

“Pondering”

Luke 2:1-20

A Sermon by Dr. Jim Davis

Given at First Presbyterian Church of Kingwood

December 24, 2011 – Christmas Eve

Tonight, I thought I’d start off our Christmas Eve sermon in the shower! And yes, there’s a reason! You see two years ago, in 2009, Ketchum Global Research Network, a company that specializes in market research asked a thousand Americans between the ages of 25 and 54 what they think about most while they’re taking a shower.

And here are the top four answers they received:

- 41% of us said we think about “to do” lists
- 29% think about work
- 24% think about the worries they have in their lives
- And 8% of us confessed we simply daydream

And when I first read that bit of market research, a couple of thoughts went through my mind. First, “Why would anybody care about the thoughts people think in the shower? But then it came to me. Maybe we should all care. Because what we think about in the shower actually says a lot about us. Apparently we’re who start our mornings or finish our evenings pondering over places we need to go, people we need to see, things we need to do.

And what a difference there is between thoughts like those and the thoughts Mary probably pondered. For you see we know something about Mary’s thoughts that first Christmas Eve. Like the careful doctor he is, Luke doesn’t forget to tell us about it. You see at the end of making his rounds through the Christmas story Luke takes time to write on Mary’s chart a brief note about her state of mind.

And according to his note, Mary’s mind that night wasn’t occupied by “to do lists.” She wasn’t thinking about work or worries. Truth is her mind wasn’t troubled at all. Instead it was treasuring. That’s what Luke says. It was storing away “all these things” that had been happening to her. It was engaged in an amazing process of prioritizing memories.

You know, in recent years, science has helped us understand more about what an

amazing computer the human brain really is. It turns out in the course of every waking day the human brain processes 10 megabytes of sensory data every second. It collects the data, organizes it into thoughts and then stores the thoughts away.

No thought, research has shown, is ever left out. Everything you've seen, or heard is stored somewhere in your memory. But your memory has a file system and it's carefully prioritized. Most of what the thoughts you and I have are prioritized at such a low level that they pass quickly out of our conscious memory. But other thoughts are different. They're given higher values that keep them available to us. Then they're prioritized again, so that some of them become thoughts we use every day others thoughts we consider occasionally, and a few into special memories, memories we treasure.

In his 2010 biography, former British Prime Minister Tony Blair wrote about a friend whose mother had a treasured memory. "A friend of mine," he writes, "whose parents were immigrants, Jews from Europe who came to America in search of safety, told me this story. His parents lived and worked in New York. They were not well off. His father died when he was young. His mother lived on, and in time my friend succeeded and became wealthy. He often used to offer his mother the chance to travel outside America. She never did.

When eventually she died, they went back to recover the safety box where she kept her jewelry. They found there another box. There was no key. So they had to drill it open. They wondered what precious jewel must be in it. They lifted the lid.

There was wrapping and more wrapping and finally an envelope. Intrigued, they opened it. In the envelope were her U.S. citizenship papers: nothing more! That was the jewel. That was more precious to her than any other possession. It was the memory she treasured."

What's the memory you treasure? And where do you keep it? Is it a letter you leave in a special drawer in your desk, a book that sits on a special shelf, a picture you put in a special place? Most of us have something, somewhere. And maybe Mary did too. Maybe she kept a piece of straw from the manger or a scrap torn from one of the swaddling clothes. But if she did, we don't know about it.

No, what we know for sure is only that Mary kept her memories in a special place inside her mind. She "treasured all these things" Luke tells us, and he probably means everything that happened to her before she came to Bethlehem and everything that had happened to her afterwards. She "treasured all these things."

And “she pondered them” Luke says “in her heart.”

In Italy, there’s a city called Cremona. It’s about 60 miles southeast of Milan. And in Cremona lives a man called Andreas, Andreas Mosconi. He has a unique vocation. You see for the last 30 years, six days a week, early in the morning he walks to the City Hall. He goes to a climate controlled glass display case that is in a museum there. And before the museum opens, he takes out a key, unlocks the case, takes out one of the three or four hundred year old violins that are stored there, and starts to play it.

There are eight violins in the case and he plays each one 6 or 7 minutes. Over the course of the next hour, he plays instruments built by the Great Makers; Amatis, Guarneris and Stardiveris. Why? Because even great antique violins need to do more than just sit in a case. They need to be played. "The wood gets tired," an expert explains. "It's the same as with a human being. If you just sit and rest in your chair every day doing nothing, after a while, you won't be able to remember much of anything."

And somehow in her heart, Mary knew that. She knew her memories needed to be pondered, played and replayed in her mind if they were going to stay fresh. So she treasured them, Luke says. She kept thinking through them, turning words and events over and over in her memory. She pondered them. And though we can't know everything she pondered, from what Luke writes, we can know some things.

We can know for instance that Mary pondered the day “all these things” began. “Greetings, Mary! The Lord is with you. You’re going to conceive and give birth to a son. And you are to give him the name Jesus.” Those were Gabriel’s words. And Mary treasured those words, remembered them, pondered them. We know she did, because nine months later, “when it was time to circumcise” her newborn son “he was named Jesus,” Luke says, “the name the angel gave him before he was conceived.” So we know Mary pondered at least that part of the past. And she probably pondered more.

We know for instance that she pondered the promises; the promises God made in the Old Testament about the Messiah, the Savior he would someday send to redeem His people. Mary treasured those promises. We know it because she spoke about some of them with her cousin Elizabeth. “My soul,” she told Elizabeth, “and my spirit rejoices in God my Savior.”

And here’s the really interesting part. You see in Hebrew the words “God my

Savior” are actually a name: *Yehoshua*. It’s the name Jesus. And Mary knew that. And because she made that connection, she probably made others too. Did you know there are more than 70 prophetic promises made about the Messiah in the Old Testament? And they detail not only what his name would be. They specify things about what he would do, how he would die, where he would be buried.

They also give details about his birth, more than a dozen of them. They give glimpses in advance about who his mother will be, what his genealogy will be, the city where he’ll be born, and some specific events that will surround his birth. Promises, prophetic promises, written centuries before they all took place; but all of them were fulfilled when Jesus was born.

So you see it’s not really guesswork. We know Mary knew the Old Testament. We know she knew at least some of the promises. We know she treasured them, pondered them looked for their fulfillment. Then, on the night Jesus was born God she discovered other people were being directed by God to do the same.

“Now there were shepherds living out in the fields, keeping watch over their flocks at night. And an angel of the Lord appeared to them. The glory of the Lord shone around them, and they were terrified. But the angel said to them, ‘Don’t be afraid. I bring you good news of great joy that will be for all people. Today in the city of David a Savior has been born to you. He is the Messiah, the Lord. And this will be a sign to you: You will find a baby wrapped in cloths and lying in a manger.’”

And when the Shepherds came to the manger and told everyone their experience, Mary added it her memories. She put their words with the other words she treasured there. And she pondered them. She kept going back to them, thinking them over pondering their meaning for her life. And we need to do the same thing.

So this Christmas, I want to invite you to consider pondering something different than the things we usually think about. This Christmas I want to invite you to ponder what Mary pondered.

I want to invite you to ponder the words Gabriel spoke to her. I want to invite you to ponder the meaning of the name of Jesus. For the name means God my Savior. I want to invite you to ponder all the prophetic promises that were fulfilled in Jesus’ life and death and birth. I want to invite you to ponder the report of the shepherds. I want to invite you to ponder “all these things.”

Then I want to invite you to do one thing more. I want to invite you to put your

trust in them, “all these things” and the truth they tell you: that Jesus was born to be your Savior. Maybe you’ve never done that before, put your trust in the truth about Jesus, the whole truth. But if you haven’t, then let me invite you to consider doing it tonight.

You know it was just a few months ago now that one of the most influential men in America died. His name was Steve Jobs, and when he died a speech that he’d given surfaced again. It was a speech he delivered in 2005 to the graduates of Stanford University. And in the speech, there was one section that I’d like to read to you right now. And I hope you’ll listen to it carefully this Christmas and ponder what it’s really saying to you.

“You can't connect the dots looking forward,” Steve said. “You can only connect them looking backwards. So you have to trust that ... You have to trust in something; your gut, destiny, life, karma, whatever.”

And he was right. You do. But I’m here tonight to tell you, you don’t have to trust in “whatever.” You can trust in “all these things,” all these things God did to show you that Jesus Christ was born into this world of ours to be your Savior.

Let’s pray ...