

Mary's Christmas: Ponderings and Treasuring Christ (Luke 1-2)

Well it's a blessing to be with so many families here today, extended family and friends, and I want to repeat a welcome from our church family to each guest here and let you know if there is any way we can minister to you, let us know. We're here every week. Right now I'm preaching through the book of Revelation and we would love you to join us to learn about the future and the One who controls the future. Last week we considered the historic view in the Reformation tradition about if/where Islam fits in Revelation 9. Next week we'll look at Christmas in the book of Revelation and what happens after Christmas (you might not know that's in there, too). Rev 12 is about a woman who gives birth to Christ who will rule the world, like the carols we sing, and it takes us from advent to the 2nd advent when Christ comes again

Our focus is always on Christ and how He's glorified and magnified. Today I want to look at that through the eyes of that woman who gave birth to Him who said when she first heard she would be His mother: *'My soul glorifies the Lord'* or *'My soul magnifies the Lord'* (Luke 1:46 NIV or NKJV). Last year and the year before we pondered Christmas from Joseph's perspective. I called it Joseph, Did you Know? But of course he has a wife, too, we can't leave out, a mother's perspective on Christ. Today's title: Mary's Christmas. For Mary's Christmas I want to look at her ponderings and treasuring Christ in the first 2 chapters of Luke's gospel. Let's join Mary in Luke chapters 1-2

There's 3 times in Luke 1-2 where it says Mary marveled or pondered what she heard, first from the angel Gabriel, the second time from the shepherds, and the third time from Jesus Himself as a boy. I want us to ponder with her these familiar interchanges, 3 stories that are simple enough for children to understand, but deep enough that scholars can't fully ponder all their depths. If you want to follow along on the pew Bible under the seat in front of you, we'll be on p. 555. If you don't have a Bible, take it home as our gift to you.

In the gospel according to Luke, chapter 1, and v. 27 we read that there was *'a virgin betrothed to a man whose name was Joseph, of the house of David. And the virgin's name was Mary.'* Now Mary was a very common name in Bible times. It was the name of the sister of Moses in the OT (in Hebrew it's spelled Miriam). In the NT there was Mary Magdalene, Mary the sister of Martha and Lazarus, Mary the mother of James, Mary the mother of John Mark, Mary the wife of Clopas. A little girl once asked 'which one was the mother of Jesus again? What is the virgin Mary or the King James Virgin?'

This is the virgin Mary here, but I want to read our text from the familiar *New King James Version*. Mary was a common name. She was a common peasant girl in the eyes of the world, engaged to a commoner, a laborer in Galilee, but she's about to receive an uncommon grace and favor from God.

[she has no halo or holy aura like paintings but God sees her in grace]

²⁸ *And having come in, the angel said to her, "Rejoice, highly favored one, the Lord is with you [the source was in Him, not her, look at v. 29] ...when she saw him, she was troubled at his saying, and considered what manner of greeting this was.'* The NASB translation says Mary '*was very perplexed at this statement, and kept pondering*' – it's the first time the word *ponder* is used. The first of Mary's Christmas ponderings is 'why me?' Why me? And this isn't just for her, let's join her. Our hearts should be prone to ponder.

1. Ponder the grace of God with us (repeat)

Meditate on the grace of God to us who like v. 28 know the Lord is with us. Consider the coming of Christ to us. Why me? It's not just Mary who the Lord's messenger gives this type of blessing and greeting to. Favored in v. 28 is another way to say grace, and listen to the greeting to us who are in Christ by grace in Eph 1: *Grace to you ... from God... who has blessed us in Christ with every spiritual blessing...according to His favor and will, to the praise of His glorious grace that He favored us with in the Beloved* (HCSB)

That's the same word 'favored' used of Mary in Luke 1:28 in the angel's greeting. For us who are in Christ, the NT letters give us a similar greeting 'grace to you' as highly favored ones. Mary had great heavenly blessings here but Eph 1:3 says Christians have every spiritual blessing from heaven.

Grace by definition is God's undeserved favor or kindness given to a sinner. Mary isn't someone we're to hail as full of grace, she had to receive grace. A sinner in the presence of God naturally fears but God can replace the fear of a sinner with the favor of the Savior for those who find grace like Mary. ³⁰ *Then the angel said to her, "Do not be afraid, Mary, for you have found favor with God.* ³¹ *And behold, you will conceive in your womb and bring forth a Son, and shall call His name JESUS.* [Jesus means Jehovah saves]

This was good news for Mary, because she needed a Savior. In fact in v. 46, if you look at it, pondering grace made her rejoice in the Savior she needed: ⁴⁶ *And Mary said: "My soul magnifies the Lord,* ⁴⁷ *And my spirit has rejoiced in God my Savior.* ⁴⁸ *For He has regarded the lowly state of His maidservant...* [that's the word for a slave, it's what she wants to be called]

Mary didn't want to be elevated or venerated, Mary wanted to be known as a lowly unworthy servant girl. Mary would rebuke any who regard her as a super-saint. Her identity was a slave in a lowly state who God graciously regarded. If you want to honor Mary...honor her wishes for how she wanted to be known in v. 38: behold her as a maidservant, a slave who stands off to the side out of sight, wanting to serve her Master and make *Him* look good.

[Mary would say 'don't hail me, all hail the power of Jesus' name']

Mary didn't want her name to be known as 'the holy mother,' she says in v. 49 at the end of v. 49: '*holy is His name.*' She would be horrified to hear her name might be part of a church name, or that some would make her statues to pray to instead of God, or that she would be made central in worship for hundreds of millions around the world. To generations of people coming to her for favors or grace, who focus on her instead of God, she says in v. 50: *His mercy is on those who fear Him from generation to generation.* It isn't from her, it's Him. Even angels say if people bow 'no, I'm just a servant'¹

The book *12 Extraordinary Women* points out that Mary was an ordinary Jewish teenager who God gave extraordinary favor to, but the 'point of her "blessedness" is certainly not that we should think of her as someone to whom we can appeal for blessing; but rather than she herself was supremely blessed by God. She is never portrayed in Scripture as a source or dispenser of grace, but is herself the recipient of God's blessing. Her Son, not Mary... is the fountain of grace (Ps. 72:17 '*all nations shall call Him blessed*').'²

Mary prays to God alone as our pattern, and her Son taught us to pray '*Our father in heaven, hallowed be Thy name...*' (we're not to pray to *our mother in heaven* or hallow *her* name). Mary prays to and focuses on God. Honor her by following her example, by how Mary puts all the focus on the Lord. Mary is not some co-Redeemer or co-Mediator as Roman Catholic theology teaches, v. 68 makes clear the Lord is the One who redeems His people and the Bible says '*there is one mediator between God and man, the man Christ Jesus*' (2 Tim 2:5). Not the woman, the man she gave birth to is Redeemer and Mediator for all. To those who think she was immaculately conceived without original sin, v. 47 is Mary's own testimony that she needed a Savior and rejoiced to have God as her Savior (it's sinners who need to be saved, those who are perfect like angels don't call God 'Savior'). We honor Mary by focusing on what she focused on: *Lord/God/He/His/Him* 18x in v. 46-55

[like Mary in v. 46, may our souls magnify/glorify the Lord alone]

Turn forward to Luke 11 for just a moment. The desire to praise the mother of Jesus and elevate Mary isn't new. It happened while Jesus was on earth.

11:27 *And it happened, as He spoke these things, that a certain woman from the crowd raised her voice and said to Him, “Blessed is the womb that bore You [that’s basically a Greek equivalent of ‘Hail Mary!’] ... ²⁸ But He said, “More than that, blessed are those who hear the word of God and keep it!”*

Jesus corrected those who try to elevate Mary more than other believers in her Son because her womb gave birth to Him. He says, on the contrary, in a greater way, we can be just as blessed or more so if we hear the Word Jesus taught and obey it. So the application for you as you ponder the grace Christ gave is to look beyond Christmas, beyond Christ’s birth, beyond the mother who gave birth to Him: do you hear Christ’s Word and obey it? Are you one who comes to church regularly to hear His Word preached and do you apply it regularly? Do you come eager to hear what the Word has to say for you to obey? A greater blessing than being the mother of Jesus is promised by Him to those who come eager to hear His Word preached that you seek to keep. Ponder if that’s your heart or pattern. If not pray God will help it be in 2015 [if you don’t want to be here, pray for God to help you as you come]

Maybe you’re missing out on grace God wants to give through the means of grace because you don’t come to hear the Word (or you do but not to obey). Ponder the grace of Christ this Christmas, not just the past grace of Christ as a baby promised to Mary, but as a present and future grace to us who are all a part of His family just as much as Mary if we’re those who hear the Word of Christ and do the will of Christ, present tense. In another place Mary and the physical family of Jesus came to Jesus and He said *“Who is My mother, or My brothers?”* *And He looked around in a circle at those who sat about Him, and said, “Here are My mother and My brothers! For whoever does the will of God is My brother and My sister and mother.”* (Mark 3:31-35)

Ponder the grace of Christmas, and if by grace you are one who does God’s will, ponder the fact that you are just as much a part of Christ’s family as His mother. True followers of Christ are just as blessed as His mother Mary. By the grace of adoption, we are blessed as His real family. Ponder grace.

Ponder the grace of God with us, that’s #1. Back in Luke 2, let’s with Mary: **Ponder the glory of God becoming one of us** (that’s #2, repeat 2nd point)

In Luke 2, v. 14, the angels announce to the shepherds these familiar words: ¹⁴ *“Glory to God in the highest, And on earth peace, goodwill toward men!* [the NIV has ‘peace to men on whom his favor rests,’ in other words, favor is not just for Mary, it’s for men God favors with ‘grace to you and peace’]

The highest glory of God isn't creation, it's salvation. It says in v. 11 this glory, this good news of great joy for all people, is a Savior born that day, who is Christ the Lord. Ponder the glory of this scene. Glory to God in the highest isn't announced about mansions of glory in heaven, it's announced about a manger in the end of v. 12. The Lord who's clothed in splendor now is clothed in swaddling clothes. The highest glory of God is revealed in the lowliest of places, as the Prince of Peace brings peace and favor to men on whom God's favor or goodwill or good pleasure rests because of His grace. Ponder the glory of God becoming one of us, God lying in a feeding trough. Ponder the God who never slumbers or sleeps now needing to sleep, a child who will need to rest and will need to go to the restroom. He's fully human.

The old song 'away in a manger' says 'little Lord Jesus, no crying He makes' but Jesus would have cried like any other baby, and He wept as a man. It's not sinful to cry, and moms when your babies cry a little, know baby Jesus did, too. I know you want them not to be a distraction. I know there's ladies available to help in the nursery if little ones make it hard to hear for you to hear the Word as Jesus calls us to, but ponder also the fact that baby Jesus Himself cried and was fussy at inconvenient times, too. Some who aren't in that stage of life anymore aren't always sensitive to the challenges of being a mom but let's all rejoice at new life in our church this year: 11 new babies and counting! As you young moms adapt to little ones, challenges, ponder that Jesus not only is with you in the late night feedings and diaper changes, Jesus once needed them, too. In His humanity He can identify in every way, and His weakness and dependence to Mary communicated His gospel grace.

v. 16 says they '*...found Mary and Joseph, and the Babe lying in a manger*'

A hymn says:³ See him in a manger laid, Whom the choirs of angels praise
Mary, Joseph, lend your aid, While our hearts in love we raise
Gloria in excelsis Deo [that's Latin for glory in the highest from Luke 2:14]

Or another:⁴ 'when they came to Bethlehem Where our dear Saviour lay,
They found Him in a manger, Where oxen feed on hay;
His Mother Mary kneeling down, Unto the Lord did pray.
O tidings of comfort and joy, comfort and joy, O tidings of comfort and joy

'Round yon virgin mother and child [I used to picture a round young virgin with her big belly, but that's old English for around yonder virgin after she gave birth to the] Holy infant so tender and mild, sleep in heavenly peace⁵

The shepherds saw this. ¹⁸ *Now when they had seen Him, they made widely known the saying which was told them concerning this Child.* ¹⁸ *And all those who heard it marveled at those things which were told them by the shepherds.* [and we need to marvel at these things. We need to ponder this like Mary] ¹⁹ *But Mary kept all these things and pondered them in her heart*

This is the second time Luke says Mary pondered or meditated in her heart on these things. There's something very special about a mom and her first baby, or any baby, but this is the most special one ever. Every child born is wonderful, but this is the child of Isa 9:6 who's called Wonderful Counselor and Mighty God. Every baby is a miracle but this One is the miracle-maker. A song that helps us ponder the glory of God becoming one of us wonders:

Mary did you know that your baby boy will some day walk on water?
 Mary did you know that your baby boy will save our sons and daughters?
 Did you know that your baby boy has come to make you new?
 This child that you've delivered, will soon deliver you ...
 Mary did you know that your baby boy will give sight to a blind man?
 Mary did you know that your baby boy will calm a storm with his hand?
 Did you know that your baby boy has walked where angels trod?
 And when you kiss your little baby, you have kissed the face of God?⁶

Ponder the grace of God with us, the glory of God becoming one of us, and
#3. Ponder the growth and life of Christ for us (repeat point #3 slowly)

He didn't stay a baby, He grew into a young man, and Mary ponders again.
⁴⁰ *And the Child grew and became strong in spirit, filled with wisdom; and the grace of God was upon Him.* ⁴¹ *His parents went to Jerusalem every year at the Feast of the Passover.* ⁴² *And when He was twelve years old, they went up to Jerusalem according to the custom of the feast.* ⁴³ *When they had finished the days, as they returned, the Boy Jesus lingered behind in Jerusalem ...* [every mom can imagine what it would be like to lose a child for 3 days. Look down at v. 48] ... *So when they saw Him, they were amazed; and His mother said to Him, "Son, why have You done this to us? Look, Your father and I have sought You anxiously."* ⁴⁹ *And He said to them, "Why did you seek Me? Did you not know that I must be about My Father's business?"* [or 'my Father's house'] ⁵⁰ *But they did not understand the statement which He spoke to them.* ⁵¹ *Then He went down with them and came to Nazareth, and was subject to them, but His mother kept all these things in her heart* [most of the other translations 'treasured in her heart']. ⁵² *And Jesus increased in wisdom and stature, and in favor with God and men.*

Mary kept pondering and treasuring all these things in her heart. She called Him 'Son' in v. 48, but He tells her He needed to be at 'My Father's house,' or 'about My Father's business.' As Jesus grew to be a young man, He tells her basically 'I'm God's Son.' Later at a wedding when she told Jesus the wine had run out, He didn't call her 'mom,' He said 'woman, what business is this of us?,' reminding her who He is. Jesus always respected mother and father on an earthly level, but as He becomes a man He lets them know this is what He's going to be about in His life. Maybe Mary later remembered this when her grown Son so often taught the Jewish leaders in the temple?

I'm sure she later remembered what Simeon said in v. 35 in the temple, that her son would be opposed and a sword would pierce her soul, too. When the 'nails, spear...pierce Him through, the cross He bore for me, for you,' Mary must have felt like she had been pierced through. The hymn says 'Hail, hail, the Word made flesh, the Babe, the son of Mary.' John's gospel begins with '*the Word became flesh and dwelt among us*' and John says Mary was at the cross watching and Jesus asked John to care for Mary for the rest of her life. Ponder Christ's care for family, for those who lose loved ones, for widows.

[He suffered hunger, lack, and want, so He can help us in ours, Heb 4:15-16]

Ponder the fact that Jesus grew in every way people grow, from the time He was brought into the temple as a baby to the time He came back to it for His first Passover as a young man, to the time He returned to the temple as a 30-year-old after living a full life for us, cleaned house at His Father's house, and then fulfills the symbolism of the temple, dying as our sacrificial Lamb. As God He rose, as a human son He learned obedience in suffering, Heb 5:8

Father's pure radiance perfect in innocence yet learns obedience to death on a cross
 Suffering to give us life, conquering through sacrifice
 And as they crucify prays Father forgive ...
 Meekness and majesty manhood and deity in perfect harmony the Man who is God
 Lord of eternity dwells in humanity, kneels in humility and washes our feet ...
 Wisdom unsearchable God the invisible, love indestructible in frailty appears
 Lord of infinity stooping so tenderly, lifts our humanity ...
 O what a mystery meekness and majesty. Bow down and worship ...⁷

My favorite modern poet from another genre, Shai Linne, ponders further:
 The topic of our discussion is beyond human comprehension
 The infinite God has made a super condescension
 ... only a human can substitute for human lives
 But only God can take the wrath of God and survive ...
 The Son of God: 100% divinity, self-existent second Person of the Trinity

The Son of Man 100% humanity, the mind stretches to understand how can it be?

You gotta see what He does

Becoming [man] He wasn't while never ceasing to be what He was ...

By faith we believe this amazing Jesus

Who made Uranus and Venus became a fetus

It's a secret, few if anybody knew it; months later, He's covered in amniotic fluid

The subject of the gospels, praise of Apostles

Armed with eye sockets, arm pits and nostrils? ...

See the One who never tires knocked out sleeping

See the Source of eternal joy weeping

Which one can explain...the Son abundant with fame

Who made thunder and rain now has hunger pains?

See the Creator of water become thirsty

On the cross when He saves ... the unworthy

My awe should be sky high and I ought to cry, "Why?"

with water in my eyes when the Author of Life dies

Raised on the third, God-man, soul-seeker

The hypostatic union, it gets no deeper⁸

You probably never heard the phrase 'hypostatic union' in a rhyme before but it really gets no deeper than that mystery of God becoming one of us, as both God and man 200%, fully divine, fully human, in the hypostatic union. O what a mystery, meekness and majesty, bow down and worship! Fall on your knees, as you hear the angel voices! O come let us adore Him, Christ the Lord! Ponder the gospel truths till you're lost in wonder, love and praise

This, this is Christ the King, whom shepherds watch and angels sing,

Haste, haste to bring Him laud [honor], the Babe, the son of Mary ...

The King of kings salvation brings, Let loving hearts enthrone him.⁹

Christ only brings salvation to those who know Him as their King, only for those who from loving hearts enthrone Christ as King of Kings. Is Jesus the King of your life who you love and love to worship? Is He your treasure? If not, may this be the day you join Mary treasuring these things in your heart. Turn from sin and trust Christ alone and treasure Christ, find all satisfaction in Him. You don't need to bring Christ treasure (gold, frankincense, myrrh) you need to make Christ your treasure. Make much of Christ this Christmas. Like Mary, magnify the Lord in your heart. May He become bigger in your heart, and may you rejoice like her in God your Savior. Ponder His grace as you go from this place, or before you go if you need help praying for grace in your life, please stay, pray upfront after the service or with your family.

¹ Revelation 19:10 *‘Then I fell down at [the angel’s] feet to worship him, but he said to me, “You must not do that! I am a fellow servant with you and your brothers who hold to the testimony of Jesus. Worship God.”*

² John MacArthur, *Twelve Extraordinary Women*, p. 108.

³ “Hark the Herald Angels Sing.”

⁴ “God Rest Ye Merry Gentlemen.”

⁵ “Silent Night.”

⁶ Mark Lowry, “Mary, Did You Know?”

⁷ Graham Kendrick, “Meekness and Majesty.”

⁸ Shai Linne, “The Hypostatic Union,” Lyrical Theology album (Lampmode records).

⁹ “What Child is This?”