

Ann Bonner-Stewart

St. Mary's Episcopal Church, Newton Lower Falls, MA

The Presentation of Our Lord: Luke 2:21-40

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More than twenty years ago, a song with compelling, relatable lyrics, an artist's obvious passion, and brilliant production skill burst onto the scene and never went away. Part of "Lose Yourself"'s chorus, which I will NOT rap, says, "You only get one shot, do not let your chance to blow this opportunity comes once in a lifetime."

Marshall Mathers, aka Eminem, is not the first or last musician to tell people not to miss their chance. In the 1990s, Steven Tyler in Aerosmith sang about how he didn't want to fall asleep because he didn't want to miss a thing. More recently, Lin-Manuel Miranda had the titular character in *Hamilton* repeatedly sing "I'm not throwing away my shot." Rap. Rock. Broadway. All saying that we need to look out because we are in danger of missing out, fanning our FOMO, encouraging us to YOLO.

This is nothing new. People have always had big moments they do not want to miss, though most do not lead to fame or record deals. In today's passage from Luke, Mary and Joseph participate in Important, carefully timed rituals with the baby Jesus that they do not want to miss.

Eight days after birth, Joseph, Mary, and the baby travel from Bethlehem to Jerusalem. The infant is circumcised, as was and is the custom in Judaism. The baby also officially receives a name— Jesus, the name Gabriel suggests during that fateful visit with Mary less than a year ago.

Today in Luke, forty days after birth, the family returns to the temple in Jerusalem. Jesus is being ritually dedicated as a first-born son, and Mary is being purified, a rite meant to restore mothers to community after childbirth. While completing then common yet irreplaceable milestones, two people identify Jesus as the Messiah. Anna praises God and tells people about Jesus. Simeon sings about Jesus being the Messiah not only for Israel but also for all.

Simeon and Anna are not the first to flag Jesus as special. Mary and Joseph have already heard their almost 6 week old called: Son of the Most High, King David's successor, Holy , Saviour, Son of God, Messiah. Due to the momentous ways these superlatives came to Mary and Joseph, I would have thought the couple would have been changed so much that anything would be believable. That nothing could surprise them anymore, like a veteran high school teacher.

Because incredible experiences can change people. Some people have a wonderful moment of beauty that hints that there is something bigger, an awe-filled, perfectly quiet moment in nature, or beautiful music that took your breath away, like that high C in Allegri's setting of Psalm 51. Experiencing life's fragility can also change us. Like the aftermath from a serious accident, a difficult diagnosis, or a broken heart. These moments, some beautiful, some horrid, some both, we vow to remember them, to remember to love more, or appreciate more.

Mary and Joseph's epiphanies were doozies– they were also relatively recent. Today's Gospel is less than two months after the shepherds tell the family about the heavenly host we hear about every Christmas. We are less than a year after Mary's auspicious visit from Gabriel, less than a year from Joseph's dream telling him to protect Mary. Even so, Simeon does surprise the couple.

Verse 33: "And the child's father and mother were amazed at what was being said about him." Another translation says: "Jesus' father and mother were speechless with surprise at these words." How can they be surprised? Well, after the birth, Mary and Joseph's lives must have reverted to mundane matters. They find themselves focusing on the baby's relentless needs. Joseph's family seems to be MIA, and Mary's family is back in Nazareth, so we can surmise that infant care fell heavily on these new parents.

Moreover, the gift of turtledoves in verse 24, signals they are poor. Mary & Joseph likely had problems meeting their– and the baby's– basic needs. And last but not least, there's the Roman Empire, that large, turning wheel of systemic oppression, which crushed so many in its quest for domination & supremacy. Jerusalem was often under martial law. Mary and Joseph can still be surprised, despite their multiple revelations from angels and shepherds, because they're just trying to get through the day.

Like Mary and Joseph, our epiphanies can get overshadowed, even if they are powerful in the moment. We have to round up paperwork for taxes, or for FAFSA, or for our parents' care; we have to register our children for summer camps NOW or they will all be filled or try to get in with the correct medical specialist in a timely fashion. Many put out crisis after crisis after crisis after crisis at work or at home. We might start thinking our epiphany was unimportant. We might think it wasn't real. We might forget it because we're just trying to get through the day.

If Mary and Joseph, people who quite literally became bonafide saints, have a hard time grasping and remembering God's love and presence, why do we expect more from ourselves? Mary and Joseph needed assurance multiple times. And they got it. Might we too? We might not get the angels. Even if we do get angels, clearly that does not fix everything (cough Mary and Joseph).

Mathers, Tyler, and Miranda, the musicians I talked about at the beginning, are not completely wrong; opportunity, timing, and chance have a relationship in some situations. Thankfully, God's presence is not a blink it and you might miss it thing. Jesus is more a Jackson 5 "I'll be There," or Bruno Mars "Count on Me," Or Kacey Musgraves' "Rainbow" kind of song. The spiritual *I want Jesus to walk with me* cries out for God to be with us, particularly during different times:

*I want Jesus to walk with me*

*In my trials,*

*In my troubles,*

*In my sorrows*

*When my heart is almost breaking,*

*When my head is bowed in sorrow,*

*When my life becomes a burden,*

*Lord, I want Jesus to walk with me.*

God's presence is an umbrella when it rains, a coat when it's cold. Someone showing up when life stinks. Rain is still there. Cold still there. Problem still there. And so is God, making a real difference in our ability to weather the storm whether we feel it or not. Please

know that when we miss or forget God reaching out, God will try again. And again. And again. To let us know that we are are not alone, that ALL people are loved– even those– no, ESPECIALLY those –who are most often marginalized, sidelined. Forgotten. Left out. Shoved aside. Legislated out of legal, though not actual, existence. God so loved the WORLD, right, not the church, not the Christians.

The world. ALL. People.

Beloveds, look for God looking for you. Look for God looking for you. And if you cannot see God, that is okay. You are not throwing away your chance. You are not missing your shot. Really. Because if you miss God looking for you, God will keep showing up. Amen.