
The New Year and The Days After Christmas

**An article from the *Cathedral Times*
by the Very Reverend Samuel G. Candler,
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Christmas was wonderful! With Christians across the world, we listened again to the familiar stories of the birth of Jesus. We heard sermons and stories about Joseph and Mary and the angels and shepherds and wise men. We heard the stories sung and we saw the stories in pageant. Thus we learned again something about the incarnation of God in our lives.

What then? What happened next? And, just as importantly in our lives: what happens next? What are we to listen to now? What are we to do now?

We don't have many biblical stories about the life of Jesus during the days just after he was born. Apparently, eight days after he was born, his parents followed the usual naming customs. Then, maybe forty days after his birth, he was presented appropriately in the temple. His parents took him to Egypt for protection for a while. Then, maybe when he was about twelve years old, his parents lost track of where he was and found him in the temple. That's it. Those are the customary stories we have about the earliest years of Jesus' life, and the Church listens to them during the season of twelve days which is Christmas.

What can we make of those stories? What do they mean for us? What dramatic lesson can we learn from these biblical passages as we approach a new year of faith in our lives?

Well, my observation in these several stories is that the parents of Jesus, and the other principal characters, did not do much different from what they had already been doing. The common feature in these stories is that the characters were following customary routines and practices. The parents of Jesus were tending to their tradition's usual spiritual practices: presenting their child at the temple as appropriate and making their way to Jerusalem at the proper times. They were saying their usual prayers.

That should be our lesson, too, for 2014. Follow the routines and customs that our tradition has honored over time. Go to church, take your children (and others) to church, say your prayers. Care for the poor and keep watch. Like Simeon and Anna, keep watch when you are following the ordinary routines for surprise presence of the messiah.

Essentially, we do not have to make dramatic resolutions in 2014 for our spiritual lives. Resolving simply to be faithful to our routine customs might well be enough: Say our prayers, tend to the practices and prayers of church, give generously, feed the hungry, care for the poor, live into the traditions that our community of faith has offered us generation after generation, do justice and love mercy.

Those were the things that Mary, Joseph, Simeon, Anna, the shepherds, and the wise men were all doing. They were doing the things that their faith had taught them to do day after day, and year after year. Even Jesus himself would begin his ministry by tending to the customary routines that his religion had taught him.

I hope those customary practices will be our spiritual resolutions for 2014. Do the right things, the things we already know we should do. Gradually, oh so gradually, so that only later might we notice the sudden change, our lives will be transformed; and the lives of those around us will be transformed too. Grace and peace and spiritual routine to you in 2014!

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Sam Candler". The signature is fluid and cursive, with a long horizontal flourish extending to the right.

The Very Reverend Samuel G. Candler
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