

St. Luke's Evangelical Lutheran Church – Watertown, WI
Pastor Mark Gartner
Sermon for Sunday School Christmas Service -- December 16th, 2012

Luke 2:19

“But Mary treasured up all these things and pondered them in her heart.”

In the name of Jesus our Savior,

Pastor Schultz and myself have been known to use a phrase, “faster, faster”. This is a phrase that we use when it seems like you can't cram anymore stuff into a set amount of time and then you actually do cram some more stuff in. When life gets like this, what do we do? It seems like our only option is to move faster, faster. I think that most of us sitting here today understand very well the phrase “faster, faster”. Faster, faster would describe our lives as we go to work with our Smartphone in our hands and are checking text messages, the weather and business deals all while on the way to work. Faster, faster is running your children from one activity to the next and the more kids you have multiplies the faster part of it. Faster, faster really seems to hit this time of the year. There are only so many days in December to get everything done to have the best Christmas ever. Faster, faster as you run from mall to mall and store to store to get the right presents. Faster, faster as you try and cram one more Christmas party in an already way too hectic month. Faster, faster is trying to have family and friends over to be with them and everyone's schedules are too full to even fit in a time that works for everyone.

In the middle of all this faster, faster, we have the words that describe Mary at the end of her labor, delivery, and visitors that first night. These words of our text for today don't say faster, faster. They say slower, slower. Slow down and see what is going on around us. Slow down and see what Christmas is all about. Slow down and get rid of all the distractions this world is using to lead us to forget about Christmas. It is this example of Mary slowing down that will serve to guide us today and always as we:

Theme: Ponder and Treasure!

- 1. Ponder who this baby is**
- 2. Treasure what this baby accomplished**

I read an article a few days ago that was talking about what they think that social media has done to our brains. Things like Facebook and Twitter and things like that. The article said that ten years ago, the average attention span was about 12 minutes long. Today – and they blamed it on social media –today the average attention span is down to five seconds. I think that means that there's at least a chance that I've lost a bunch of you already, and we haven't even really gotten started yet! What it might really mean is that many people don't do, maybe even aren't able to do, what Mary did in our text. And really, what Mary did is the answer to so many complications of this time of year. This is in so many ways the season of distractions. Our to-do list is never longer than it was in the past few weeks. The shopping and wrapping and parties and dinners and cards and baking and all the family gatherings, not to mention a few extra church services, this might be the most wonderful time of the year, but it's also often the most chaotic time of the year. Our heads can end up spinning with so much going on around us.

If you think about it, I bet the same thing was happening to Mary on that first Christmas night. I doubt that was a very calm, relaxed, serene setting. That's sort of how it's pictured in the nativity scenes we see, but I kind of doubt that's how it really was. Mary and Joseph were miles from home because they had to make the trip to Bethlehem, and of course when they got there, there wasn't anywhere to stay, so they found what a cave was probably, and that's where they stayed, and that's where Mary gave birth to her son. In a cave.

With all the animals that were supposed to be there surrounding them. Not exactly the most quiet labor and delivery room – or the best smelling, for that matter. And as if that wasn't crazy enough, all of a sudden come barging in these shepherds. And if you think about it, they had to be absolutely crazy. We're told they hurried to find Mary and Joseph and the baby, and when they left they spread the word about what they had heard and seen, and they were glorifying and praising God, so try to imagine what they were like when they got to the cave. They had to be out of their minds with excitement, going on and on about what the angels had told them and that they had seen angels and can you believe that, and their Savior had been born and he was right there in front of them, and you can just hear all the commotion, right? It had to be complete chaos swirling around Mary. Maybe the past few days have been pretty hectic for us, but I'm not sure that they were anything like that.

But what do we hear that Mary did? The shepherds were bouncing off the walls because of everything going on. But not Mary. **“Mary treasured up all these things, and pondered them in her heart.”** You can almost see Mary sitting there, just trying to take it all in. Trying to make sense of everything that had gone on. She did have nine months to think about this, but we just have to wonder how much she knew. When Gabriel first appeared to her nine months ago, the angel had said that her son would be the Son of God, that he would sit on David's throne forever. And Gabriel had told Joseph that this child who they were to name Jesus, which meant “the Lord saves.” He would have that name because he would save his people from their sins. I'd bet that's what Mary was pondering. She was pondering who exactly this child was. He was her son; she was probably still feeling the pain of the delivery. But he was the Son of God as well. How could that be? What a wonderful truth that she was trying to wrap her mind around. Her creator, she had just given birth to. He who fills heaven and earth was lying on her lap. He who has all power, was a helpless little infant. He who had promised to supply all her needs, was looking up at her, needing to be fed. None of it made any sense, but all of it was true.

And all of it was necessary. Again, the angel had said that her Son would save the people from their sins. I'm sure that's what she was pondering as well. But how would he do that? Did she have any idea? Did she know that the life she just gave birth to would be given for her, as a ransom for her sin? That the little head that still was soft from his birth would soon be punctured with a crown made of thorns? That the little hands that gripped her fingers would be pierced through by the nails that held him to a cross?

We don't really know what Mary knew; but we know. We know who this little child was, and we know what he would do. Ponder that today. Christmas is a wonderful time of the year, but most people don't really have any concept why. The birth of a baby is always a moving story, but that's not what today is all about. Today isn't really a story in itself; today is only the beginning of a greater story. If we look closely in the manger we see a cuddly little baby. But what else do we see? Through our eyes of faith, we also see a crown of thorns. When we peer into the manger, we see the cross. When we ponder the wonders of that first Christmas night, we ponder the miracle of God becoming human, the Word made flesh, so that he could live, die and rise again, in our place, for us, so that he might pay for our sins and win for us forgiveness and eternal life. Treasure those things. Ponder them in your heart. No matter how hectic this time of year is, take the time, make the time, to marvel at the love of God, shown to us in the birth of his Son, but even more in his suffering, his death, and his resurrection. That is the reason for the season. Celebrate his birth, because of who this baby is, and what this baby would do. Treasure those things always. Amen