

Christmas Eve 2023

*“Fear not, for behold, I bring you good news of great joy
that will be for all the people.”
(Luke 2:10 ESV)*

Pondering Them In Her Heart

December 24th, 2023

Luke 2:1-21

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Introduction:

Good evening everyone, and Merry Christmas Eve!!!! I want to thank _____,
_____ and _____ for reading the Christmas story to us. Great job! That IS
the story we think of when we think of “the Christmas story” isn’t it? Most of the “magical”
elements of the Christmas story come from Luke’s Gospel, and we believe that is because Luke
interviewed Mary as part of his writing process. Matthew, of course was one of the disciples so
he knew Jesus as a man and wrote his own perspective. The same thing is true of John. Mark’s
Gospel is really “Peter’s Gospel” as Mark was Peter’s assistant and secretary, so his perspective
to is largely about Jesus the man. It’s a really good thing that we have Luke’s Gospel – if all we
had was Mark for example, then our Christmas story would read as follows:

The beginning of the gospel of Jesus Christ, the Son of God. (Mark 1:1 ESV)

That’s Mark 1:1 – and that’s ALL YOU GET in terms of preamble and backstory in Mark’s
Gospel. He goes from there to John the Baptist with absolutely no mention of Jesus’ childhood at
all.

But Luke gives us a lot of Mary’s perspective, so that’s where we find all the magic! Which
makes sense, doesn’t it? Because in most houses, Moms are the Queens of Christmas. That sure
is the case in our house. Moms make the magic – but this mom, in our story, ALSO took time to
think about the MEANING. She thought about things. Luke 2:19 says:

“But Mary treasured up all these things, pondering them in her heart.” (Luke 2:19 ESV)

I love that!!

And I think that is a great example for us to follow. Mary doesn't DENY the magic – she doesn't skip over it and she isn't irritated by it. Dads, I think some of us could learn from that. Sometimes DADS can be a little Christmas Scroogey.

“How much did that cost?”

“Why do we have to drive all the way to Kalamazoo to visit your aunt Shirley? Her turkey is always dry and her house smells like old cat.”

SOME dads need to embrace the magic.

But we shouldn't JUST embrace the magic – we should think about what it means and where it came from. That's what Mary did. She looked at all the wonderful things happening around them and she PONDERED these wonderful things in her heart.

Why are the angels singing tonight?

Why is this star shining bright?

What are these shepherds so excited about?

And then several months later, she must have been wondered: Why have these wise men travelled so far?

Why are they bringing such magnificent gifts?

Who is this child and what manner of man will he become?

Those are very good questions – have you thought about those things? We see sing about those things, we make movies about those things, we write those things on our Christmas cards, we imitate those things – like the angels, we sing, like the wise men, we give gifts. Like the star, we hang bright and shiny things all over our house – so we REMEMBER and IMITATE these things – but do we think about them? Do we ponder them?

I want to do that tonight. The Bible doesn't tell us exactly what Mary thought about these things, so we'll have to do our own thinking. We know what happened – so we know the subject headings – but we'll have to supply our own ponderings. So let's do that.

First of all then, what were those angels singing about?

They said:

“Glory to God in the highest, and on earth peace among those with whom he is pleased!” (Luke 2:14 ESV)

What does that mean?

“Glory to God” is one of those things religious people say but it doesn't make a ton of sense to regular people. To glorify God means to consider his worth, his goodness and his centrality. To glorify God is to remember who he is and to remember who we are and to come into proper alignment with respect to him. You could even say that the planets of our solar system GLORIFY the SUN by circling the sun year after year in their proper orbit. The SUN is their BIGGEST THING – that's kind of what the angels are saying here. They are saying that God has done something that will help people SEE and understand HOW GOOD, and how BIG and how LIFE GIVING he really is.

So – GLORY TO GOD IN THE HIGHEST! The universe is going to get itself straightened out! Things are going to come together. Light is going to shine. Life is going to flourish. Creatures and going to be glad in their Creator.

And peace on earth among those with whom he is pleased – that seems to mean that as people get right with God up there, they will increasingly come to enjoy one another down here. And we see that and reflect that understanding whenever we gather with our loved ones over the Christmas season.

That's one of our favourite parts about Christmas isn't it? You know, as you get older, you see your siblings less and less frequently. I'm almost 50 and I only see my brother and sister, once or twice a year. I have home videos from back in the 70's and 80's though and those videos remind me that we used to be the best of friends. We did everything together. But life, tends to pull you apart over time. You get jobs in different places. You move around – and then all of the sudden, it takes something BIG to bring you all back together.

Something BIG like the birth of Jesus.

Kids, when you get together with your cousins and your aunties and uncles this week, remember and PONDER about the fact that you are doing that because of Jesus. Doing that is supposed to remind us of what the angels said. Because of Jesus we can have friendship with God and fellowship with other people. Jesus makes all his followers into one big happy family.

But what about the star?

Mary must have had a bunch of thoughts about that star. When a woman is having a baby she is not necessarily LOOKING for a giant spotlight to be shining on her, but in the Providence of God, there was one! It had been shining for a long time – the Wise Men tell Herod that they SAW the star when it rose and they have come to see what it was pointing to. Thankfully, for Mary, they arrived several months AFTER the baby was born, but the star had obviously been shining for quite some time – so it was definitely one of the things Mary was thinking about on that first Christmas night.

So why was that star up there?

And why did it shine so bright?

I don't know what Mary thought about that at the time, but I know that later, one of Jesus' disciples said that Jesus was the LIGHT of MEN. He was the SPARK that made us special in the beginning and that could bring us back to life now if we believed in him.

Maybe that's what it meant. Light after all, reminds us of LIFE. There can be no LIFE without LIGHT. We all need it and so maybe Mary was thinking that the LIGHT was following her baby because her baby would bring LIFE to the world.

That seems like a good thing to think – and I think that is something you should think when you see all the lights that people put up at Christmas. Even people who say they don't believe in Jesus decorate their homes with bright coloured lights at Christmas. So maybe without even meaning to, they are keeping alive this tradition of associating the birth of Jesus with LIGHT and LIFE.

Jesus is the LIGHT OF THE WORLD! He is the spark that awakens us and empowers us to become again, the people we were created and intended to be. Think about that when you see all the lights at Christmas.

Mary was thinking about that light up above her, and no doubt, **she was thinking about the shepherds standing right in front of her.**

Just like a pregnant lady isn't looking for a spotlight, neither is she looking for uninvited guests. Sometimes the dad isn't even invited too far into the process. When a woman has a baby she wants the circle of visitors kept pretty tight – but all of the sudden there were strangers and visitors from far away. Shepherds were poor people, generally, and not all together civilized. Mary and Joseph were upper middle class folks. They were from a noble family and Joseph had a good job, but all of the sudden their circle of celebration included poor people who slept outside.

And of course, most of us try to keep that tradition alive in some ways at Christmas – even today, don't we? We give to the Salvation Army kettles, or we sponsor a family through the angel tree, or we give to the Christmas offering. Mary must have thought about why God was including these people in her special day – but she didn't protest, she went with it and she pondered this thing in her heart. Maybe she realized that the birth of Jesus was going to create new forms of community. It was going to be a particular blessing to the people who were often left out. This

little one in the manger was going to turn the world upside down and many who were at the top would tumble to the bottom and many of those who are at the bottom – like these shepherds, by believing in him, would be lifted to the top. Grabbing hold of Jesus LIFTS YOU UP and creates whole new possibilities.

Maybe Mary was thinking about that – but whether she was or not, we’re supposed to be. Christmas time should remind us to welcome others and to expect the social order to be turned on its ear every once in a while.

And then of course, there are the PRESENTS!!

Sometimes as we get older we get a little sour about all the presents – and certainly, it is easy to go overboard, but giving presents is one the oldest Christmas traditions of them all. The Wise Men brought gifts – expensive gifts. They wanted to honour Jesus as the child who would one day, be king of the world.

Giving gifts is a way of expressing joy and love.

That’s a good thing.

Can you think of the best gift you’ve ever received?

I can remember a remote control robot – that I think broke on Christmas Day, but was really awesome. I remember getting a safe, with a locking dial and everything – that I think my older brother broke into by shooting hockey pucks at it – but while it lasted it was really cool.

What about you?

What’s the best gift you’ve ever received?

Whatever it is – and whatever you get tomorrow - enjoy it! But, like my robot or my safe, understand that all those gifts will eventually break or rust or get thrown out into the trash. Those gifts are just reminders of a bigger gift – a better gift – that has already been given. They are all

ways that we remember and imitate the TRUE GIFT of CHRISTMAS. We give gifts to each other because God gave JESUS to us.

So when you get something really good this year – say thank you to whoever gave it to you – and then say a quick prayer to God.

Say God: “Thank you for the gift of Christmas. Thank you for angel songs, bright lights, family visits, Salvation Army kettles, robots, safes and even OLDER BROTHERS! Thank you for all those good things. But thank you most of all for the gift of Jesus! Thank you for his life, his example, his teachings – and most of all, thank you that he died on the cross for my sins. And thank you that he rose again so that I can rise again and live with you and enjoy you forever. Thank you for that. Thank you for the gift at the HEART of it all. Amen.”

Would you pray that prayer at some point this Christmas?

As you enjoy all the magic, and all the mystery – all the songs, the lights, the visits, the laughter and the presents – as you enjoy that, do like Mary did. PONDER ALL THESE THINGS IN YOUR HEART. Remember where they came from. Remember what they mean. Remember WHO IS BEHIND THEM – and as you do, remember to THANK THE LORD.

Let’s take a minute and do that together right now. Let’s pray together.