

The Message from God's Word: Mary Treasured & Pondered

*But Mary treasured up all these things,
pondering them in her heart. – Luke 2:19*

In 1997, Beth and I were engaged, and I spent the summer in China, teaching English. It was difficult to be apart from each other for 8 weeks, and communication was difficult and expensive in those days before the Internet and smart phones. We were able to talk on the phone a few times (which was expensive), and Beth sent me a care package with a letter, which took weeks to arrive. Being apart made me treasure the sparse communication we had and the care package I received. I thought about every word of our conversations and treasured each item that was sent to me in the care package.

Mary was in an unfamiliar town. She was away from her parents and the people she had known all her life. She may have felt a bit relieved to be away from the rumors, gossips and looks. Yet she was in a stable of some sort, amid animals, having just given birth to her firstborn with only her loving husband by her side to help her.

Then, hours later, as she is exhausted and overjoyed as only a new mother can be, shepherds come to visit. We're not told how many shepherds came or whether they brought any of their littlest lambs with them, as we always see in manger scenes this time of year. The shepherds come and tell Mary that angels visited them in their field as they were on the night watch, telling them the long-awaited Messiah had been born.

Mary's response to all that she was told by the shepherds, indeed her response to all of the remarkable events of this uniquely wonderful birth is found in verse 19: "*But Mary treasured up all these things, pondering them in her heart.*"

The word translated as "treasured" means "to keep from being lost, to preserve, to keep in mind." The word translated "pondered" means "to bring together in one's mind." So Mary was intentionally remembering, so as not to forget or lose these things, and she was bringing them together in her mind. The fact that Luke tells us Mary treasured and pondered "all these things" indicates that she was keeping and considering, preserving and pondering more than just the words of the shepherds. In fact, this sentence functions as a summary of everything that Mary has experienced to this point, from the visit of the angel Gabriel to her visit to Elizabeth to the journey to Bethlehem to Jesus' birth and the visit of the shepherds. "Mary treasured up all these things, pondering them in her heart."

We can consider "all these things" under two headings, all she had been told and all she had received.

All She Had Been Told

By the Angel Gabriel

Mary's story in Luke's Gospel began with the words of the angel Gabriel: "'Greetings, O favored one, the Lord is with you!' In this unusual greeting, Mary found out she was the special recipient of God's great grace, that the Lord had shown His favor to her and chosen her for a very special role in His redemption of His people: "*And behold, you will conceive in your womb and bear a son, and you shall call his name Jesus. He will be great and will be called the Son of the Most High. And the Lord God will give to him the throne of his father David, and he will reign over the house of Jacob forever, and of his kingdom there will be no end.*" (vv. 31-33)

Of course, it wasn't physically possible for Mary to have a baby. She had never been with a man. She knew this was impossible, so she asked how it would happen, and she was told by Gabriel: "*The Holy Spirit will come upon you, and the power of the Most High will overshadow you; therefore the child to be born will be called holy—the Son of God.*"

Such wonderful and yet overwhelming news would be tough for anyone to process. Yet this young girl, maybe 13-15 years old, responded with faith, humility and obedience, "*Behold, I am the servant of the Lord; let it be to me according to your word.*"

So Mary knew from the beginning that her son was the Son of God, for she knew He had no earthly father. And despite the fact that she was a poor girl from a small town in the hills of Galilee, she was to be the mother of the great king, the long-awaited Messiah, who would sit on David's throne forever. How could it be? She did not fully understand, but she treasured and pondered.

By her cousin, Elizabeth

Then, prompted by Gabriel's words, Mary had gone to visit Elizabeth, her cousin, who was miraculously pregnant after many years of being unable to have children. Elizabeth's words had been almost as wonderful as the words of Gabriel had been earlier –

"Blessed are you among women, and blessed is the fruit of your womb! And why is this granted to me that the mother of my Lord should come to me? For behold, when the sound of your greeting came to my ears, the baby in my womb leaped for joy. And blessed is she who believed that there would be a fulfillment of what was spoken to her from the Lord." – 1:42-45

Elizabeth had called her highly honored and favored by God. Her older, godly cousin had called her "the mother of my Lord" and had expressed humble honor at Mary's visit. Even Elizabeth's baby boy had been thrilled by the coming of Jesus and had leapt in his mother's womb.

By the shepherds

And now shepherds have come, bringing news of a visit from an angel. The angel told them of "*good news of great joy for all the people.*" A new title had been added to Jesus, matching His name (YaHWeH saves), He is "*a Savior, Christ the Lord.*" So her Son would not only rule over God's people forever, but He would bring salvation!

Then, the shepherds told how they were visited not just by a single angel but by a great multitude of the heavenly host, who were praising God with their heavenly song, "*Glory to God in the highest, and on earth peace among those with whom he is pleased!*" Mary knew that, somehow, she was one with whom the Lord was pleased, that she was a favored one, and so she knew that peace from God had been added now to the message of an eternal kingdom and salvation. Kingship, salvation and peace.

All together, these words from Gabriel, Elizabeth and the shepherds gave Mary so much to ponder, so much to treasure!

All She Had Been Given

Yet Mary had more than just words to treasure and ponder. She had received much from the Lord already.

A Miraculous Pregnancy

The first and most obvious thing Mary had already received was a miraculous pregnancy. All pregnancies carry an air of the miraculous about them. The idea of carrying around a tiny, developing life inside your body is profoundly marvelous. Yet Mary knew with each movement of the Baby Jesus inside her that her baby was a true miracle. Her baby was very different from any other baby who had ever been born in the history of the world. The last people to be directly and miraculously created by God were Adam and Eve.

A Faithful Husband

With her miraculous pregnancy, Mary had also been given a faithful husband. Joseph was a righteous man, and he was going to divorce Mary when he found out she was pregnant. God was merciful to both Joseph and Mary, giving Joseph the truth in a dream and giving Mary a faithful husband who would father her other children and who would help her raise Jesus as best as they could.

A Beautiful Baby Boy

And finally, now, in her arms, she had been given a beautiful baby boy. Babies are so wonderful, so precious. I remember when Andrew was first born, and we stopped going anywhere or doing anything. No more movies, no more trips to Starbucks. For a while, we really didn't do much of anything but look at, hold, feed and love this tiny boy.

And yet all of this was only the beginning, which Mary knew based on all the words she had heard. Her newborn infant Son was the Son of God, destined to be the eternal King over God's people, bringing salvation and peace to all of God's own, including her. What she had received so far was nothing compared with what she was yet to receive.

Will We Treasure & Ponder?

The question for us this Christmas Eve is simple: Will we treasure and ponder all we have been told and all we have been given?

All We Have Been Told

We have been told even more about Jesus than Mary was told. We know the whole story of His life – of His sinless perfection, His miracles of healing, feeding, and freeing people from demons and death. We know of His atoning death on the cross and of His glorious resurrection three days later. We have the complete word of God, the whole counsel of the Scriptures, to show us all about Jesus.

Have we treasured and pondered all we have been told?

All We Have Been Given

Not only have we been told the truth about Jesus, but we have been given so much – forgiveness of sins, reconciliation with God, adoption into God's family, the wisdom of God's word, the fellowship of God's people,

service in the kingdom of God for His glory and the good of others, an eternal inheritance, kept in heaven for us, and a perfectly glorious eternal destiny.

Have you indeed been given these things? Have you received the benefits Christ was born to give? They are found in Jesus Christ Himself, received by faith as we are united to Him as His people.

If you have not yet received these things because you have not yet trusted in Christ, will you turn to Jesus tonight in faith? Will you believe in the One who left heaven and came to earth in humility to save you and to be your King forever?

If you have received these things, are you treasuring them, making sure you don't forget? Are you pondering them, carefully considering Christ and all His benefits to you?

This Christmas, may we all pay much closer attention to the things we have heard. May we hear the words about Christ and receive the benefits in Christ. And may we treasure up all these things, pondering them in our hearts.