

Pondering

A Christmas Eve Sermon by Pastor Rob Hamilton

Delivered on December 24, 2021 at 6pm

Luke 2:1-20 Revised Standard Version

2 In those days a decree went out from Emperor Augustus that all the world should be registered. 2 This was the first registration and was taken while Quirinius was governor of Syria. 3 All went to their own towns to be registered. 4 Joseph also went from the town of Nazareth in Galilee to Judea, to the city of David called Bethlehem, because he was descended from the house and family of David. 5 He went to be registered with Mary, to whom he was engaged and who was expecting a child. 6 While they were there, the time came for her to deliver her child. 7 And she gave birth to her firstborn son and wrapped him in bands of cloth, and laid him in a manger, because there was no place for them in the inn.

8 In that region there were shepherds living in the fields, keeping watch over their flock by night. 9 Then an angel of the Lord stood before them, and the glory of the Lord shone around them, and they were terrified. 10 But the angel said to them, “Do not be afraid; for see—I am bringing you good news of great joy for all the people: 11 to you is born this day in the city of David a Savior, who is the Messiah,[a] the Lord. 12 This will be a sign for you: you will find a child wrapped in bands of cloth and lying in a manger.” 13 And suddenly there was with the angel a multitude of the heavenly host, praising God and saying,

14

“Glory to God in the highest heaven,
and on earth peace among those whom he favors!”

15 When the angels had left them and gone into heaven, the shepherds said to one another, “Let us go now to Bethlehem and see this thing that has taken place, which the Lord has made known to us.” 16 So they went with haste and found Mary and Joseph, and the child lying in the manger. 17 When they saw this, they made known what had been told them about this child; 18 and all who heard it were amazed at what the shepherds told them. 19 But Mary treasured all these words and pondered them in her heart. 20 The shepherds returned, glorifying and praising God for all they had heard and seen, as it had been told them.



Sermon

“But Mary treasured up all these things and pondered them in her heart.”

I get Mary - at least to some degree.

I’m a ponderer too.

Except I don’t use that language. I’m one to ‘marinate’ on the things I don’t understand or the experiences I haven’t fully processed.

Or I go for a run, work on a project, meditate a bit to see if that brings any clarity.

Every once in a while, I just have to ‘talk it out’ to start to make sense of something.

So what is it that Mary has treasured up in her heart and is pondering?

Is it the normal first-time parent stuff? Awe at the miracle of birth mixed with delirium from the pain of childbirth in the age before epidurals? Was it simply being consumed with the beauty of this tiny human that was hers and God’s? Was it the burden of responsibility of caring for one so utterly dependent on her for survival? Was it that traveling from home to Bethlehem and giving birth in a cattle shed wasn’t part of her birth plan? Was what she pondered about how everything in their lives was going to change?

If I had to guess what Mary treasured and pondered in her heart, I would say it was all of this *AND...* the fact that God’s was doing something new through her and her first born son for the whole world. (‘cause you know that ain’t a small thing!) I’m sure she pondered the visit of the shepherds which confirmed that the angel that appeared to her at the time of conception wasn’t a hallucination or a matter of wishful thinking on her part. I’m sure Mary pondered the kinds of things we sing about in the modern carol - “Mary Did You Know?” That her baby boy, would rule nations, and heal the blind, and walk on water, and be God’s chosen One to save all of humankind from the oppression of sin and death- and that the God who created the heavens and the Earth was now the crying, suckling infant in her arms. Yes, to whatever extent she (or any of us) could, I imagine Mary pondered these things too.

What are the big things you’ve been treasuring and pondering in your heart?

This is not the kind of question we give much credence to on Christmas Eve.

We have traditions to enjoy, presents to exchange (or still wrap), family to visit, meals to make - all to distract us. Yet, still- in large or small ways - we are marinating on the large things of life that fill us with awe and wonder or fear and anxiety. All it takes is a family picture, seeing a treasured Christmas ornament, a quick glance at a news feed or the front page of the paper - and we’re pondering in those ways unique to us.

But what if in the midst of our pondering tonight, tomorrow, next week or in the next year we recalled the piece of Good News that got all of this pondering started: The words of the angels who said: “Today in the town of David a Savior has been born to you; he is the Messiah, the Lord.”?

Consider this:

When pondering the big things that come with grief - we remember that TODAY a savior has been born to YOU he is the Messiah, - which means deliver and deliverance from the pain of grief is found in him.

When pondering about the marginalized of society spending Christmas under open skies with uncertainty about safety and their next meal - we remember that TODAY a savior has been born to you, he is the Messiah - that even now TODAY relief is being offered in the Spirit and name of the One born this night.

When pondering about how our politicians don't meet our expectations or have lost touch with our values - we remember that TODAY a SAVIOR has been born to YOU he is the Messiah, the Lord - who is Lord of lords, above every earthly ruler, and whose reign will have no end.

When pondering about how lucky and blessed we are as we sit around the tree, opening gifts and enjoying each other's company - we remember that TODAY a savior has been born to you he is the Messiah, the LORD - The giver of all good gifts.

No matter what we ponder, at Christmas we celebrate that the God of all creation- left the heavenly throne, to be one with us to: laugh and cry, as we laugh and cry; to suffer, as we suffer; to live and die, as we live and die - and TO SAVE US from our fears, our anxieties, our sin and from death. — What child is this? What kind of God is this, that would be so mindful of us?

Now that's something to treasure up and ponder in our hearts!

And we don't just hold it in our hearts and we live it out in our actions.

That's why, I get Mary. She thinks and acts. She raises her boy to become the man who loved everyone and stood up for the oppressed. The man who would follow God's call all the way to the cross, so that we all might be free from the tyranny of sin and death.

I hope you understand Mary a bit more too now as we ponder what God is doing anew in and through us this Christmas, this week and this year.

Merry Christmas. Amen.