

St. Luke's Evangelical Lutheran Church – Watertown, WI
Pastor Mark Gartner
Sermon for Christmas Day Service -- December 25th, 2008

Luke 2:19

“¹⁹But Mary treasured up all these things and pondered them in her heart.”

In the name of him who is the Lord of lords, and the King of kings, dear Christian friends,

What's going to happen to Christmas after today is over? What's going to happen to Christmas when the tree is out there by the curb, the family get-togethers are over, and you and I go back to our day to day routines and responsibilities? What's going to happen to Christmas when the grass is green, the temperatures are in the 80's, and the neighborhoods of Watertown aren't all lit up with beautiful lights? What's going to happen to Christmas when there are no little children singing to us and you and I have to struggle again with life's heartaches and hardships? What's going to happen to Christmas? My friends, did you know that the right answer to all those questions is here at the very end of Luke's Christmas story. For it's there that we meet a humble child of God for whom Christmas would never be over. Today the Holy Spirit would use her to encourage us all to:

Theme: Hold On Tight To Christmas!

- 1. Treasure who Jesus is.**
- 2. Find strength in what Jesus did.**

Who would have faulted Mary if she would have quickly put the events of Christmas Eve on the back burner of her life? As nice as the shepherds' visit had been, that was past history! And those sermons and songs of angels which the shepherds had reported, why they weren't going to put bread on the table and find a better place to house a baby than a barn. It would take time for Mary to be strong enough again for the trip back to Nazareth, a journey of over 80 miles on rough, and winding roads. If Joseph was going to provide for his family, he'd have to look for work in Bethlehem. And if they would be staying there for a while, Mary would shoulder the responsibility of caring for her first baby all by herself without the help of relatives and friends. Mom wouldn't be flying into Bethlehem on the next plane to help Mary get back on her feet again. Yes. Christmas was over now. Who would have blamed Mary if she had put it all on the back burner of her life?

But Mary didn't do that. Instead, we are told: **“Mary treasured up all these things and pondered them in her heart.”** Those two verbs in our sermon text are oh so rich in meaning. **“Treasured”** comes from a Greek word which means to “put a military guard around” something. That's what Mary did with Christmas! In her heart, Mary guarded Christmas so that it could never be taken away from her. Luke also tells us that Mary **“pondered all these things in her heart”**. **“Ponder”** comes from a Greek word meaning to pile one thing on top of another and then go back through the pile over and over again. That's what Mary did with Christmas! Did Mary know that night that her baby boy would someday walk on water and calm a storm with his hand? Probably not! But she did know that her little baby was heaven's perfect lamb who would take away the sins of the world. And that's all she needed to know! Would Mary understand all the whys and wherefores still to come in her life? No! But Mary knew that the sleeping child she was holding was the great **“I AM”**! And that's all she needed to know! You see, this great I AM was her Lord God and if he was for her then who or what could be against her? As she went about the task of learning to mother her Child, Mary never stopped thinking about what a special Son this was. Her Son was born miraculously without a human father. Her baby in the manger was sinless. He was

Immanuel . ***“God with us.”*** His birth was heralded with Christmas carols by angels. He was worshipped by keepers of sheep and Magi from the Far East.

“Mary treasured up all these things and pondered them in her heart”. That’s also what Mary did with the entire life, death, and resurrection of her Son. You see, as Mary did her treasuring and pondering there would be more experiences to come. She would hear her Son speak the words of eternal life. She would see her Son perform some of those great miracles. One day with a broken heart, she also would stand beneath her Son as he suffered and died on a cross. Three days later she would stand in his presence again, joyfully worshipping him as the Risen Conqueror of sin, death, and Satan. As Mary continued to turn over and over in her heart all these things, she would grow day by day in her faith in this little baby. That’s because Jesus Christ wasn’t just her little baby boy. Jesus Christ was Mary the sinner’s Savior.

My friends, what’s going to happen to Christmas with you after today is over? Once again the Christmas angel comes to each of you personally and says: “I bring you good news of great joy...to you who are born in sin, to you whose lives are a broken record of daily failures, to you who offend a holy God with every one of your sins and deserve to go to hell for them, to you such sinners, a Savior has been born. He is Christ the Lord.” Like Mary, we don’t always understand all the whys and wherefores of life. We don’t need to know everything. But there is one thing we do need to know. Our merciful God sent his Son to Bethlehem to rescue us. This Rescuer kept the divine Law of God in our place. On a dark Friday afternoon he voluntarily accepted a horrible death as our Substitute. Bethlehem’s manger, Calvary’s cross. Easter’s empty grave ... Christ the Lord comes from heaven to earth so that we can go from this earth to his heaven.

That, my dear people, is what you and I can hold on tight to, treasuring and pondering, not just on this Christmas Day, but on every day we still have granted to us in this world. Here is something that will outlast our Christmas trees. Here is something that will still be there for us when all the presents are exchanged and all the relatives have gone home A Savior who is Christ the Lord! He’s the one who will answer this daily bedtime prayer: “Jesus Savior, wash away all that has been wrong today.” A Savior who is Christ the Lord! He’s the one who will take this children’s Christmas and make it our joy all year round: “God loves me dearly, loves even me!” A Savior who is Christ the Lord. That’s not just Someone for today. That’s Someone for frigid February, and during April showers and July’s humidity and October’s Fall colors.

What’s going to happen to Christmas when you and I go back out there again into enemy territory? How do we stop the devil in our lives with his clever weapons of greed and gossip, lust and lies, anger and anxiety? There is but one way. It’s that Baby whom the angels called Christ the Lord. He took all the devil could hand out and he knocked him out. In that almighty Savior we have the power to say, “No” to this devil and send him packing. If we know how often his temptations win in our daily lives, then we’ll do what Mary did. We’ll treasure up and ponder all these things in our hearts by coming this New Year to worship services with greater interest and greater joy than ever before. In 2009 we will treasure up and ponder all these things in our hearts by making more room for Jesus and his Word in our family life. And we’ll let Jesus do more guiding us in the way we live our lives each day.

What’s going to happen to Christmas the next time there’s another one of those heartaches in your lives? What’s going to happen to Christmas the next time you are struggling with one of life’s many disappointments? What’s going to happen to Christmas if this coming year a doctor tells you or someone you love that they have cancer? What’s going to happen to Christmas if in 2009 one of your children or one of your parents or your husband or wife is taken away from you by death? All those things would be impossible to bear without that night at Bethlehem. My friends, when life gets tough for you, then you do what Mary did. Treasure and ponder all the things these Scriptures say about the Savior who is Christ the Lord, your Jesus: How he has engraved you upon the palms of his hands! How he has a heart that understands all your feelings and carries all your burdens. How he will never leave you nor forsake you.

How he will see you through every tragedy and every trial. And when you must stand at those gravesides of your Christian dear ones, Bethlehem is still where it's at when it comes to drying your tears. This blessed truth of the Christmas still stands: **"Whoever believes in Jesus will not perish, but will have everlasting life"**. Because of the first Christmas there's another Christmas still to come - the best Christmas! On that Christmas your ears are going to really hear the angels sing: ***"Glory to God in the Highest"***. On that Christmas your eyes are really going to see the Lord of lords and King of kings in all his glory. And on that Christmas your arms will once again embrace all those departed Christians you miss so much tonight.

What's going to happen to Christmas after this one is over? Mary has the answer. Dear Lord Jesus, may this be this way it is for all of us here today: **And they treasured up all these things and then they pondered them in their hearts.** Hold on tight to Christmas and never let go! Amen.