
A Meditation on Lancelot Andrewes

**A meditation for Evensong and 5:22 Contemplative Eucharist
observing the Feast of Lancelot Andrewes
by the Very Rev. Sam Candler**

A cold coming they had of it at this time of the year, just the worst time of the year to take a journey, and specially a long journey. The ways deep, the weather sharp, the days short, the sun farthest off, in solstitio brumali, 'the very dead of winter.'

What? Is it Epiphany? Are we hearing the wonderful opening lines of the poem, "Journey of the Magi?"

No, the lines above were not composed by T.S. Eliot. The alert among you may have noticed the slight differences. However, the great poet, T.S. Eliot, did use the essence of these lines for his poem. He was quoting one of the great scholars of the seventeenth Anglican Church, the man whom we remember today, Lancelot Andrewes (1555-1626).

It was in the year 1622 that Lancelot Andrewes preached a Nativity sermon which included those now famous lines, *A cold coming they had of it at this time of the year, just the worst time of the year to take a journey, and specially a long journey... 'the very dead of winter.'*

It is his scholarship, his precision, his order, his ability with language, that we remember today. Oh, he had his titles, for sure. He was fellow of Pembroke. He was dean of Westminster. He was bishop of Chichester, and then Ely, and then finally bishop of Winchester.

It is said that he spent five hours a day in prayer. One of his compositions, *Preces Privatae*, is a collection of the prayers and devotions that he used. He didn't actually write many of those devotions; rather, he collected them from other places. Maybe he was like T.S. Eliot that way, using the material of others.

His chief reputation was as a preacher and scholar. Richard Schmidt writes that, "He preached in the "witty" or "metaphysical" style of the time, which rarely referred to personal matters or current concerns, but strictly confined itself to the exploration of a biblical idea. Andrewes dissected his biblical texts minutely, including etymological analyses of Hebrew and Greek words. ... Even T. S. Eliot, who loved them [the sermons], said that Andrewes 'takes a word and derives the world from it; squeezing and squeezing the word until it yields a full juice of meaning which we should have have supposed any word to possess.'" (Richard H. Schmidt, *Glorious Companions*, p. 35.)

It is also said that he was fluent in fifteen languages, and that he strived to master one new language every year. When he said his prayers, he did so in three languages, and none of them was English.

He had a precise and beautiful ability with words. When King James, around 1604, put together the scholars who would compile an Authorized Version of Holy Scripture, it was Lancelot Andrewes who was put in charge of the Winchester division of scholars. Many people point to that product, the great King James Version of the Bible, as the greatest achievement of Lancelot Andrewes. He was one of its leading translators.

Thus, Lancelot Andrewes lived a balanced, orderly, and disciplined life. Glory to God for each of us, for all of us, who strive to produce words with love and order, with precision and care, for the good of the world. May such heritage guide our future in the church and in the world!

AMEN.

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