May the words of my mouth and the meditations of all our hearts be acceptable to you O Lord, our creator, our sustainer and our redeemer. Amen.

And the child’s father and mother were amazed at what was being said about him.¹ Of all the wonderful verses in this rich passage from Luke, that line is one that certainly stands out to me.

Why were they amazed?

It was after all just one chapter earlier in the gospel that we read of Mary being visited by the archangel Gabriel and being perplexed from the very beginning by the words she heard: “Greetings, favored one! The Lord is with you.”² Then we had the scene in which Mary visited her cousin Elizabeth and – after hearing that Elizabeth’s child physically reacted in the womb to the nearness of her own child – spoke some of the most beautiful words in the New Testament, the text of what we know as the Magnificat. Even just a few verses back in this same chapter we heard of the visit of the shepherds to the newborn child and the sense of amazement felt by all as they listened to their story of a heavenly chorus appearing in the darkened fields near Bethlehem.

With all of this in mind we can go back to the question I asked earlier. In fairness I do think we could ask, “Well, if Mary had heard such incredible things since the beginning … since she received words spoken by both humans and angels and experienced a remarkable moment in the visit to her cousin … why is there a sense of amazement here? Why does this seem to come as a surprise?”

To those questions I suppose I could answer with yet another question: “Why does amazement have to be a one-time event?” And why do the moments of amazement only have to mean one particular feeling or emotion?

On that latter point I thought it was important to consider some of the synonyms for amazement ... and it’s quite a list. I’ll only give a few of them, but as you listen consider how many moments in our lives are moments of amazement based on how they’re defined.


Changing the synonym can certainly change the feeling or mood of a passage of scripture. Listen for instance to verse 33 with that one important one altered in a few different ways.

First: “And the child’s father and mother were astonished at what was being said about him.” Or this: “And the child’s father and mother were in awe at what was being said about him.” Or perhaps this: “And the child’s father and mother were confused and bewildered by what was being said about him.” And then there’s this: “And the child’s father and mother were in wonder at what was being said about him.”

In adjusting the words my goal was to show that countless moments in our lives can be considered amazing. Similarly, if you examine the totality of Jesus’ life and ministry “amazement” is a word that can be readily and easily applied in some form or another from its beginning to its end … and to its new beginning. The writer of the gospel even found ways to tie this narrative to key events … key moments of amazement … in the history of the Jewish people. I’m referring here to the presentation of Jesus in the Temple and the encounter with the aged Simeon reflecting back on a similar narrative in I Samuel.

In that instance, Elkanah and Hannah have taken their son Samuel and left him at the temple to be instructed by the aged prophet Eli – the very prophet who assured Hannah that her prayer for a son who would be given into the service of God would be answered when he said, “Go in peace; the God of Israel grant the petition you have made to him.”3 Aside from the story, we can even find very particular and direct ties between the Old and New Testament writing: "And the boy Samuel grew up in the presence of the Lord"4 compared to "The child grew and became strong, filled with wisdom; and the favor of God was upon him."5 We find the amazing early life of the Prophet now echoing in the amazing early life of the Messiah.

Something else I find remarkable about this passage is the presence of Simeon and Anna in the Temple on the very day that Jesus, Mary and Joseph arrive. We know from the text that it was the Holy Spirit who led Simeon there to the Temple, and we’re aware that Anna as a prophet was always present … never leaving the temple and worshiping and fasting, night and day. The amazement for me in this is that Simeon could have simply ignored the nudge he received and not gone; Anna could have decided after many years that she didn’t need to be there that day. But their faith compelled them to be there; their openness to hearing instructions from God compelled them to be there; the certainty about one great moment soon to occur in the twilight of their years … a moment they had to witness … compelled them to be there.

What amazes you … and what compels you? Personally, what amazes me – and you are free to swap that for other phrases: what astonishes me; or what has me in awe; or what I admire; or what holds me in a state of marvel and wonder – but what amazes me is your love for this place. What amazes me is your love for one another. What amazes me is your love for your history. What amazes me is your love for learning. What amazes me is your love for fellowship. What amazes me is your love for community. What amazes me is your love for God.

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3 1 Samuel 1:17 (NRSV).
4 1 Samuel 2:21 (NRSV).
But that’s simply how I see it. What amazes you ... and what compels you? What amazes you about your life ... or your family ... or your friends ... or this place ... or your world, and what compels you to do what you do – here and elsewhere? Consider where the words of Simeon and the actions of Anna might be reflected by and in you. Consider where you might have seen and continue to see the light of revealed salvation in your life and the world around you. Consider where you already are “speaking about the child to all who [are] looking for the redemption of Jerusalem”6 – and give thought, if you are not doing so, where and how you might.

There are many incredible things we can continue to learn and emulate from the life and action of Jesus. My hope is that in focusing on the big aspects of his life we never lose sight of the incredible moments of insight ... the incredible moments of amazement ... that can be revealed through encounters with the minor prophets we find in our own journeys. May we always take time to listen to the Simeons and the Annas of this world. May we always take the time to listen to the pleas of the Hannahs and the promises of the Elis. And at the end of our journeys, may we be able to say – with certainty, and joy, and yes, even with amazement – “My eyes have seen your salvation.”7

Amen.

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7 Luke 2:30 (NRSV).