



# DELAYED GRATIFICATION

A Fourth Sunday of Advent Sermon on Luke 1:26-38—Rev. Adam E. Eckhart  
December 24, 2017—10:00 a.m.—First UCC Milford, CT

1.

I invite the kids forward.

I have here a present, and it's a gift that I want to share with all of you, and I want to show it to you now, but I need to wait until the end of this message. Okay? Ashley will help us keep the gift safe until then.

I bet you wish we could open it now, though. Because it's so difficult to wait for things, right?

For example, people who work at colleges, in their psychology departments, have done games with kids. They have told kids that they get to choose between having one piece of chocolate now or two pieces of chocolate in 15 minutes. Do you know what most kids pick? One piece, now. Because it's difficult to wait.

Adults have a phrase that someone's money is 'burning a hole in their pocket.' The money isn't REALLY burning a hole in somebody's pocket! (I wouldn't want that kind of money!) It means that someone really wants to use the money right away! They have a hard time saving the money. Because it can be difficult to wait for things.

I am wearing this stole that Kelsey made for me, she asked me to open it early so I could wear it today. It's got the Chicago Cubs logo on it, which also reminds me about waiting because from when I started caring about baseball in 1984, I had to wait 33 seasons before they won a World Series—a third of a century! That's a long time to wait! The team

hadn't won a World Series long before I cared—it had been 108 years since 1908 when they last won. Whoa!

I have a hard time, though, when I'm baking, to even be able to wait the seven minutes for my ginger cookies to bake and five minutes after that for them to cool down before I can "test" one. Twelve minutes to yummy!

Much of the world's business is based on the idea that it's difficult to wait for things. Banks, interest rates, mortgages, payday loans, impulse shopping, on demand videos, most of the internet is based on the idea that we'd rather not wait to see something or learn about something or get or order something.

It's so difficult to anticipate something that we know or we hope is going to happen. We want it now!

Christmas has become a holiday centered on the difficulty of waiting. You write a Christmas list, a Dear Santa letters, and give the list to a parent or send the letter to Santa. And then you wait. Or some family who you rarely get to see will visit or you'll get to visit on that day, and you love those people, so you're so excited to be reunited with them. You look at the calendar, maybe somebody points out to you when Christmas is and you see how many boxes are left before Christmas Day, and back in like October you saw there was like 65 days, and it's so tough to wait! But today, today you're down to just hours before Christmas. It's the final countdown before your waiting is over and the gifts will be distributed and the family and friends will

gather. The agony of waiting will be over!  
Alleluia!

The tradition of receiving gifts on Christmas challenges our sense of instant gratification by delaying the reception of gifts. We have to wait.

2.

Well, in today's reading we hear about an event that told about some waiting. You see, Mary is this girl about 13 years old who was about to get married to a man named Joseph. Today we say, people really should wait until they're a little bit older to get married, but back then most people didn't go to high school or college, they had to start working a job as a kid, so it was like time to become an adult around age 13! They didn't wait to get married.

Then the angel Gabriel visits her and asks her to consent to give birth to the promised Messiah, to Jesus, the Son of God. She's like, "I'm just a poor girl from a poor family, Spare me, O God, from this monstrosity!" Mary is basically shivering in the corner of her bedroom in fear.

But Gabriel calms her down and convinces her that God will help her through this, and that her cousin Elizabeth is pregnant, too, at advanced maternal age, to remember that all things are possible with God.

Amazingly, Mary says, 'Here I am, sign me up, I can help God.'

She is interested and willing, perhaps excited to do something meaningful for God!

Part of her willingness may have been because she knew that the people of Israel

had been waiting for a long time for their hoped for Messiah. Longer than twelve minutes, longer than a couple weeks, or even longer than 33 or 108 years. They had been waiting a LONG TIME for God's promised Messiah to come and make life better for God's people. The people had been waiting, but Mary was willing to wait nine months in order for this baby to be born, in order for God to do a new thing!

3.

Which is part of the Good News for us today.

We live in a society where people of all ages can get caught up in instant superficial gratification, watching online videos or getting things as soon we decide we want it. But we also sense deep down that there is something deeper that we can do with our lives. It may mean that we have to look further down the road than we're used to, to get what we want, or maybe we give up getting what we want for what the world needs, like giving up a present so that we can make sure a young person has food on the weekends or that a frail person has a walker they need. Mary was willing to deal with the nine months of pregnancy to give birth to Jesus, which if you ask any biological parents, is a long time to wait. If you ask any adoptive parents, their waiting is even harder in some ways because they may not know when or if their child will arrive! But serving God through ministries of service or of parenthood, these are amazing opportunities, things that make us feel favored by God to have the chance to take part in, despite the costs.

4.

The other bigger good news of this story is

that it reveals how eagerly God wants to share the gift of Jesus with us.

Sometimes we forget that it can be just as difficult to wait to give a gift as it can be to receive it. Sometimes my kids get so excited to share a gift with me that they forget to wait until Christmas.

I think God was eager to establish Christmas, to send Jesus to us, to give us the gift of Jesus!

God mostly uses the angels to share the news of the gift of Jesus. Gabriel tells us how special this child is and will be. Jesus' nicknames in this story alone include Son of the Most High, eternal king, Holy One, and Son of God. Later, the angels will call him their great joy; a Savior; the Messiah; Christ the Lord. The angels are all excited to bear this good news to the people on behalf of God! They are psyched to bear this gift! Don't be afraid, they keep on saying, if you'd just get over the freaked out by us phase—Mary, Joseph, shepherds—we can tell something really awesome! Please, please, please, please listen! Jesus is a special gift from God to God's people—God's favored Son! God's tired of waiting for the right time. The right time is now! God wants you to receive him!

On Christmas some of us can't wait to receive gifts, and some of us can't wait to give gifts to be generous or to show how generous we can be. But God is the most eager of all to share Jesus with us. Because Jesus is the one gift for all of us, to show us that God is with us. There's a fancy word for that, for God is with us. Emmanuel. Can you say that with me? Emmanuel. God is with us!

So we give thanks for Mary for being willing to deal with all her waiting, we give thanks for the angel Gabriel being willing to bring the message, and to God who waited but couldn't wait any longer on Christmas to send Jesus to us to be with us!

Are you ready for the wait to be over with this gift? Can you help me open this?

Look what it is, ginger cookies in the shape of an angel! I hope you enjoy these.

And look what else: the baby Jesus for our Nativity scene! Let's all put the baby Jesus in the creche scene so we can be ready to celebrate Christ's birth tonight and tomorrow. Amen!