Christmas Day Luke 2:19
December 25, 2020 55-37-50/63/61-62

May the peace the angel proclaimed – the peace the Christ-child brings – fill your hearts and lives today and every day. Amen.

Ponder Christmas with Mary
I. Ponder God's power.
II. Ponder God's grace.
III. Ponder God's faithfulness and ways.

Dear Christian friends,

It's true EVERY YEAR but this year especially I NEED Christmas. In so many ways - and **for so many** people - 2020 has been a HARD year. It's so easy to feel WORN OUT – TIRED – **frustrated**. And who knows what **next year** will all bring! I NEED Christmas!

AS MUCH AS I enjoy a **big, fat, real** Christmas tree loaded with **lots and lots** of lights and all those special, **treasured ornaments** – I **really** DON'T NEED that. **As much as** I love those FAVORITE COOKIES and the **outside decorations** – I **really** DON'T NEED them either. I definitely don't like **shopping** for Christmas presents but I do enjoy watching people open their presents – but I CAN DO WITHOUT that too.

I need CHRISTMAS – **I need** the baby Jesus in the manger. It seems that ESPECIALLY THIS YEAR I need to do as Mary did – ***"Mary treasured up all these things, PONDERING them in her heart."*** So this morning I invite you to JOIN ME and PONDER CHRISTMAS WITH MARY. **With Mary** PONDER 1)God's power, 2)God's grace, 3)God's faithfulness and **ways**.

I. Ponder God's power.

In a sense these verses **take us** to the END of the first Christmas. Mary and Joseph have made it to Bethlehem and Mary's given birth to the baby Jesus. The shepherds have COME AND GONE. No doubt they had FILLED Mary and Joseph in about the angel suddenly appearing to them with his ***"good news of great joy"*** – then their seeing and hearing that ***"multitude of the heavenly host praising God."*** The shepherds were now heading back to their flocks but they're TOTALLY CHANGED people. They're busy telling others what's happened – busy ***"glorifying and praising God for all the things that they had heard and seen, which were just as they had been told."***

Now it seems to be JUST MARY and Joseph having some QUIET TIME with the baby Jesus. Perhaps Jesus is ONCE MORE "asleep on the hay" in the manger. THERE He is – her ***"firstborn son."*** OH PONDER with Mary God's almighty power!

"Ponder." That means to MULL things over – looking at something FROM ALL DIFFERENT angles – picking up new INSIGHTS and **details** – seeing anew OLD, FAMILIAR TRUTHS. Watching the baby Jesus sleep He's SO PRECIOUS. Every baby is a SPECIAL GIFT from God but even more so the baby Jesus. Mary's a ***"virgin"*** yet she's given birth to a baby. The virgin birth is an UNEXPLAINABLE MIRACLE except as the angel Gabriel had explained to Mary, ***"Nothing is impossible with God."***

But an even greater miracle is JUST WHO her baby is. ***"The holy one to be born will be called the Son of God,"*** Gabriel had told Mary. SHE was the virgin Isaiah had talked about when he wrote, ***"The virgin will be with child and will give birth to a son. And they will call Him Immanuel, which means, 'God with us.'"***

Now there He lies in the manger ***"Immanuel – God with us – the Word made flesh."*** PONDER CHRISTMAS with Mary! **Her baby** is our almighty Creator - ***"through Him everything was made,***

and without Him not one thing was made that has been made." He who needs Mary to **feed** and burp and change Him is the very God who JUST BY SAYING, ***"Let there be…"*** created this world in **all its vastness** and **complexities**. **Her baby** is the God who had created HER – created you and me and all that exists! "OH, COME, let us adore Him!" Kneel at the manger and WITH HOLY AWE and **joy** confess, ***"My Lord and my God!"***

Oh, how I need to SEE and PONDER my God's **almighty** power. I'm not **almighty**. I can't fix **every problem**. I don't have **all the answers**. Life is SO OUT OF MY hands and **my control**. 2020 has sure reminded me of that. But then I kneel at the manger. The baby Jesus – Mary's ***"firstborn son"*** – the eternal, almighty Son of God Himself. OH, WOW!

II. Ponder God's grace.

AS Mary was ***"pondering all these things"*** she didn't have to WONDER WHAT her baby would grow up to be. BOTH Mary and Joseph had been instructed TO NAME her baby ***"Jesus." "Because He will save His people from their sin,"*** the angel explained to Joseph. That name ***"Jesus"*** – **Joshua** in Hebrew – means "the LORD/Jehovah saves." ***"The good news of great joy"*** that the angel brought to those ***"terrified"*** shepherds was that ***"unto you is born …a SAVIOR."***

Those shepherds were ***"terrified (when) the glory of the Lord shone around them."*** JUST BEING **in the presence** of those HOLY CREATURES rocked and devastated them. WHO WERE THEY to be in such a **holy place**? What message FROM GOD was the angel bringing them? Who are WE? Who am I? What message is GOD SENDING **us**?

"Ponder" it. WHY am I so often NOT ***"terrified"*** and devastated by my sins? I was born sinful – ***"dead in sin."*** Do I sometimes just shrug that DEVASTATING TRUTH off with a, "Well, nobody's perfect!"? Have I grown comfortable with my sins so that I think of them as TRIVIAL and NO BIG DEAL? Driving a little over the speed limit **isn't as bad** as DRIVING DRUNK and **killing** someone. WHY do I often fail to think about HOW MY LOVE for God is often **lukewarm at best** – HOW MY TRUST in God's **will** and **ways** is often hedged with a, "I SUPPOSE **God knows** what He's doing." ***"Pondering"*** my sin and HONESTLY FACING UP to how I've treated God should ***"terrify"*** me! God SHOULD BE so frustrated and FED UP with me – so disgusted and DONE with me! God really should banish FROM His presence TO hell's eternal punishment.

Yet I – WE! – have Christmas! ***"GOOD news of GREAT joy. Unto you is born …a SAVIOR. He will SAVE His people from their sins."*** Jesus didn't become our Savior who He TURNED12 or began His **public ministry** when He was 30. FROM HIS BIRTH Jesus is our Savior. Jesus lived His whole life AS OUR SUBSTITUTE under God's law – perfectly obeying every commandment for us – perfectly trusting His heavenly Father's **will** and **ways** – perfectly loving His heavenly Father EVEN MORE than His **own life** and **comfort**. Then Jesus says, "Here, I did all this FOR YOU – you get **all the credit** FOR MY perfect life." Isn't that something to ***"treasure up and keep pondering in our hearts"***? WHAT GRACE! God's Son born **our Brother** to do all that **for us**!

Today we see Jesus the LITTLE BABY in the manger. But we cannot separate Christmas from Good Friday. We dare not **separate** the MANGER from the cross. God's Son took on our human flesh and blood to ONE DAY bleed and die on the cross as ***"the Lamb of God, who takes away the sin of the world."*** The sinless Son of God WILLINGLY took the punishment for **every single sin** of every single person – yours and mine included. Jesus endured the hell WE HAD COMING **so that** we could be reconciled and **reunited** with our heavenly Father. God's Son shed His precious blood to ***"cleanse us from all sin."*** Isn't that ALSO SOMETHING to ***"treasure up and keep pondering in our hearts"***? WHAT GRACE! God doing everything SO WE could be forgiven and live forever with Him in heaven.

But don't stop there! We can't separate Christmas from Good Friday from Easter. They're a PACKAGE DEAL **so to speak**. Our Savior who died for us rose triumphant from the dead on Easter

morning JUST AS He had promised to do! Jesus shares with us His victory over death and hell promising us eternal life in heaven when we die.

Oh, PONDER CHRISTMAS with Mary! ***"A Savior"*** – the perfect Christmas present - just what we ALL NEED. The gift that KEEPS ON **giving** – that never breaks – **never** wears out – **never** GOES OUT OF style. Ponder ALL THE PRESENTS that come with the baby Jesus – forgiveness full and free for all our sins – peace with God – a whole new relationship with God – the privilege of prayer – the COMFORT of God's abiding presence – His faithful promises – His almighty power and **control** – eternal life in heaven the **moment** we die – "the resurrection of the body and the life everlasting." WHAT GRACE!

III. Ponder God's faithfulness and ways.

"But Mary treasured up all these things, pondering them in her heart." Mary HAD PLENTY to ***"ponder"*** – from when Gabriel FIRST came to her to now in the QUIET of that first Christmas night. WHAT GRACE that God had chosen her to **be the mother** of the Savior of the world. SUCH A BLESSING that brought such complications and **troubles** into her life! Just imagine the STARES and SNICKERING **behind her back** by the gossips in Nazareth. It took an angel to CONVINCE JOSEPH that she was **really telling him** the truth. The timing of this trip to Bethlehem was DOWNRIGHT LOUSY. Then giving birth to ***"Immanuel"*** basically out IN A BARN – a ***"manger"*** – an animal's feeding trough for Jesus' first crib. It WASN'T RIGHT! It **wasn't** FAIR! It didn't make ANY SENSE! Yet it all happened JUST AS God wanted and **had promised**. You don't see that RIGHT AWAY – it actually looks like the EXACT OPPOSITE of God **being in control**. But AS Mary ***"kept pondering these things in her heart"*** – it became CLEAR and DEAR to her. God does things HIS WAY – according to HIS PLANS and **schedule**. God is ALWAYS in control – working all things out AS HE KNOWS BEST.

"Ponder" God's ways and faithfulness **with Mary** AND APPLY that to our lives today. TRUSTING in Jesus we are God's **dear, beloved children** and **heirs** of eternal life in heaven. We ARE SO BLESSED but God has never promised us a **life now** that's EASY or FAIR or RIGHT. We don't always understand what God is up to but THAT DOESN'T MEAN God doesn't know what He's doing. God doesn't explain everything to us EXCEPT TO SAY, "Trust Me – I love you."

PONDERING CHRISTMAS with Mary and seeing God's faithfulness – THAT FILLS our **hearts** and **daily lives** with the ***"peace on earth"*** the angel proclaimed to the shepherds – that ***"peace of God that goes beyond all understanding"*** – the ***"peace"*** of God's love – forgiveness – **faithfulness** – the ***"peace"*** of God's presence and promises.

2020 has been a rough year for a lot of people. But PONDERING CHRISTMAS with Mary – mulling over these OH-SO-FAMILIAR sights and **truths** – it's OK. I – WE! – need Christmas. We HAVE **Christmas**. We have God's Son born our ***"Savior."*** Merry Christmas! Amen.

EXPLANATION TO 2ND ARTICLE (in bulletin)