

SERMON: Pondering

TEXT: Luke 2:1-20

The Christmas story from the Gospel of Luke is perhaps the most well-known of all the Bible passages, perhaps with the exception of the 23rd Psalm. Even those who've never been in a church or seen a Bible probably know the story from watching Charlie Brown's Christmas. But as familiar as it is, it is also very foreign to us in many ways.

While most of us can relate to the birth of a baby, we certainly don't recognize all that surrounds the birth of Jesus: Mary and Joseph have traveled many miles on foot and on the back of a donkey. They are away from home with no place to stay. They are unsheltered. It's hard to imagine having a baby under such circumstances.

Also unsheltered are the shepherds. Luke reports that they are "living in the field, keeping watch over their flock by night." Some of you may have an inkling of what shepherding is all about, but not likely from first-hand experience.

Then there's this angel. I know that many people believe in angels. Perhaps you've even had a vision or been visited by one. But angel sightings in our time

seem to be much less common and much more subtle than how they are described here. I've never heard of anyone seeing the bright light of glory or hearing a multitude of heavenly hosts.

But there is a word in this story that likely conjures up quite a bit of personal experience for us at this time of year. *Haste*. After hearing from the angels, the shepherds went "with haste." Today we would call it *hustle and bustle*. Too busy. In a hurry. Trying to get things done. Those of you sitting here tonight may have come with great haste.

And there's another word that always seems to jump out at me that we seem to rush past. I think it's God trying to tell me – trying to tell all of us – to stop all the hasty, busy, hustle and bustle, and simply *ponder*.

Surrounded by shepherds who were excited and breathless after coming in haste, "Mary treasured all [their] words and pondered them in her heart."

She pondered those words used by the angel to announce who this child was: Savior. Messiah. Lord. These titles were not new to Mary. When she learned of her pregnancy, an angel also appeared to her with this news.

Mary Did You Know is a beautiful song that has become very popular in recent years and is a favorite of many at Christmastime, though it is not without controversy. The lyrics ask this question of Mary over and over again, referring to the wonders and the trials of Jesus' life. Did she know who he was and how he would change the world? The controversy comes from those who believe the whole concept is absurd. Of course, she knew. The angel told her, and she was well aware of all that his life would entail.

Theologically, the naysayers make a good point. However, my own theological argument would say that this musical question reveals those things that Mary pondered on the night of his birth. We can know something in our minds and still need to ponder it in our hearts.

Here are just some of the words from the song:

Mary, did you know

That your baby boy will one day walk on water?...

Did you know

That your baby boy will save our sons and daughters?...

Mary, did you know

That your baby boy will give sight to a blind man?

Did you know

That your baby boy will calm a storm with his hand?...

The blind will see

The deaf will hear

And the dead will live again

The lame will leap

The dumb will speak

The praises of the lamb.

Mary, did you know

That your baby boy is lord of all creation?

Did you know

That your baby boy will one day rule the nations?

Did you know

That your baby boy is heaven's perfect lamb?

This sleeping child you're holding

Is the great I am.

(Mark Lowry and Buddy Greene, *Mary Did You Know*, Lyricsfreak.com © 2018)

All of this and more, Mary treasured and pondered in her heart.

What are your ponderings on this Christmas Eve? Or have you even had time to think about anything beyond your “to-do” list? I invite you to take some time right now, and perhaps later this evening or sometime tomorrow or throughout the week.

Who is Jesus to you?... What does his birth mean to you? His life? His death? His resurrection?... Where do you see yourself in his story?... Where do you see him in your story?... Has he made a difference in your life?

Perhaps you haven't seen his light or felt his love. Perhaps you have doubts that the good news of great joy is for all the people. As you ponder, I pray that the glory of the Lord will shine around you. I pray that an angel will greet you saying, “Do not be afraid.” As you ponder, I pray that you will be filled with hope, love, joy, and peace.

I pray that Christ the Savior will be born in you.

To the glory of God!

AMEN.