Its halls are catching their breath. What extraordinary life found voice and expression in the nave this Christmas! Sermons and anthems, hymns and prayers, flowers and color, all blossomed with love and glory!

But, like the enormous lungs of a great body, the Cathedral pauses to inhale again. It is time to breathe in again. The birth of Jesus, new life itself, came forth with hallelujahs! But, now, as new life begins to grow, we learn the rhythms of breathing. We inhale and we exhale. We breathe in and we breathe out.

I think this is what Mary was doing as she treasured these words and pondered them in her heart. Surely childbirth is an amazing event. Surely Christmas Eve is an amazing and glorious event. But child life, and child breathing, are even more marvelous. The ongoing routine of a new life, a new person, among us is even more marvelous.

On Christmas Day, we pause to ponder this new life, and to "catch our breath." Now, "To catch your breath" is a fascinating phrase. "To catch your breath" means to stop running for a second. It means you have outrun your capacity for a moment, and you need to stop. It doesn't mean you have to run faster in order, literally, to catch your breath that ran away from you. Rather, you have to stop and wait for the breath to catch back up to you.

Christmas Day is a day to wait for the breath to catch back up to us. It is time to breathe in again, to learn the rhythms of breathing, to inhale and exhale, to breathe in and breathe out.

Birth is one thing, and that dramatic moment when the baby gasps for air, breathes, and cries out, and everyone in attendance beams at the miracle. But then comes the routine of regular life, breathing in and breathing out, the regular respiration of life. Today, Christmas Day, we begin the regular routines of respiration.

So, take time to breathe deeply today. There are bodies around, waiting for your breath. There are people around, who need your inspiration, your breathing into them. This church needs your breath. Your family, your loved one, needs your spirit. Breathe into them today.

Last night, our gospel ended with those reflective words, that "Mary treasured these words and pondered them in her heart." Today's gospel reflects the result. "The Word was made

flesh and dwelt among us."

When the Word is made flesh and dwells among us, the Word becomes an ongoing, living, breathing body. That Word is here today, living and breathing among us.

Christmas, after all, is more than a birth. It is a life. It is about breathing regularly, taking time to breathe deeply and rejoice, breathe deeply and rejoice.

So, breathe deeply and rejoice this Christmas season. And that which has been born a baby will grow. That which has been born in you will grow this year into a glorious body of love and service. Breathe deeply, and rejoice!

AMEN.

The Very Reverend Samuel G. Candler  
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