

The late great Tom Petty wrote a song called *The Waiting*, the chorus of which goes: “The waiting is the hardest part, every day you see one more card, you take it on faith, you take it to the heart, the waiting is the hardest part.” What I remember about Christmases as a kid more than anything is the waiting. Honestly, it wasn’t the holy kind of waiting either, it wasn’t faith, it wasn’t hope, it was mostly just greed. I wanted to get to the stuff. As I have grown up, and as I got more involved in the faith part of this season, I am sort of amused to find that the actual practice of Advent is, in fact, waiting and expecting. They say that one of the markers of maturity is being able to delay your gratification, being willing to put off some reward for one reason or another.

Since it is pretty fashionable to blame big tech companies for most things these days, I’m going to blame Amazon for ruining my ability to wait for things. Back when I first had my own money and the ability to order things through the mail, I remember it was pretty standard to have to wait four to six weeks, for say, a new pair of waders from Cabelas, so that meant that I had to plan ahead for the start of fishing season. Trout season opened in April, so that meant sometime in February, I had to sit down with the big thick catalog full of fishing and hunting gear, and sort through my options, what I could afford and what fit my needs. In the process, I thought about fishing, I looked forward to fishing. I dreamed about fishing and usually I would get inspired to sit down and tie some flies, or make sure my reel was oiled up. In the dead of winter, I was thinking about spring and expecting spring, and yes, buying something that would probably take over a month to get to me.

Now, if I want something, I click a few things on my computer and in two days it’s sitting in a box on my front step. The way I used to do things, rather joyfully I might add, would seem agonizing now. At the risk of sounding like a grump on Christmas Eve, I’m not really sure that the speed of things is entirely good for us. Don’t get me wrong, I don’t want to go back to the way it used to be. I love me some Amazon, and I agree with Tom Petty, the Waiting is the hardest part, but sometimes there is a blessing in expectation. I think the best example of that is waiting for a baby. Mary, it seems to me, is put into a situation where she is just constantly expecting, I mean even after Jesus is born there is all this stuff that had to constantly just make her wonder, what on earth was going on with her little boy. Why did these shepherds show up in the middle of the night?

Why shepherds for that matter? They were terrible witnesses. Remember Kato Kaelin? It’s forgivable if you have repressed him from your memory. He was this Hollywood actor wannabe who had sort of attached himself to OJ Simpson in those halcyon days of the white bronco and the bloody glove. Nobody was really sure why we had to suddenly care about who Kato was, or why we had to look at him give some truly obtuse and clueless testimony in court in a very serious trial of a very famous man. That made me also remember Mark Furman, the LAPD detective, who in addition to investigating OJ also happened to be sort of a racist, you know, just for a hobby. The flaws of the witnesses in the case suddenly became a major plank in the defense strategy, and doubt was sown, maybe it was reasonable, maybe not, but a murder had taken place and two people were dead, it was pretty serious business to be hanging on the likes of Kato and Furman.

Just the way that this arrival, this expected moment of the Messiah, could have been probably better attested by some priests or maybe a few rabbis. Surely the angels could have roused them out of bed. But maybe the expectation is too important to just stamp and seal the details like that. Maybe the world is always supposed to be able to doubt the witnesses, and this is what I know about following

Jesus, we are all witnesses. We are here to tell what it is that we see and what it is that God is doing in our lives and among us as a communion. It's always going to involve faith though, it's never meant to be a sure thing. The expectation is part of what we are supposed to be about, we are supposed to look for Christ in all things and at all times. Sometimes we might actually get one of those choirs of angels kind of moments, but most of the time it is going to be things that we must just keep and ponder in our hearts like Mary.

Waiting is hard, but it is important. There are lots of moments that just have to come in the fullness of time. There is no perfect witness, there is no foolproof way of getting to the human heart. That's why it is so remarkable that God will use so many different ways to bring his love and truth to us.