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## *Rising Early for Easter Glory*

**An article from the *Cathedral Times*  
by the Very Reverend Samuel G. Candler,  
Dean of the Cathedral of St. Philip**

Early on Easter morning this year, we gathered again in front of the Cathedral, along Peachtree Road. Ever since I arrived here, twelve years ago, we have celebrated the Easter Vigil not on Saturday evening, but as early as possible on Easter morning itself, at 6 a.m. There, in the deep spring darkness, we light the largest fire we can possibly sustain. As most of you know, it is absolutely glorious!

This year, it was glorious again. We have a role for every one of God's ministers on that morning. The Boy Scouts prepare the fire on Saturday, and their parents are astounded that they are willing to wake up so early on a Sunday—a Sunday! But it is Easter Sunday, and they want to light a fire at church. Our wondrous choir members act the same way. They are exhausted already from a strenuous holy week, but they rise early on Easter Sunday in order to be prepared by 6 a.m. Our altar guild and vergers and ushers and readers and flower arrangers and lay ministers have all learned the same thing: if any lights must be lit early on that Sunday, they must be turned off by 5:30 a.m. We want the entire Cathedral campus to be dark when people begin arriving between 5:30 and 6 a.m.

When I stand at Peachtree Road at 5:30 a.m. on Easter Sunday, I watch a glorious procession develop. I see God's faithful arrive in all manner of ways. Some are dressed for a fine Easter morning, and some still have their pajamas on. Some are sleepy, but all are excited. It is Easter, and our faith creates the procession; our faith creates the fire; our faith forms the new light of Easter.

This year, as I stood along Peachtree Road, I noticed something else. The sky was exceptionally clear that morning, and I could see the stars. Even in urban Atlanta, if the sky is dry and crisp and dark enough, one can see glorious stars. I remember one Lenten series, years ago, when I used my telescope to show our children the stars and planets above the Cathedral. We gathered right there, in the front drive of the Cathedral, and saw Saturn, up close, right about the Cathedral tower.

This past Easter morning, before the sun was up, and even before we lit the new fire of Easter, I stood and gazed upward to Ursa Major. "Arc to Arcturus," goes the familiar astronomical phrase, and I slowly oriented myself. "Speed to Spica," led me to the constellation Virgo. The old constellations welcomed me to the morning.

Even before we lit that Easter fire, God had already set starry fires in the sky. They have been leading explorers and navigators for centuries. In fact, they have been leading story tellers and mystics for even longer. As Psalm 19 says, "the heavens are telling the glory of God."

When I moved to Atlanta years ago, one of my fears was that I would be unable to see the stars. In most large cities, electric civilization has replaced the darkness of night with all manner of incandescence and neon, artificial lights shining indiscriminately into night sky. I learned that, sometimes, that the best way to see the stars is not to stay up late, but, instead, to rise early, after the earthly city lights have died out.

And so, this year, I was especially glad to rise early on Easter morning. Every part of that morning declared the glory of

God. The stars and planets in their courses. The liturgical ministers in their courses. The faithful parishioners of God in processing in their courses.

It is we who are the new light of God. And that light did not die out on Easter afternoon. It is still with us, if we are willing to stand outside the city lights, or if we are willing to rise early in the morning when the only light we have is that of God. Easter is not just one day, or even just one season. Easter is every morning, when we rise eagerly to greet the light of God.

Sam Candler signature



The Very Rev. Sam Candler

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