
The Annunciation! And What is Growing Inside Us!

**An article for *The Cathedral Times*
by the Very Rev. Sam Candler, *Dean of the Cathedral***

This week, in the middle of Lent, we observe the Feast of the Annunciation (March 25 is nine months before Christmas!), when the angel announced to Mary that something was growing inside her!

Well, scientists tell me that, at any given moment, thousands of things are growing inside me. And they are growing inside you, too. Lots of those things are good; blood cells and bone cells, nerve endings, and tissues and organs that together make up this wondrous human body. Over five hundred species of bacteria also live inside us. In fact, there are ten times as many bacterial cells inside us than there are human cells! Most of the bacteria inside us are actually good. I don't see them, but they are good!

But, many of the things growing inside us are not so good. There are also viruses, germs, bad bacteria, even pathogens and toxic agents that would kill us if they were left to grow uncontrolled. Even the healthiest human body always contains thousands of viruses and germs that are not so healthy. This is a fact of life.

What keeps the human body healthy is that we feed the good elements. We feed the good bacteria and good cells. We pay attention to those unseen elements that are positive and life-giving. Great family therapists, like the late Edwin Friedman, tell us the same thing about families and social systems. At any given moment, every social structure or family system contains elements that are destructive. But the healthy social systems distinguish themselves from the ill and the hopeless. They give energy to hope and to independent life.

This same principle was illustrated in a story told long ago by the Cherokee people, who once inhabited this very land around us. In their parable, an old Cherokee grandfather is teaching his grandson about life.

"A fight is going on inside me," he says to the boy. "It is a terrible fight, between two wolves. One wolf is evil; he is anger, envy, greed, arrogance, self-pity, guilt, resentment, lies, false pride, superiority, and ego." But then, the grandfather continues, "The other wolf is good; he is joy, peace, love, hope, serenity, humility, kindness, benevolence, empathy, generosity, truth, compassion, and faith. This same fight is going on inside you—and inside every other person, too."

The grandson thinks about it for a minute and then asks his grandfather, "Which wolf will win?" The old Cherokee replies simply, "The one I feed."

Right now, in our own time, in every time, many things are inside us. Some of us have the germ of fear growing inside us. Some of us have the germ of anxiety, the demon of anxiety, growing inside us.

Fear and anxiety are real, just as real as any pathogen or virus that physically grows inside our bodies. Fear and anxiety can grow. Fear and anxiety are like diseases; they can actually infect people around you. Even unseen, these germs can grow.

Christians believe in things seen and unseen, and we believe they can grow. As we remember the Feast of the Annunciation this week, we hear again the miraculous story of an annunciation of growth. To the Virgin Mary appears that wondrous angel, speaking words of wisdom and comfort, "Do not fear." Those are almost always the first words of angels to human beings: "do not fear, do not fear." They are words we all need to hear, from generation to generation.

The angel says that Mary has a holy child growing inside her. Among all the other things growing in Mary, the Living Christ will also be growing. As a male, I do not know, nor will I ever know, what it is to have a living person physically growing inside me. I can only imagine that it is one of the most humbling experiences of

humanity. That there is life inside us which comes from beyond us, is a humbling experience that exalts us to glory.

I will never know that experience physically. Many women never know that experience physically. But I can know, and all of us can know, what it is like to have the living Christ growing spiritually inside us. The story of the Virgin Mary, then, is not a story just for women. It is a story of how each of us allows something to grow inside us. That something can be the living Christ! Of everything growing inside us, we can choose what to feed! We can choose which development to encourage. We can choose to feed the Living Christ!

We believe in things seen and unseen. We believe in the power of the Word. There are lots of things that can grow inside us: germs and bacteria and viruses. But the living Christ can also grow. The living Christ can also spread. The living Christ can also be contagious!

Let it be. Let it be in us, according to the Word.

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Sam Candler". The signature is fluid and cursive, with a long horizontal line extending from the end of the name.

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