

## Ponder These Things

(Luke 2:1-20)

Homily delivered by The Very Rev. Matt Rhodes at Christ Church, Millwood, Virginia  
The Eve of the Nativity of Our Lord, December 24, 2018

In the name of the one God, creator, redeemer, and sustainer. Amen.

This reading from the Gospel of Luke – one of the most familiar passages anywhere in the Scriptures – includes some incredibly triumphant imagery. There is the glory of the timeless God stepping into a world bound by time to take the form of a human and to live and die as one of us. There is the power of the heavenly visitor who in the blink of an eye suddenly stood before the shepherds to announce the birth of the Messiah. And we read of the brilliant vision of a chorus of angels illuminating the night sky and boldly proclaiming the magnificence of God and a prayer for peace.

But perhaps what speak to me most deeply are the understated aspects of the scene. Before the appearance of the first angel, the shepherds and their sheep are shrouded in the silent darkness of the night, resting on a hillside somewhere near Bethlehem. There is the image of the newborn child, watched over by his proud but exhausted parents, spending the first hours of his life in a manger behind a nondescript inn on a darkened street.

And after the shepherds arrived to see the infant Jesus and share with Mary all they had heard from the angels, “she treasured all these words and pondered them in her heart.”<sup>1</sup>

We do not read of any major conversation with Joseph, or about a long series of questions on what she had just been told. The shepherds came and they went, and Mary was left to sit quietly next to her newborn son, considering all that she had heard. She was left to ponder those things that were said to her – words that were incredibly meaningful and touched her deeply. Among all of the magnificent things of the birth narrative, this must have been one of the greatest: hearing from simple shepherds words shared from heavenly visitors, words that were **valuable** ... that were **priceless** ... that were a **treasure**.

Once before Mary had heard from an angelic visitor and what was revealed to her **changed** her life. Now, several months again, she once again heard the words of a messenger of God – and what she learned **validated** her life. It confirmed what she already knew.

Because of the will of God and her acceptance of his call, this young girl went from simply being the daughter of an anonymous family betrothed to a working-class carpenter to being the mother of the incarnate Son. She had gone from being ordinary to being extraordinary. And she pondered all of these things in her heart – the treasure that was this new reality.

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<sup>1</sup> Luke 2:19 (NRSV).

That I think could be the true invitation – the true message – to take away from this Gospel passage. Yes, we recognize that Jesus was born ... that the long season of Advent for the people of Israel (and the Advent through which we have just journeyed) had come to an end. We know that the Messiah who had long been promised had at long last arrived ... albeit not as the triumphant king riding on horseback, as many had wished, but as a fragile child born into a common family. The shepherds heard the news, and from them we – as Mary before us – learned the message of the angels: Do not be afraid, because we have got some **very good news** for you!

But the important thing is not to simply **know** these things ... to remember these events. We are called to let them soak deeply into us, to let the true meaning of the birth of Jesus settle into our souls (and yes, even as they settle perhaps allow them to **unsettle** us). We are invited to ponder **everything** that God has done for us. We are asked to take time to treasure it all ... the joys, love and victories of life – and yes, even the sorrows, heartache and disappointments. For **from** all of them we can learn, and **through** all of them God speaks to us ... sometimes as loudly as a chorus of angels, and sometimes as quietly as the silent manger in which the newborn child slept.

At this Christmas and in every day moving forward, look for God at work in your lives. See where God is with you. Listen for the voice of God.

Treasure all that God **says** to you. Treasure all that God **does** for you. And ponder it in your heart ... always.

Amen.