

Ponder These Things In Your Heart

Luke 2:19

Trinity Lutheran Church

December 24, 2015 – Christmas Eve



In the name of the Father, and of † the Son, and of the Holy Spirit. Amen. The text before us on this most holy night is the 19th verse of the 2nd chapter of the Gospel of St. Luke where it's reported that after hearing from the angel that she was about to become the bearer of the Savior of the world, Mary "pondered all these things in her heart." Now to be sure, there are a great many things one might rightly and properly ponder on the eve of the Mass of Christmas – that time when the Feast of our Lord's Nativity begins. It's on this day that the One who holds the entire universe in His hand as Lord and Creator is at the same time also amazingly cradled in the arms of His virgin mother. It's on this day that the One whose Divine essence no man can touch is also wrapped in ordinary swaddling cloths – that the One who gives food to the hungry and seed to the sower must Himself be sustained by milk from His own mother's breasts. It's on this day that the fullness of God is pleased to dwell as an Infant born of a Virgin – as the eternal Word of God becomes human flesh and blood – and as the Creator becomes the creature so that He might save us who cannot save ourselves.

So tonight we too should and must follow the blessed Virgin's example as we keep and ponder these wonderful things in our own hearts – for the truth is that unless this wonderful birth which was foretold in the sermon of the angel, the hymn of the heavenly host, and the joy of the shepherds also finds its way into our hearts, then all that's happened is that these glorious events has been for naught. For unless this holy Child is born in us, and us in Him – and not just on this day, but every day – then the reality is that we will be lost forever – doomed and damned because of our sin – the very same sin from which the infant Jesus came to set us free.

According to the testimony of Scripture, Jesus Christ was born during the reign of Caesar Augustus and later was crucified under Pontius Pilate. Though He was born a tender Lamb, behind that

meek, mild exterior lay the very Sacrifice of God – the Lamb without blemish or stain who would take away the sin of the world. He was born in earthly poverty so that all who trust in Him might become rich in heavenly treasure. He was born the Child of Mary so that you and I might be reborn as the children of God. He was first laid as an Infant in the cave of Bethlehem, so that later He might also be placed in a tomb to save us from the grave. He once slept in His birth on the green wood of the manger, but later He would sleep in death on the dry wood of the cross. He was wrapped in swaddling cloths at His birth, but 33 years hence He would be draped in burial cloths at His death. This is He whose birth and rising from the dead were both announced by angels – the One who once was worshiped by shepherds and adored by wise men – who now is bowed down before and worshiped by heaven, earth, and all of creation – the One who once came in humility to die so that He might come again on the Last Day to raise the faithful dead to His glory unto life everlasting.

God's Son was born in the tiny town of Bethlehem, just outside of Jerusalem. But Bethlehem was more than just another little backwater burg. It was a town of shepherds and kings. In fact, it was the hometown of King David, the greatest shepherd-king Israel had ever known. Another interesting fact about Bethlehem is that its name means "house of bread" – a very appropriate name, don't you think? – especially in view of the fact that Jesus called Himself the true and living Bread which came down from heaven to give life to the world. In fact, Jesus also said that "if anyone eats of this Bread, he will live forever." But you don't need to go to Bethlehem to receive the blessing and benefit of this Living Bread, for today the Church is Bethlehem. Here is where you find God's "house of bread." Here is where Christ, the Living Bread which came down from heaven, comes to feed us, give us His life, and make our hearts His manger.

And as He comes to us here and now, He's still clothed in the same humility of that first holy night when the shepherds were out in their fields watching over their flocks. Here He can still be found wrapped in the swaddling cloths of Holy Scripture and mangered in the lowliness of the Sacraments. And this will be the sign for you. You will find him hidden under the water of Baptism, in the mouth of the preacher, and under the bread and the wine of the Holy Supper. Here is where He comes to you – gentle, humble, and hidden – so that you might receive Him as your Savior and Christ – here, where you are in the presence of angels and archangels and all the company of heaven who also worship this Child. Here in the Church is where the search for Jesus ends – for here in the Liturgy of the Word the holy Child of Bethlehem is still speaking to you, forgiving you, feeding you His own body and blood, and giving you eternal life.

Therefore, the one who rejects God's Word and the Sacraments also rejects the Child of Bethlehem – and the one who rejects the Child of Bethlehem also rejects the Father who sent Him – who will then reject that person on the Last Day – casting them into a death and darkness such as none could ever imagine. But the Good News on this Eve of Christmas is that those who receive His Word, Baptism, and His body and blood, also receive Him who came by way of a virgin mother, was laid in a manger crib, diapered in swaddling cloths, nestled at His mother's breast, worshiped by angels and adored by shepherds, hung on a cross in death, and rose from the grave in life. Those who receive Him through faith as Brother, Savior, Christ and Lord freely receive true life and light – as well as hope, peace, freedom from sin and eternal joy in heaven.

Dear friends, if you've lived your life this year, this month, this week, or this day as though the

Child from Bethlehem had never been born – as though God had not taken on our flesh and blood on that holy night so long ago – as though God were not with us – as if you mattered most and this Child mattered least – and are there really any who can plead innocent to these charges? – then make this holy night a night of repentance and renewal before the Day comes when there are no more days left for repentance. Hear the words of the angel anew as if you'd never heard them before: "To you is born in the city of David, a Savior, who is Christ the Lord!" – and like Mary, ponder these words in your heart afresh and new.

As you make your way home tonight and see all the Christmas lights, ponder our Savior – the Light of the world whom no darkness can overcome – and ponder the eternal life He freely offers you in His Name. Ponder the water that keeps all these Christmas trees alive for the season, and then ponder your own Baptism – that living water of Christ from heaven that wells up to eternal life. And as you exchange your gifts with family and loved ones, ponder the Gift that once was laid in a manger and wrapped in swaddling cloths. Ponder how He exchanged your death for His life, and your sin for His holiness. And in your pondering, give heartfelt thanks to God for His great mercy and everlasting love in sending this Child to be born to us, and this Son to be given to us – the One whose name is Wonderful, Counselor, Everlasting Father, Mighty God and Prince of Peace – for in Him alone God has given you His peace this day – and every day – to the praise and glory of His most holy name. Amen.

And now that peace of God, which passes all understanding, will keep your hearts and minds in that one true faith in Christ Jesus, unto life everlasting. Amen.