

We are continuing our Silent Advent meditations this week with the silence of Mary. Last week, we had a look at Zechariah and his angel imposed silence, then on Sunday we heard Mary's Song of praise, but she also took out a moment for silence, and we find that in:

Luke 2:15-19 *When the angels went away from them into heaven, the shepherds said to one another, "Let us go over to Bethlehem and see this thing that has happened, which the Lord has made known to us." ¹⁶ And they went with haste and found Mary and Joseph, and the baby lying in a manger. ¹⁷ And when they saw it, they made known the saying that had been told them concerning this child. ¹⁸ And all who heard it wondered at what the shepherds told them. ¹⁹ But Mary treasured up all these things, pondering them in her heart.*

Have you ever been around a raging river? Here in Florida, I don't think we get those at all, but around the rest of the country, when it starts raining hard and the rivers start moving large volumes of water, the rate of flow can pick up rather quickly. And it can be extremely dangerous. Rivers start tearing through the surrounding landscape, causing large chunks earth to crumble into the water, sweeping up trees and structures along the way. Warnings will be sent out on the nightly news, "Stay away from the river's edge because the current can be deadly."

Having witnessed such raging rivers from safe distances, the last thing that I could ever imagine doing would be jumping into those waters "just to see what it would be like." And yet that is exactly what you and I tend to do throughout our lives. We witness the chaos that is life in 21st century America—we marvel at the fast-moving current of all the distractions that our society props up—and our reaction is often to plug our nose and to dive in. We can easily fall into the trap of trying to wade through the waters of this world, thinking that we have to do so to keep up, but the truth is that these are deadly waters that can easily overwhelm us and drown our souls.

Now God does not want us to hide from the world, He doesn't want us to just cloister ourselves in the mountains somewhere and wait out our days, since He Himself instructs us that we are to be *in the world*, just not *of* the world (cf. Matthew 5:14-16; John 15:18-19, John 17:14-16). Since we are *in* the world there will be a sort of "rat race" characteristic to our lives here on this earth. But it doesn't mean we ought to spend our days in the riptide of trying to keep up with everyone else. No, rather, in recognition of how chaotic life can become, this should help us realize how important and valuable a time like Advent is—a time to silently meditate on the things not of this world but of God.

Wise King Solomon was a seasoned veteran in being swept up by the currents of this life, and he once wrote in Ecclesiastes: ***"To everything there is a season, a time for every purpose under heaven: A time to be born, and a time to die...a time to break down, and a time to build up; A time to weep, and a time to laugh; a time to mourn, and a time to dance...A time to gain, and a time to lose; a time to keep, and a time to throw away...A time to keep silence, and a time to speak"*** (Ecclesiastes 3:1ff). Life cannot be just laughing and dancing and singing and speaking all the time. Sin ruined that. Though we prefer to speak, or to sing, there also needs to be silence to meditate on what God says.

Today, we learn a valuable lesson from the "highly-favored one"—Mary. Do you remember her simple response when the angel told her what was about to happen to her? No strutting, no bragging, no prideful puffing out of the chest. There simply came the humble reply, ***"Behold the maidservant of***

the Lord. Let it be to me according to your word” (Luke 1:38). Her response, together with what we read about her in our text, give us the sort of model Christian with which our God is well-pleased.

Now in these words from Luke 2, we see that sort of “Songs and Silence” dynamic which we’ve been considering all Advent season. The angels came to tell the shepherds that a Savior was born to them in Bethlehem, that He’d be lying in a manger. They ran with haste to see this for themselves. And afterwards we’re told **“When they saw it, they made known the saying that had been told them concerning this child.”** Clearly this was a good and appropriate response since our text tells us that **“All who heard it wondered at what the shepherds told them.”** Literally, the people were marveling, standing in awe at everything that had been revealed to them. This was the Great Commission put into action—the shepherds heard the good news, and then it was their turn to proclaim and sing.

Yet the very next line of our text gives us the balance that is so necessary in our lives: **“But Mary treasured up all these things, pondering them in her heart.”** Consider for a moment the chaos and turmoil of Mary’s life from the day the angel announced to her that she would be the mother of her God. How could she possibly comprehend that the Son of God would grow in her womb, that she would give birth to Him, that she would nurse and provide for and protect and comfort the Promised Savior of the World? Just a little over a week later, Simeon would announce to her in the temple: **“Behold, this Child is destined for the fall and rising of many in Israel, and for a sign which will be spoken against (yes, a sword will pierce through your own soul also), that the thoughts of many hearts may be revealed”** (Luke 2:34-35). How would Mary ever come to terms with what was happening to her and through her?

Well, we’re told what she did. She **“Treasured up all these things, pondering them in her heart.”** She didn’t just file these words in the back of her mind to be remembered at a later date. The word for “treasured up,” it refers to keeping something at the forefront of your mind, giving it a prominent place so that you won’t soon forget it. But her goal was not simply to not forget anything she’d seen, because then we’re also told she was pondering them. It’s presented as an ongoing action for her, she literally, “continued tossing these words about in her heart.” In short, it was the Word of God that was continually on her mind.

So what are we supposed to learn from all this?

Certainly one of our greatest challenges in life is to learn that we cannot figure everything out if only we can learn to apply ourselves. That type of notion is purely humanistic. Humanists seek to understand everything by their own power and their own insight. And a closely-related piece of advice is that everyone needs a little, “me time.” Take some time to relax, empty your mind of everything, and just focus on you. Some of the most popular phone apps out there are meditation apps, which are purposed to help you achieve that mental peace and quiet.

Now, I’m certainly not against taking time to relax; down-time is important. But what’s even more important than getting some down-time is how you spend that down-time. In many forms of meditation, like transcendental meditation, the goal is to completely empty the mind, to think of nothing at all. That may sound like a welcome idea, the only problem is that the mind isn’t meant to be empty. If you’ve tried to do that in the past, you probably quickly learned that something is always

rushing back in to fill up the void. And as humans with sinful hearts and minds, so often our absent-minded moments are filled with anger, fear, anxiety, and any other sort of sinful mental vice.

And that's not what Mary did. Yes, she had a little quiet time, but it wasn't to empty her mind. Instead she kept it filled with her dearest treasure: the Word of God concerning Her Son. And she wasn't about to let anything else take its prominent place. Again and again, she considered these words, she meditated on these words, she spent her down time considering exactly what God had said.

This Advent Season, let's take out some time to do the very same thing. It's time to chase away our fears and our worries and return to God's Word. We need to spend time meditating upon what the Scriptures tell us about Jesus. We need to take some quiet moments to turn these things over again and again in our mind, making every effort to understand what is the height and depth of God's love. (cf. Ephesians 1:18-23)

Let's not be satisfied to wade in the kiddie pool end of heavenly wisdom when there is so much more. Let's dive in, and strive to swim in the deep end, to understand better the depths of God's Love for us.

Let's not consider Christmas with a detached wonderment, as if the birth of Christ is just a nice story of an eventful birth of a child to a poor woman more than 2,000 years ago. Rather, after meditating upon the Word of God, let's celebrate the birth of the one who loved you before time began and who died with your rescue on His mind.

Let's not consider that death with a detached sorrow as if his was just another sad death of a 1st Century human being under Roman tyranny. Instead, after meditating upon the Word of God, we celebrate that He—Son of Mary and Son of God—went to the cross so that His death might be timeless, an event that carries an important impact even 2000 years later, as it is God's guarantee of life and love for you.

I think the shepherds also had a little quiet time to reflect upon these things. After all, we're told in our text that they immediately made widely known everything that was told them, but then in the verse after our text, we're told, ***"The shepherds returned, glorifying and praising God for all the things that they had heard and seen, as it was told them."*** (Luke 2:20) After they'd finished spreading the news, they took out a moment for personal worship.

Certainly, we've also been given good news to share this Advent season, but the birth of the Savior isn't only news for others. It's personal for me. It's personal for you. Jesus did not just come to this earth to save others, He came to save *me*. It would truly be a tragedy if we did not take time like Mary, to ponder in our hearts the significance of these facts—that God loves *me*, and that God died for the forgiveness of all *my* sins.

So on this day, let's step out of the swirling torrent of news and things and worries and sports and everything else, and let's ponder how personal our Savior's birth is for each of us. May the Holy Spirit bless us as we treasure up these things and ponder them in our hearts. Amen.

"And the peace of God, which surpasses all understanding, will guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus." (Philippians 4:7) Amen.