

Christmas Eve, 7:00 PM
December 24, 2022
Text: Luke 2:1-20

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Portland, Oregon

One of the things I've always loved most about Christmas Eve is the quiet that comes after: after Christmas Eve dinner and after presents have been opened; after the worship service with singing and candles and the happy, smiling faces of people I love. After all of the busyness is over, there's a quiet pause. After a full evening that has stretched late into the night, packed with activity and people and memories and all sorts of feelings, in the quiet I let all of the experiences of the day come back to me for a moment—to treasure them, to ponder them. In the quiet, I give thanks for all the wonderful, beautiful people who are part of my life. I give thanks for those who were part of my life in years past, and are still with me in memory. I give thanks for this holy season and the love that binds us together.

I wonder if it was something like that for Mary. Luke tells us how she “treasured all these words and pondered them in her heart.” So much had happened—the unexpected pregnancy, the unexpected journey to Bethlehem, giving birth to her first child, and the unexpected visitors, shepherds who had come with a story of angels appearing to them, telling them that the baby in the stable would be the Messiah. It was so much to take in—not just being a mother, but being entrusted with caring for this child, through whom God would bring peace and blessing to God's people! She treasured everything the shepherds said and wondered what would come next.

This wouldn't be the only time Mary would treasure and ponder what she experienced with her son. When Jesus was 12, his parents were surprised to find him in the temple engaged in deep conversation with the priests and teachers of Israel's faith. And Mary treasured these things. In fact, through the rest of Jesus' life, as he embodied the promise and blessing and call of God, it was both a source of comfort and challenge for Mary. I imagine she treasured and pondered often—what does this all mean? What does God want for me, or from me?

This is one of the things we do together as a congregation: we treasure the story of Jesus and ponder, “What does this mean for us?” We treasure how Jesus was born to be God with us. We treasure how Jesus spent his life working for healing and reconciliation. We treasure how Jesus called people to follow his way of compassion and forgiveness. We treasure how Jesus gathered a community where all people are welcome and every person is valued. We let our hearts be opened by Jesus' words and by his example of love.

And we ponder, “What does this mean for us?” What sort of goals should I have for the coming year in light of Jesus' way of love? How should I deal with the difficult people in my life in light of Jesus' practice of forgiveness? Is there really anything I should be afraid of in light of God's eternal faithfulness? When we treasure the story of Jesus and ponder how it speaks to us, it does something powerful in our lives. It removes from the center all the things we often focus on—our wants and desires, our fears, our wishes—and instead puts love in the center. As we treasure the story of Jesus together, it provokes us to ponder how our lives will be expressions

of love. I wonder how Jesus will comfort and challenge you, so that your life will reflect the beauty of his way of compassion, so that the people who are part of your life will see love at the center of who you are.

One of the most beautiful things about Christmas is this recentering around love. I pray that, for all of us, this Christmas would turn our attention to God's great love for us and for the whole world, and then provoke us to ponder how that beautiful love will come to birth through us. Thanks be to God. Amen.