Guarding the Sacred Treasures of Our Hearts

But Mary treasured up all these things, pondering them in her heart. -LUKE 2:19

Introduction

In the preface to his book, *The Christ of Christmas*, James Montgomery Boice wrote these words: "Over the years, it has been my privilege as a pastor preaching at the normal worship services of a local church to come repeatedly to the Christmas season and explore the Christmas story in a variety of ways. I confess that at times I have approached the task reluctantly, particularly in later years. I have wondered, having preached so many sermons on Luke 2, Matthew 2, and related 'Christmas' passages, if I was going to be able to find anything new or even interesting for a congregation that has known those texts from childhood. But I have never been disappointed. I have always found the texts to speak in fresh ways, first to me, and then also, I hope, to my congregation."

Introduction

Over the years, I have heard many other pastors admit to similar feelings. Some, in fact, have shared with me how much they dread the Christian liturgical year (e.g. Advent, Christmas, Epiphany, Easter, etc.) for this very reason. They can't find anything new to say. My Old Testament professor, Dr. Jack Scott, however, told our class one day that we should never find ourselves in the position of having nothing further to say about the Scriptures. No one, he said, will ever be able to plumb the depths of God's Word – not even one verse. As long as we continued to read and study the Scriptures prayerfully, he claimed, we would discover new insights and gain more wisdom for our own lives as well as for those to whom we minister in Jesus' name.

Introduction

As I was preparing my own heart to celebrate Christmas this year, I was led to read and re-read one verse recorded by Luke, the author of the third Gospel. My earliest memory of this passage took me back to my high school years. The King James Version still stands out in my mind: "But Mary kept all these things, and pondered them in her heart." I loved the sound of the words – they are beautiful - but I am quite certain that I did not have the faintest idea about their meaning. I would be in college before I was introduced to Scripture memory and meditation. And once that door was opened for me, my entire life began to change. In fact, everyone who understands and practices what Mary did will, most certainly, be gloriously transformed.

Luke 2:19



"But Mary treasured up all these things, pondering them in her heart" (NASV & ESV).

"But Mary quietly treasured these things in her heart and thought about them often" (NLT).

"Mary kept all these things to herself, holding them dear, deep within herself" (*The Message*).

What It Means to Treasure Up

- When Luke wrote his Gospel, he chose a compound Greek word (syntereo = to guard + together) to describe Mary's inner thoughts after the visit of the shepherds to the manger in Bethlehem. In this context, it means to hold or treasure up (in one's memory). In the New Testament, the verb means "to guard," "to keep," "to maintain," or "to keep to oneself, conceal." The preposition before the word gives the verb an intensive sense.
- The imperfect tense of the verb indicates that her impressions were enduring. "She said nothing – it was all too sacred, too miraculous for her" (Lenski).
- Calvin observes that Mary kept the works of God "locked up in herself." She guarded the treasure entrusted to her heart.

"There is a time to keep silence" (Eccl. 3:7)

What It Means to Treasure Up

- After Daniel's vision was interpreted, the Scripture indicates that he came to the end of the matter and wrote, "As for me, Daniel, my thoughts greatly alarmed me, and my color changed, but I kept the matter in my heart" (Dan. 7:28).
- "Nor do men put new wine into old wine-skins; otherwise the wine-skins burst, and the wine pours out, and the wine-skins are ruined; but they put new wine into fresh wine-skins, and both are preserved" (Mt. 9:17). In other words, the new wine did not "spill out."

Matthew Henry

"The virgin Mary made them the matter of her *private meditation*. She said little, but kept all these things, and pondered them in her heart. She laid the evidences together, and kept them in reserve, to be compared with the discoveries that should afterwards be made by her. As she had silently left it to God to clear up her virtue, when that was suspected, so she silently leaves it to him to publish her honor now when it was veiled; and it is satisfaction enough to find that if no one else takes notice of the birth of her child, angels do. Note: The truths of Christ are worth keeping; and the way to keep them safe is to *ponder* them. Meditation is the best help to memory."

What It Means to Ponder

- Mary "pondered" these things in her heart.
- The Greek word is another compound word (symballo = to throw + together) meaning *to consider* or *ponder*.
- "The idea in the participle is that of throwing things together, comparing, letting one explain and add to another" (Lenski).
- Calvin adds that to ponder "means to put single parts together, which combine with each other to attest the glory of Christ, as it were, to make one body. Mary could not diligently weigh everything up, to find the value of them all, except by comparing one part with another."
- The OED defines *ponder* this way: "to weigh (a matter, words, etc.) mentally, esp. before making a decision or reaching a conclusion; to think over, consider, or reflect on; to wonder about."

Pondering Patiently

"Firm, unwavering trust, that knows no passing cloud, is a work of time with all who have an inner personal nearness to the Savior; and it was so with Mary. She reached it only, like us all, through manifold doubts and struggles of heart, by that grace from above which roused her ever anew, and led her on from step to step."

- J. Glentworth Butler (1892)

Pondering Patiently

"Thinking itself – what goes on in our minds – is private. And certainly the ideas we pick up from reading or listening are best evaluated, weighed, pondered, linked up with other ideas in the quiet repose that solitude alone provides in measure....Time in solitude is also important. Thinking cannot be rushed. Ideas spring to mind from the wellsprings of thought, and often they spring suddenly with what seems to be no preparation, no anticipation, just with apparent spontaneity. But for this to happen, time must be provided."

- James W. Sire

I wait for the Lord, my soul waits, and in his word I hope; my soul waits for the Lord more than watchmen for the morning. - Psalm 130:5-6

"We receive only when we are recollected;

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only in silence is heard the beating of the heart of God."

Father Bernardo Olivera

Penetrating the Incognito



C.S. Lewis 1898-1963

"We may ignore, but we can nowhere evade, the presence of God. The world is crowded with Him. He walks everywhere *incognito*. And the *incognito* is not always hard to penetrate. The real labor is to remember, to attend. In fact, to come awake. Still more, to remain awake."

Looking at Art

"We must begin by laying aside as completely as we can all our own preconceptions, interests, and associations...We must use our eyes. We must look, and go on looking till we have certainly seen exactly what is there. We sit down before the picture in order to have something done to us, not that we may do things with it. The first demand any work of art makes upon us is surrender. Look. Listen. Get yourself out of the way" (C.S. Lewis).



A Warning To Those Who Do Not Ponder

"My son, be attentive to my wisdom; incline your ear to my understanding, that you may keep discretion, and your lips may guard knowledge. For the lips of a forbidden woman drip honey, and her speech is smoother than oil, but in the end she is bitter as wormwood, sharp as a two-edged sword. Her feet go down to death; her steps follow the path to Sheol; **she does not ponder the path of life; her ways wander, and she does not know it**" (Prov. 5:1-6).



Barriers to Pondering

- Busyness
- Tiredness
- Interruptions
- Noise
- Bias
- Anxiety
- "Truth Decay" (Dr. Douglas Groothuis)
- Failure to practice the spiritual disciplines of solitude and silence.

Pondering the Christmas Narrative

- The Promise of the Birth of John the Baptist
- Gabriel's Annunciation to Mary
- Mary's Visit to Elizabeth and the Magnificat
- The Birth of John the Baptist and Zechariah's Prophecy
- The Virgin Mary, No Room in the Inn, and the Birth of Jesus
- The Angelic Visitation and the Adoration of Jesus by the Shepherds
- Herod the Great and the Wise Men
- Simeon's Psalm: Nunc Dimittis
- Anna Spreads the News of Jesus

Descending into the Heart of God

"Solitude shows us the way to let our behavior be shaped not by the compulsions of the world but by our new mind, the mind of Christ. Silence prevents us from being suffocated by our wordy world and teaches us to speak the Word of God. Finally, unceasing prayer gives solitude and silence their real meaning. In unceasing prayer, we descend with the mind into the heart. Thus we enter through our heart into the heart of God, who embraces all of history with his eternally creative and recreative love."

- Henri J.M. Nouwen