
Let It Be: The Gift of God is Time

A sermon by the Very Reverend Sam Candler
The Cathedral of St. Philip
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Christmas Eve

*All who heard it were amazed,
But Mary treasured all these words and pondered them in her heart.
(Luke 2:18-19)*

I love being amazed!

Thank you, thanks to each of you, for amazing me. On this holy night, when we dress up our lives with glitter and gold, and when we dress up our families with love and bling, I thank you. I thank you for your amazement tonight.

We are filling up this holy cathedral with amazement""with majestic music and overflowing flowers and wondrous words. We are filling up Atlanta and the world, and the television airwaves, with amazement. Glory! I love it.

Mary, the young girl, Mary, witnessed all this amazement. She saw the odd animals around her. She saw the grimy shepherds arrive in their pick-up trucks. She heard the strange religious clairvoyants, with their crystals and incense, knock on the door, in their odd amazement.

She had been amazed herself. It was around nine months ago, that Mary had been surprised by an angel""or maybe it was a dream, or a revelation. An angel had said, "Greetings, favored one! Hail, Mary, full of grace! You will have a child!" Mary was amazed, astounded, and she asked how in the world this could be. The messenger said simply, "Nothing will be impossible with God."

It was then that Mary responded with those famous words from a John Lennon and Paul McCartney, Beatles, song. Mary said, "Let it be. Let it be. Let it be. Let it be to me, according to your word."

But it takes time. It takes time to let it be. The incarnation of the Word takes time. During nine months of waiting, lots of other amazing things happened. Mary shared amazement with her cousin, Elizabeth. Joseph, her betrothed, was amazed by his own dream.

During these last months of waiting, Mary has learned something. She has learned not simply to be amazed. Mary has learned to ponder, to contemplate. Mary has learned to pray.

It's easy to be amazed. And it's great fun to be amazed! We crave amazement all the time. We change channels on our television sets every five minutes, looking for the next amazing scene, the next outrageous segment. We can't wait! We can't

wait to see the five most amazing sports plays from yesterday. We want our movies to be action adventures and amazing love stories. And we are so impatient, so quick, to be distracted by the latest outrage and drama of the day.

As usual, it has been a productive year for amazing outrage and drama. Impatient wars and impatient violence have piled up across the world; citizens have shot one another, and governments have bombed their own citizens. Our national politics almost paralyzed us with the daily drama of government shutdown. We were amazed by the National Security Agency, who knows when we are sleeping and knows when we're awake""who knows when we've been bad or good, so be good for goodness' sake! When the new government health care web site failed, why didn't we just get the National Security Agency to do the computer work?

Personally, amazing new children and grandchildren have been born. Other children have left for amazing colleges or gotten married in amazing services. Sadly, amazing friends got sick this year. Amazing people we love have died. The Atlanta Braves teased us with amazement, but then offered us traditional agony; the Atlanta Falcons amazed us with a colossal collapse of expectations.

Unfortunately, our obsession with quick amazement""our inability to wait""has also done us wrong sometimes. Consider the events of this past year in which our newscasters were so intent on delivering breaking news that they delivered the wrong news. At least one newscaster lost her job that way. On *The Daily Show*, Jon Stewart made fun of the breaking news phrase, "initial conclusions."

Consider how many e-mails we received from so-called friends who surely must have pressed the "Send" key more quickly than they should have. Consider the hundreds of cars on Peachtree Road who were so amazingly close to the car in front of them, that they ran into them at the slightest pause. Consider, ponder, how many times you spoke so quickly and then had to spend an hour making up for the mistake. We can't wait!

It's easy to be quickly amazed, and oh, too easy, to share that amazement so quickly that it is wrong. Breaking news is not always reliable news. Breaking news is often the wrong news.

Tonight, I hope we can be amazed like the shepherds, but I hope even more that we ponder like Mary. Pondering takes time. Mary knows""like many a woman amazed at the joy of new life""Mary knows that pondering takes months. Sometimes years.

Not every event needs immediate amazement. The young child can wait a few years before she plays the star in the pageant. When your seven-year old asks you where babies come from, you can wait a few years before delivering the most direct answer.

If we are ever going to realize God in this world, we""like Mary""will have to wait and ponder.

And we will invite our companions to ponder with us. Remember: an angel appeared to Mary's companion, too, Joseph, who had to have been completely dumbfounded by the situation. "Do not be afraid," said the angel to Joseph. Do not be afraid to take Mary as your wife. Do not be afraid to commit yourself to the one you love. Believe. Believe in the dreams of the person you love. Believe in the dreams of the person you love.

And Joseph did believe. Together, the stable belief of Mary and Joseph began to grow something that would change the world.

When we ponder things, we let them lie still for a bit, before we let ourselves act on them. We consider their weight. Sometimes, the events before us seem weighty indeed, heavy enough to sink us. Tonight, there may be a situation in your life""a weight or worry""that threatens to sink you. Let it be. Let it go.

There is a heavier element inside you that will not sink you. It will anchor you, fix you, to the steady presence of God. Love is that element inside each of us, that gold glory, which waits for true rest and true peace.

Love is the solid and stable truth growing inside us, which we realize when we take the time to ponder. When we take the

time to contemplate is when we truly realize God.

What is Christmas, the Feast of the Incarnation? Christmas, the Incarnation, is the realization of God. In the incarnation, God intentionally ponders, God weighs himself down. God gets real! God fixes himself down to earth, down to the earth full of the anxieties and burdens of our humanity.

But God is not exhausted by that burden. God loves our burdens, just as God loved the burden that Mary carried for nine months. God loves our burdens. It may just be that humanity anchors God, too. Our human nature is proof that God loves. Humanity teaches us that God loves.

Yes, in the nine months between amazement and birth, Mary learned to ponder. She learned to pray. It takes time.

There is a special gift that God has given us tonight. It is not simply a child, though we say that a lot. Well, there is no literal child here tonight; there is the tremendous memory of a child, yes, but no literal child here tonight. What God has given us tonight is something else; God has given us time.

Time, I believe, is God's great gift to us tonight, especially to those of us who think we have so little of it that we have to act quickly all the time. It is because we think we have so little time that we try to be amazed all the time.

"Take your time!" God says. In fact, God says, "Take my time. Take my time. I have plenty of it." God has given us time tonight.

We have time. The good and true things in life take time. Children take nine months. (Maybe the precocious ones come early.) New businesses, new ideas, take time. New wisdom and new truth rarely blossom into the world without months, even years, of preparation.

"Take your time," says God. "Take my time," says God, "I have plenty of it for you." Ponder the wondrous love of this day, and carry that weight. Carry that weight, a long time. It is a weight of glory, amazing glory. Let it be. Let it be to us according to God's word.

AMEN.

The Very Reverend Samuel G. Candler
Dean of the Cathedral of St. Philip