

Christmas Joy

Luke 2:19

At first hearing it seems as though Mary must have gotten it all wrong. I mean, isn't Christmas a time for celebration? And here Luke tells us that "Mary treasured up all these things and pondered them in her heart" (2:19). The contrast is striking. While every year the Christmas retail season starts earlier and earlier and the hype gets more and more intense, the first Christmas was not an intense affair at all. If anything, it seems to be quite calm and quiet in comparison to today's festivities.

Now, of course, you can't blame people for trying to make a buck. Ethel Merman belted it out a long time ago: "There's no business like show business." And she was right. Show business is fine in its place. But show business has no place in God's business. Christmas has its entertainment side and its retail side, but we have not come here this night to be entertained. We are here on God's business. And God's business is to call a halt to all the busy-ness of our hectic lives and this hectic season so that we might discover anew the good news of great joy that was proclaimed a long time ago to shepherds on Bethlehem's plain: "Today . . . a Savior has been born to you; he is Christ the Lord" (2:11).

You and I have much to learn from Mary, the mother of our Lord. What exactly did she "ponder" in her heart? Not those things many people have come to expect in this season: like an extravagance of gifts and bright lights, the sound of carols and the glistening of new-fallen snow in the Sierra that casts a mystic glow over hearth and family—all these trappings lay far in the future. No, Mary's enchantment was not found in any of that. Rather, what she pondered in her heart was that which that had been spoken by the angel of the Lord to the rugged shepherds concerning her baby boy, "Christ the Lord."

She looked down at the tiny baby wrapped tightly in swaddling clothes in his manger bed. Could it really be that the Lord, the God of hosts, who feeds all creation, who opens up his hand to satisfy the desire of every living thing, could come to be so small that he would take flesh within her virgin womb, be born as a helpless infant boy, and be nursed at her breast? "Good news of great joy that will be for all the people" (Lk 2:10), the

angel had announced to the shepherds. This was no pipe dream or human speculation; these words were from the very mouth of God. Her firstborn Son was none other than the Messiah, the promised Redeemer, and God in human flesh and bone. So Mary kept all these words, pondering them in her heart.

You and I can do no less on this holy night. For when all is said and done, there is nothing to say or do that could add the smallest luster to this day. The most overpowering music or overwhelming light display could never hold a candle to the simple wonder of a heart captivated by our gracious God, who loved the world so that he gave his only begotten Son. When we could not go to him, he has come to us wrapped in swaddling clothes. This is the mystery in the manger; God in diapers, here among us. God in a crib—and then some 30 years later, God on a cross, made to be sin for us that he might remove forever the curse of sin and the sting of death, which is the just penalty of God's Law "that whoever believes in him shall not perish but have eternal life" (Jn 3:16). That's the gist of Christmas.

Everything else will fade. The glitz and glitter will soon be packed away for another year. The excitement of children and the happy glow of all we've come to expect from this holy night is illusive and fast fleeting. All too soon it's come and gone. But not this.

In faith, let Mary lead the way this night. Set aside the show business and get down to God's business. Shut down your head and open up your heart to receive the great glad news that Christ is born a child. "Let ev'ry heart prepare him room". For he comes among us wrapped in the swaddling clothes of the Word of his Gospel. He comes for every soul distressed and lonely and grieving. He comes for every wounded mind and heart. He comes for peace that passes all understanding, for forgiveness, for life and our salvation. He comes for you and you and you this night. And you can be sure of this: "Where meek souls will receive him, still the dear Christ enters in".

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