

Christmas Eve, 9pm 12/24/18

Luke 2:1-20 & Psalm 96:10-13

"Treasures"

First Lutheran Church

Marshall, MN

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Luke 2:19 says "Mary treasured all these words and pondered them in her heart."



Let's recap the things Mary has just been through.

Young Mary is probably about 14 years old. She is "betrothed", meaning an arranged marriage will take place between her and this great guy named Joseph. She probably didn't know Joseph that well, but her parents arranged it and that is the way things were back then.

Now if that isn't exciting or scary enough, in comes an angel. I doubt it was one of those cute little babies we see on commercials with wings, because nearly every time an angel appears in the bible, they have to tell their viewer, "Do Not to be Afraid!" Legend says angels were large figures, beaming with light, loud and kind of scary looking. The angel tells Mary she is going to give birth to a son. A son? She only just found out she was going to get married and she is old enough to know where babies come from, so that takes a little explaining. Thankfully, Mary accepts the Lord's challenge and then learns that the baby is not just any son, but the son of the Lord, who has been placed in her womb by Immaculate Conception no less.

Now, Joseph also sees the angel of the Lord, in a dream. The angel urges him NOT to leave Mary and tells him she did nothing wrong. Joseph trusts the Lord and sticks with Mary, but by the decree of Caesar Augustus, one of the most effective and independent leaders in history, Joseph has to go to Bethlehem to be counted for taxes. By this time, Mary was far along in the

pregnancy so Joseph takes her with him. Mary rides 80 miles on the back of a burro to Bethlehem! Bethlehem was a town about the size of Ghent, MN. It didn't have much to offer, but Joseph was from there, so that is where he had to register.

After likely a week of walking along a dusty road, with little provisions, the couple gets to Bethlehem. They were probably hoping someone would take them in, as it was custom in that region to be very hospitable. But that was not the way it went. The gospel says there was "no room in the inn." I wonder if the people of Bethlehem and even Joseph's relatives didn't believe the angel story. Joseph and Mary were not technically married yet and it could have been that no one had any room, because they did not want to be associated with the harboring of a sinner.

There was also likely a large tented area for travelers available, but that would not have been fitting for a young pregnant woman, so Mary and Joseph stayed with the animals.



There is some dispute about if the stable was a cave or basement or make shift wooden structure, but any way you look at it, it didn't have clean hand towels or a bed and can you imagine the smell?

Young Mary then gives birth to the son of the Lord. There is no record of a midwife or doctor; no pain relief or Lamaze classes for her. I wonder how scared this little girl must have been. She was probably the furthest away from her family she had ever been, in undisputed pain, with nothing but her faith to keep her strong. Now as if that wasn't enough to deal with, in come these dingy shepherds! Shepherds were viewed as lowly people. They were not trusted and were often accused of stealing and they smelled so bad no one wanted to be near them. But some of those big frightening angels had also appeared to the shepherds and when that happens, all reason and tradition is thrown out the window.

The shepherds were told by the angels that the Messiah was born and they were the ones who got to hear the good news. They were told they could find this baby King in a manger; a feed trough in a stable in Bethlehem. Well, not many people talk to these shepherds, let alone a “multitude of heavenly hosts”. So, they just had to see this king! There he was all wrapped up tight in cloth like the angels told them; the young Mary at his side and Joseph watching over them. These shepherds were pretty impressed and totally honored, so they told everyone they knew or even saw.

Luke wrote this version of the story, read today. Tradition tells us Luke was a Gentile; likely a slave and at one time a doctor. He is reported to have spent time with the Apostle Paul researching and interviewing eye witnesses. Luke’s writings are said to be the most accurate and detailed of the accounts of scripture, because he always gave clues about the locations and time frames in which the incidents occurred, so there was little question of his validity.

Luke likely interviewed Mary, years after Jesus’s birth. Ask any mother and they can undoubtedly recall the details about the birth of their child even without the appearance of an angel. Mary was in all likelihood able to give Luke a detailed account of the birth of her first son, Jesus. Luke’s passage ends by saying “Mary treasured all these words and pondered them in her heart”.



What do **you** treasure? At Christmas time we are sometimes forced to come up with a list of things we would like to own. We are bombarded with advertising, sales and deals. We get and give gifts, hoping someone will like what we purchased and we try to win Emmys acting like we love what we have been given, even if we don’t.

But what is it we treasure in our hearts? Isn’t it the unexpected calls and visits and hand written cards from friends and family we love most? Isn’t it the spot someone saved for us or gave up so we wouldn’t miss our little nephew singing his heart out just before he falls off the second

riser? Isn't it the young woman who goes out of her way to help the elderly man out of his wheelchair in the busy grocery store or learning about the neighbor boy who gets up early to wash eggs for the homeless before the school day starts? The things I treasure most aren't things at all. They are people and moments in which I am witnessing miracles.



All of Advent we have been talking about these Angels of the Lord sneaking up on these marginalized folks, revealing this amazing, almost unbelievable story. The birth of Christ; however is not just a story or a parable. It really happened. There is more evidence of Jesus birth than many facts taught about our well known historical leaders. Dr. Ralph Muncaster, a former skeptic of the bible spent fifteen years researching and writing a series of books about Christ. His research led him to found the Institute of Contemporary Christian Faith. Dr. Muncaster lists 668 historical prophecies that he claims to be true. Even the Quran, the central religious text of Islam, details a similar story of Jesus being born of a virgin in Bethlehem. This story, foretold in the Old Testament is proof of God's love and God's commitment to follow through on his promises.

No matter how many times you hear the Christmas story, sing the songs or see the pageant. It makes you smile.

The Good News is here.

The Savior of the world has been born. He came into this world just like we did, except he was incarnate, *100% Man 100% God*. He lived a life of pressure and temptation like we all do, but he never sinned and when it came time, **he died for us**, so all of the dingy shepherds and broken hearted folk and confused shoppers could be saved by his grace. From babe to resurrection, Jesus was teaching and preaching and showing us how to love all along. Psalm 96

says “the earth rejoices in him, the trees sing out in joy, for he is coming and will judge the world with righteousness and the peoples with his truth”.



So be like Mary and ***treasure up your gifts***, not the ones bought for you, but the ones paid for on the cross. The Lord and Savior who lived to die for us, is still here among us. He lives in us and in our neighbors; find him in this season and in every season, his perfect little incarnate self is lying there for us in the feed troth, waiting to be taken into our hearts to treasure.