

Christmas 2023, now just a few short hours away. Are you ready? Or have you run out of time? In 1969, a band named Chicago famously asked: “Does anyone really know what time it is, does anyone really care (about time)? Of course we care. Time is one of the most powerful forces in our universe and time is the one natural force that none of us can avoid. Time is constantly pushing and pulling at us like an unyielding tide.

Time, or the lack thereof, causes us to fixate on the events and decisions of our past. Because we recognize those times are gone, we often try to duplicate or memorialize the good times and more often than not we hope for do-overs or search for ways to repair the dark moments of times past. Perhaps that’s why the Beatles long for “Yesterday” and Cher hopes to turn back time. And even though the Rolling Stones think that time is on their side and Styx has too much time on their hands, most of us, when we’re not looking back at lost time, we find ourselves consumed with worry and doubt that there simply won’t be enough time to complete the tasks ahead of us. When Rush hopes that time will stand still or Jim Croce wants to put time in a bottle, we can all relate because there never seems to be enough time to do things we want to do once we find them. If you’re not from my generation, I realize that those song lyrics probably don’t mean much. But regardless of the reference point, we all know that time, like the tides, rarely stands still. Time keeps prompting us to recall the problems and mistakes of our past, stopping just long enough to remind us of challenges and commitments of our future. Oh we try to focus, but inevitably time forces us to look back or forward at the expense of the present.

Imagine Mary immediately following the visitation of the Angel Gabriel. What time must have been going through her mind? I wonder if her mind was drawn to the past, wondering how she ever ended up in her current predicament. Or might her thoughts have been focused on the future, concerned most with the consequences of the angel’s eventful visit and her pending pregnancy? Either of these scenarios seems most likely to me. But is there a chance, any chance at all, that instead of fixating on the past or the future, that Mary was actually able to be in the moment and be capable of contemplating the blessing that she had just received? I hope that Mary, in that moment, could find **joy** in being called

full of grace and I hope that Mary could find confidence and courage in the knowledge that the Holy Spirit would come upon her.

We all struggle to live in the moment; to be here now. We allow our concerns with time to rob us of the comforting peace of experiencing God's love. Our concerns with time hide Jesus' presence in the Eucharist that we are about to receive and our fixation with time can blind us to our everyday blessings and Christ's presence in the people that we encounter. If we aren't intentional, we can even allow time to steal the joy of Christmas.

For I believe that the best Christmas' are experienced in the here and now. So, in these final hours of preparation for the celebration of our Savior's birth, I encourage each of us to carve out some time to gather in front of our nativity sets. If we can approach the manger with a sincere and grateful heart, I believe we will step away from that encounter with a renewed appreciation for the gift that is God's unending love for us. I believe we can stop time and find in the gift that is Jesus, a spirit of hope and a renewed appreciation for our many blessings. I believe that Christmas 2023 can be more than a day on the calendar. This Christmas just might be the time of our life. So let the good times roll!