

“Ponder Anew” message by Dr. Mark Lundberg
Dr. Mark Lundberg

December 25, 2011

Order of Worship for December 25th, Christmas Day

Prelude:

Pre-Service Song (It might be good to plan at least a couple)

Welcome and Announcements

(I recommend no ministry moment)

Call to Worship: Isaiah 9:21-7 and Luke 2:1-7

Special Music: “Away in a Manger” by the Free in Christ Singers (or the Gentrys)
Directed by Kari Walden

Songs of Worship:

“O Come, All Ye Faithful”	Song # 249
“Isn’t He?”	Song # 254
“O Little Town of Bethlehem”	Song # 250
“Infant Holy, Infant Lowly”	Song # 279

Offering and Offertory: Ron Wolcott

Special Music: Rick and Bev Gentry (if appropriate, the duet could come after the message) OR
Christie Wolcott on the piano OR the choir)

Message: (Mark Lundberg will be preaching)

Special Music: Rick and Bev

Closing Song: “Joy to the World” Song # 270

Parting Word of Grace

“The Prayer Closet”

December 25, 2010

“Continue steadfastly in prayer, being watchful in it with thanksgiving.”

(Colossians 4:2a)

This week let us be united in praying that:

1. **The Wiesners in Malaysia:** daughter Sarah will thrive spiritually and in every other way while in the States attending college; political tensions in an election year will not compromise religious freedom; an effective witness for Christ will spread throughout the country
2. **President Obama:** the Spirit will draw his mind and heart to the Christ child this Christmas season; the Lord will stir a deeper love for his family; he will see clearly the distinction between good and evil, wise and foolish
3. **The Congregation:** every person and each family is refreshed and finds great joy in worshipping the Lord and being together for the holiday
4. **Military or Public Service Personnel of the Week: Army MSgt. Davie Howell** (son-in-law to Eileen Hewitt):
5. **Young Adult of the Week:** (?)

I feel a little bit bad for the visitors today. I think there are some visitors out there today. I am not the pastor. I am Mark Lundberg. I am one of the servant-leaders here at the church. If you haven't had a chance to hear our pastor speak, I hope you come back sometime. He has a love for the Word of God that comes through in the way he teaches. He has a fruitful ministry here and does a great job of teaching and I hope you can come back if you are not scared off by me!

I wondered today, it being Christmas, that I imagine that there are some of you who have already opened presents. I know there people who have traditions that they open presents on Christmas Eve and some open them first thing on Christmas morning. I feel a little bit bad for those who are still waiting for I am the barrier to you receiving and opening those gifts! You probably feel like, “Get him over fast; I want to get home! I feel bad for you about that.

I imagine you have a lot of Christmas traditions. We all have Christmas traditions don't we? Those traditions are rich and they teach us a lot about ourselves. I want to tell you a little about my traditions just to give a flavor to the fact that every one of us has got rich traditions. I think it might be a good question to ask when you see people, maybe you get to know them and love them, to ask the question, “Tell me about some of your Christmas traditions.”

When I was young I grew up in Richvale. It is just thirteen miles out in the valley. Many of you have probably been there or through there: it doesn't take long to get through there! It is a very small little town. When that town was formed back in the early nineteen hundreds they put a church there and that church spoke only Swedish. Can you imagine that, a little church in the middle of California and that church's services were only in Swedish? It was a lot of Swedish settlers there. It was an Evangelical Free Church, and that church helped to plant this church. We are an Evangelical Free Church and from that church a lot of the founding members of this church attended out there. Some of those included the Johnsons and the Stensons. Even today they have some flavor of being a Swedish congregation. They have on Christmas morning what they call a “Julotta” service. I am sure Mrs. Snowden can tell us what that means. It must mean “Christmas Service.” When I was growing up we went to church Christmas morning in the dark: it was 6:00 am in the dark. It was times so that when you left the service the sky was filled with sun and it was beautiful. When I was going to church there they would sing one Swedish song on Christmas morning. I believe they still do. I believe it was called “Lishna”, I think that means “Listen”. (Bit of singing!)

I know that a lot of your Christmas traditions involve food too. You probably have something you always eat on Christmas. It was the same with me when I was growing up. If you are from a Swedish family you have to choke down some pickled herring and some potato sausage, although the potato sausage is pretty good now. In fact they make some great potato sausage up at the Wagon Wheel. But the one thing I do remember that Grandma once a year had to cook was lutefisk. The one thing I remember about that was a slimy, smelly fish dish. Fortunately enough she would put lots of cream, a creamy sauce with that so that if you were fortunate enough when you had to get the required bit of lutefisk you might just get the cream sauce when you dipped in there. You were very fortunate for the lutefisk was not good.

Now my traditions are certainly different than that. And I know yours growing up you probably had traditions before you were married and after you were married, and as we enrich our lives with traditions I

hope that whatever the traditions you have that they are meaningful to you and that you remember Christ’s birth.

I hope you brought your Bibles, for I want to open up our scriptures today. I want us to look at a message from God’s word. I have been praying for this teaching part of the service. I hope that my words will be God’s truth and edifying for you, the listeners. I am praying for a miracle, and the miracle that I pray for is that God would go beyond the words that I say, the words that I have prepared, and that He would minister to you through His word through the work of His Holy Spirit. I would like to pray for that right now. If you would join me in prayer:

Our Father in heaven we are so thankful today for this Christmas season. We are thankful that it reminds us that You love us, that you cared about our state. You sent a Savior. That Savior is born. Lord, You want us to understand Your truth better. May Your Holy Spirit open our eyes to see Your truth. May our ears be open. May we begin to understand things we have not understood before. May You use my words, may Your minister to people directly. Lord You are great, Your love is wonderful, Your forgiveness is complete. We thank You for Your grace and mercy. Lord may we treasure these gifts. We pray these things in Jesus’ name. Amen.

Today I want to look at treasures you have in your life. I want us to consider also the conversations we have with ourselves. You know that we talk to ourselves. I am not talking about mental disease; I am talking about those inner conversations we have, those deep conversations. We talk to ourselves. We carry on a conversation. We ponder things, we think about things. And what we do down in that area of our life, what we ponder in our heart. The Christmas story, the story of Jesus’ birth; the details of it mainly come from two books in the Bible. It mainly comes from Matthew and Luke. Let’s open to Luke. I love the very beginning of Luke. The very beginning of Luke is what they call the preface, the preface of Luke. I think it is a great statement as you read and understand and look at the context of Luke: verses 1-4. Luke writes,

“Inasmuch as many have undertaken to compile a narrative of the things that have been accomplished among us, just as those who from the beginning were eye-witnesses and ministers of the world have delivered them to us, it seemed good to me also, having followed all things closely for some time past, to write an orderly account for you, most excellent Theophilus, that you may have certainty concerning the things you have been taught.”

They call him the physician, Dr. Luke. He gave us his goals. Isn’t it interesting in verse four that he wrote this for his friend Theophilus that he would have certainty regarding the things he had been taught. He wants to clarify these things that “you would have certainty.” He mentions up in verse 2, that even though many have already written about these things, the things about Jesus, about Jesus’ work on this earth, and even though there have been a lot of eye-witnesses, “I want to put these things down; I have been studying these things, I have been interviewing people, and I want to put these things down.” That is a great goal he has: he wants to tell us so that we have certainty about the things we have been told. We no longer have the benefit of eye witnesses, do we, at least eye witnesses that were with, the eye witnesses of Jesus life. They are gone. But at the time this was written there were actually eye witnesses, people that could tell him, “I saw Jesus; I saw Him do this, I saw Him do that.” There were also as it says, there were some written narratives that the scholars think that many of those that were written are not with us. There were some things that were written that are no longer with us. Remember that when this was written there were no printers, there were no flash drives, there were no hard drives. When people wrote them down if they weren’t preserved in some way, they were lost. We are fortunate that God has preserved things for us. But

there were some things written that were not preserved. So with the Holy Spirit’s empowering work in Luke, guiding Luke, Luke’s goal that we would be certain about the things we would believe, he gives us an account of Jesus’ life.

Turn now, if you would, to Luke 2:19. This is the key verse for me today. I want to teach out of this verse. I really like this verse, and though it is found in the Christmas story, I think it describes the attitude and actions of a righteous, godly person. I would like to unpack this verse a little bit. The verse is, “*But Mary treasured up all these things, pondering them in her heart.*” First thing to look at is “these things”. Just those words themselves don’t say [much]; they are not very specific. So we are led to believe that something that comes before “these things” was spoken about. What was it that Mary pondered in her heart? So what are the things that have come before this that might have been the things that Mary pondered?

The first might be v. 18 which says when the towns people heard the things that were said by the shepherds they marveled. The song that was sung this morning spoke of “wonder”. That is the word translators sometimes use: they wondered, they marveled, they were amazed. Anyone that heard the shepherds and their testimony would naturally be amazed at what they heard. That might have been some of the things that Mary pondered. I think most importantly what she pondered was the shepherds’ story, vv. 15-20, the shepherds’ story. It says that the shepherds told each other, “*Let’s go over to Bethlehem and see this things that has happened, which the Lord has made known to us.’ and they went with haste and found Mary and Joseph, and the baby lying in a manger.*” Those were just a short number of words there, but can you imagine how much probably happened in those short number of words? They went and they found Mary and Joseph. Sometimes I think when they found them they just took off and started telling the people in the town. But I was thinking about this and I thought, “No, they probably sat there and adored that baby Jesus and they adored the good news that the shepherds had been given. They probably had a little worship service there, don’t you think? They probably said, “Mary this is what we saw; Mary this is what we experienced: the angels, the choir of angels.” And Mary probably said, “You know, this is what I experienced, I experienced an angel too. And the angel told me this...” I just imagine around that manger there was probably a praise session, there probably were testimonies. There was worship. It must have been awesome to have heard both of their stories, Mary telling them her story [and they telling Mary their story.] Like I said, there must have been a little worship service around that manger.

They say that a lot of communication goes way beyond the words you say. We say a lot of words, but what communicates louder than words is people’s tone, the look on your face, the kind body language you have. Can you imagine what those shepherds running in there and finding that baby, and the kind of tone and the kind of communication that must have portrayed to Mary? You can’t hide a life changing experience like these shepherds experienced. The closest thing I can think of is when you think of children have something wonderful has happened they can’t contain their joy can they? They are moving their arms like this, communicating that they just can’t wait to tell you. Their body language and they look is just so expressive, and I imagine these shepherds couldn’t contain their body language, their tone and their eyes. They were communicating to Mary. That must have been some of the things that Mary pondered, just what those shepherds saw and brought he back to what she had seen.

The shepherds’ story is an amazing story. We heard some of it last night with Kirk Sundahl at the Christmas Eve service. He went through what some of the shepherds were like. They were lowly people

who couldn't even testify in court they were so lowly. But here they went throughout that town with that radical message, that incredible message. They were evangelists, they were fearless, they felt an urgency; they couldn't be held back. All of this must have been part of the things that Mary pondered.

Going back then in this story, what about in chapter one where in v. 26 Gabriel came to Mary? It says that Gabriel was the angel that stands in the presence of God. That speaks to the fact that he had been in the presence of God. Now he is with Mary telling Mary about this wonderful thing that was going to happen to her. That must have been in her mind as she pondered this whole situation.

Another thing she probably of these things she probably pondered the virgin birth. There are people who question that birth and what the source of that birth was. Of all the people who knew about what the virgin birth meant was it was her. She had the facts, she knew this was a virgin birth, she knew it was a miracle that happened in her body. She knew that it was amazing, incredible.

Maybe some of the things that she pondered was the story of Elizabeth and Zachariah that also comes in chapter one. Elizabeth was a barren woman before she conceived John the Baptist. Elizabeth also through the power of the Holy Spirit – see verse 42 – she declares through the supernatural power of the Holy Spirit loudly proclaims a blessing on Mary and the child within. That could have been on Mary's mind as she pondered “these things”. Maybe though it was the story of Zachariah who was mute and couldn't speak and when finally God opened his mouth he prophesied and he talked about what he had seen, the angel [in the temple].

I think these were some of the things that were on Mary's mind as she pondered. Let's look back at that verse now: *“But Mary treasured up all these things, pondering them in her heart.”* The word “treasured” – treasured, she treasured these things – what does it mean to treasure? [It means] to value them, they are important, put them above other things. The word treasure is used a lot in scripture. I am sure you can remember that word is used to describe our lives and certain aspects of our lives. In Luke 12:34 we read that Jesus says, “For where your treasure is, there your heart is also.” Proverbs 2 says, “My son, if you receive my words and treasure up my commandments within you, making your ear attentive to wisdom and inclining your heart to understanding...” then it describes the blessing for people who treasure up God's commands. I think that there is a warning here as we think about treasuring. Particularly at Christmas time we must be careful not to treasure earthly, physical things above heavenly things. Physical things are good, they are blessings from God and they are to be useful in His service. But they are not eternal. They are only special gifts of His grace. As we reflect on our treasures, it may be an opportunity to see that we might be a little bit out of balance. I know for myself I have to consider this often. I remember Jesus warning in Luke 8 where He is talking about the seed. He talks about the seed can be choked out by the thorns. He talks about how the worries of this world, the deceitfulness of pleasure, the deceitfulness of riches and the pleasures of this life can choke out the seed. What do we treasure in life and how does that lead us astray. At this Christmas time we are trying to deliver to each other wonderful gifts because we love each other. But those cannot be the treasures of our life.

Going back to Luke 2:19, when “...Mary treasured up all these things, pondering them...” What does it mean to ponder? To weigh in the mind, to think about, reflect. Especially pondering has the sense of quietly pondering, soberly, deeply. I was thinking about this verse and the word “quietly” and I thought that is where the word “quiet time” comes from. That has been our common phrase when we talk to

people: “Do you have a quiet time in your life?” This becomes a time really for pondering isn’t it? We ponder, contemplate, kick around some ideas, ruminate, to wrestle with something, focus our thoughts and understanding deeply, examine intently or deliberately. Pondering is not superficial, it is not fast. The psalm we sang earlier today was “Praise to the Lord Almighty”. In the third verse it says, “ponder anew what the Almighty can do if with His love he befriend us.” I like that phrase “ponder anew”. There are new things we need to ponder, new things we think about our God.

Going back to Luke 2:19; “But Mary treasured up all these things, pondering them in her heart.” What is the heart? It is the center of one’s life, physically the center, mentally, spiritually, morally the center of our life. The source of good and bad; good and evil. Jesus talked about the fact that from your heart comes good, comes evil. That God does His sanctifying work is referred to sometimes as sanctifying work in our heart, His perfecting work in our heart. Sometimes we say that God, the Holy Spirit dwells in our heart. So Mary treasured up these things, pondering them in our heart.

The final thing in that verse is the word “but”. It says, “But Mary treasured up these things...” I think that “but” says she was going in another direction. And what was the [different] direction she was going in? In the verse right before this one it says, in the city all who heard wondered at what the shepherds told them. In another place it says the crowds marveled, they were amazed, astonished. Sometimes, though, marveling at things, being amazed at things, being astonished at things can be very short lived. Sometimes we can be a flash in a pan. It can be a thrill for a day. Christmas time can be like that too. It can be like that too, it can be something quick and fast, superficial, quick and empty. People go to events, go to shows, they see the lights, they go around and marvel, be astonished, be amazed, but it can be short lived. Mary, it says “But Mary treasured up these things, pondering them in her heart.” I think that we need to have that deep and meaningful look at Christmas and the things that God has done in our life. We treasure up those heavenly things that God has put in our lives, to ponder them, to set our mind on these things. Colossians 3:1-2 says “Set your minds on things that are above, not on things that are on the earth.” Philippians 4:8 also speaks about some things we should think about, we should ponder. Philippians 4:8 gives us another list: “*Finally, brothers, whatever is true, whatever is honorable, whatever is just, whatever is pure, whatever is lovely, whatever is commendable, if there is any excellence, if there is anything worthy of praise, think about these things.*”

Another heavenly thing that we can think about or ponder this Christmas is that Jesus Christ was born to be a savior. To have a savior, you have to be saved from something. We need a savior because we are sinners, we miss the mark, I miss the mark, we miss the mark. We have treasures in the wrong things. We are unloving things. We are slaves to certain sins. We have instincts in our nature that are self-centered and unloving. In this process that God saves us, He frees us, He builds an eternal home for us, He increases our capacity to love and though our life time sanctifies us.

So finally I just want to say that this earth, this world has many things to marvel at, this time of year particular, lights and beauty. They are many things to marvel at, to be astonished at, to be amazed at. But let us be like Mary. Let us treasure up heavenly things, eternal things, godly things. Let us quietly ponder them, consider them, meditate on them, think about them. Merry Christmas.

Let us pray: Our Father in heaven, Lord help us to be like Mary. May we treasure up those things, the things that are eternal, the things that are good. May we ponder them in our heart. Help us to think about

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Your love, help us to think about heavenly things. Lord, help us to be with our families. Help us to love them. Help us to increase our capacity to love. Help us to be more like Your Son Jesus Christ. Thank You for sending your Son Jesus Christ to this earth. We pray these things in Your name. Amen.