

A Homily by  
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“Pondering leads to peace in our hearts”  
Nativity of the Lord  
December 24, 2024  
Luke 2:1-20

“Mary treasured all these words and pondered them in her heart.” (Luke 2:19)

I would like us to reflect on Mary’s heart this night. With Mary of Nazareth, Mary the mother of Jesus, let us consider what she treasured and what she was pondering after the birth of her son. What was in her heart? What can we learn from what was in her heart? We might just surprise ourselves.

As the time came for her to be delivered, Mary, a child herself, gave birth to her firstborn son and laid him in a manger. Traveling in the last month of her pregnancy from the town of Nazareth in Galilee to Bethlehem in Judea had been arduous. It had been uncomfortable. But I see Mary content to carry her baby not with a resigned but a joyful smile. She was blessed, and she knew it. But the trip on the back of a donkey was not easy by any means.

It had been at the very least 80 miles. Today by air it is about 60 miles. Google maps suggests that walking along the River Jordan via Jericho today would be 103 miles. A direct route would have been the shorter 80 miles, but that would be crossing through the region Samaria. There was no love lost between the Samaritans and the Jews; that travel plan would most likely have involved considerable risk with the possibility of being attacked. And they would certainly not have found any lodging or assistance on their journey. Traveling by caravan would have been much safer in the event of an accident or injury or an encounter with bandits.

As she journeyed, Mary was trying to find meaning in what had taken place. With the extraordinary visitation of the angel Gabriel though startling, Mary came to understand that she had been chosen by God. She wondered if she could live up to what was

expected of her. She knew little about birthing a baby, except what her cousin Elizabeth had told her that she had learned from other women. God was working in her life she must have thought in remarkable ways that she could only just begin to understand. She must have pondered what would become of her relationship with Joseph. God had sent an angel to him as well, and Joseph saved her from being ostracized by the whole community. And so they had started out to Bethlehem. (Some archeologists have pointed out that there is no physical evidence of a settlement in Bethlehem in Judea 2000 years ago, but that there was a Bethlehem in Galilee precisely during the period when Jesus was born.) But then when the discomfort of the trip across rough terrain – whether 80 or 104 miles – was behind her, she and Joseph found no place to rent a room as many others too were in route to be counted in the census.

And then the pangs of labor began. But they were soon forgotten. Indeed she likely never if ever thought of them again. All she could think of was her precious bebe, her baby boy. Only after Jesus was born did she realize that they were in a place that was other-than-human. They were sharing space with animals. When she was not holding her precious child he slept in a manger – a feeding trough for animals.

Many years ago at the children's Christmas Eve service at my first church, another St. Andrew's, the children built the crèche, they put one of the animals at the manger, feeding. Reflecting on whether this might actually have happened, in my sanctified imagination I can see Joseph trying to shoo the animals away from Jesus, but Mary saying to leave them. Might she have thought that he was born for all of us and all the animals too. We think Jesus would grow up to be the Good Shepherd for all of creation? I wonder if she thought of that.

As Jesus slept, Mary was reflecting and pondering and treasuring in her heart all that she had lived through to get to this wonderful moment of new motherhood. Yes, she was tired after labor, but the fruit of her womb, this special baby boy, was her reward. She

must have been reveling in her new status as a wife and mother. And then she had to deal with visitors. She was content to deal with curious animals and an overly attentive husband, but she welcomed others to the birthplace of Jesus – rough (and smelly) shepherds fresh from the fields with their flocks of sheep.

Something amazing had happened, and they just had to come and see for themselves if it were true. They had been in their fields watching over the sheep, and then there was an angel of the Lord with a light show in the night sky, so bright as they had never seen before. And with the angel was a heaven host. It frightened them until the angel said not to be afraid, because they were to be the first to hear of the birth of the Messiah who was to save the whole world. They were to go immediately to follow a star to Bethlehem to find a child wrapped in bands of cloth and lying in a manger. And so they came to the stable where Jesus was born, and told Mary and Joseph what they had experienced – everything that the angel had told them. And Mary heard that her baby boy would be the Savior, the Messiah, the Lord. All who heard were amazed, but Mary, she “treasured all their words and pondered them in her heart.”

Mary had much on her mind. She remembered the angel who brought her news that she was favored among all women. She knew of Elizabeth’s miraculous gift of birthing a baby. She had witnessed and been a part of miracles, but the most curious message was from shepherds – “To you is born this day in the city of David a Savior.” Her child would be a savior? Would her baby boy grow up to be a hero who would deliver her people from their oppressors. But even more remarkable and inspiring than political salvation was what the shepherds said her bebe would be the Messiah, the Lord. Mary had more than an inkling about what that might mean. Was her child to be the Christ, the anointed one of God?<sup>1</sup> She kept thinking over and over about how all these things had come to pass – rolling them over and over in her mind to try to understand the truth of her

experiences and to balance them with the reality her human experience up until she first met the angel Gabriel.

The miraculous manner that Mary came to carry a child in her womb, her baby being born in a stable, his being identified as the Messiah by none other than shepherds, the boy she would raise to adulthood, was all of this to fulfill a larger destiny than just to be her son? She must have been anxious that his business would be more exalted than carpentry. Yes, she had reason to ponder. And she treasured all these things in her heart and her mind.

I want to suggest that that Mary is a model for reflecting on our own experiences with the holy – with the mysterious. Some of us might be certain what the future holds for us. Others can identify with the uncertainty that Mary embraced. Not knowing what would become of her from the very beginning of her experience as the Holy Spirit came upon her, changing her body and her life. Not knowing the time or place, the when or where she was to deliver this miraculous baby was worrying her mind at first. But she came to trust that God would provide a loving husband and a place to birth the babe; God would give her the strength to accept the changes in her life and later her baby boy's life, and all he was intended to be as a man living into his calling to be the Savior. So in all her pondering, Mary found peace.

Just so there is a time and place for our ministries here at St. Andrew's By-the-Sea in Destin, Florida. This Christmas when the Prince of Peace is born again, Mary offers us an opportunity to find that same peace.

May we take time to reflect on Mary and her greatest gift to the world and to us. May we ponder in our hearts the new true meaning of Christmas.

Lord, may it be so. Amen.

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<sup>1</sup> “Mary had much on her mind” by [Doug Koop](#) | Monday, November 28, 2011.