

Ponder These Things
Sermon: Christmas Eve
December 24, 2015; 4 pm

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[Isaiah 9:2-7](#)
[Luke 2:1-14, \(15-20\)](#)

Merry Christmas! Do you feel that? Shout it again. Merry Christmas! This is the night we celebrate a mystery so big, so profound, so joyous, that we simply can't contain ourselves! We have to shout, "Merry Christmas!"

We can't contain ourselves because, as our opening Collect says, we are people who have known the mystery of the true Light on earth. Even if we can't explain it, which basically no one really can, we can feel it. Merry Christmas! Something hugely mysterious happened when Jesus was born.

For any of you who have either given birth or been present for the birth of a child or even an animal, you know intimately the profound thing that happens at the birth of new life. It's clearly so much more than just a chemical/biological interaction that produces a human being. It's so much more than science. It's a miracle. Something much bigger than us is involved. One word for it is God. Another is mystery.

We are made of mystery. And we encounter that mystery again and again throughout our lives, whether it's entering the magical world of play as a child, experiencing the life changing emotion of deep love for another human being, or losing all track of time as we create art, or hearing a song or seeing a view that takes you to a thin place that words can't describe. In our deepest souls, we are designed from, we are programmed for, and we yearn to encounter mystery.

The Christian tradition is founded on this mystery. We believe that God is not only the starting point of all creation, not by literally creating it in 7 days, but through some amazingly complex and masterfully creative manner. But then somehow, God also became fully human in the person of Jesus. I don't know how God did that. No amount of seminary or bible reading can ever really explain it. But something so hugely significant happened 2,000 years ago that people are still talking about it today, drawn to the mystery of this birth story and molding our lives around Jesus' life, death, and resurrection.

I believe that everything in the Bible is true. And I believe that some of it actually happened. Whatever happened 2,000 years ago with Jesus and Mary and Joseph, the shepherds and angels, Herod and Pilate, the apostles and the Romans – some of it actually happened and is historically verifiable, but all of it describes a deep,

universal truth. The true Light. And you know why I believe it was and is true? It's because we can't fully describe it; it still holds mystery.

Even the first people who heard the story couldn't fully explain it. Luke writes, "And all they that heard it wondered at those things which were told them by the shepherds" (Luke 2:18). It was obviously something so significant, but also something so hard to understand, that they kept telling more people about it to try to make sense of it. The shepherds and locals wondered about Jesus' birth that night, and you and I are sitting in this church here tonight still wondering what it means.

But look at what Mary did. She did more than just wonder about it. Luke says, "But Mary kept all these things, and pondered them in her heart." (Luke 2:19) She pondered them in her heart. That word "pondered" is very important. In the original language of the New Testament, the Greek word for pondered is "*symballo*" which means to throw things together, to encounter, or to ponder. This word is related to another Greek word, *symbolein*, which is where we get our word for symbol. Symbols are actions that embody relationships, they combine or throw together something invisible with something visible; something indescribable with something tangible. In the church, we call these symbols sacraments.

So pondering isn't a passive activity. It's active. If we're to follow Mary's example and really ponder the meaning of the coming of God into human form, then we are to live our lives in such a way that we are sacraments. We are to take actions that embody the belief that God is with us. So, ponder being agents of hope – stick with tasks and relationships even when they're hard. Ponder being wonderful counselors – sit and patiently listen to your friends even when you'd rather be checking Facebook. Ponder being princes and princesses of peace – seek compromise and strive to find common ground. Really ponder being the power that brings about comfort and safety – give extravagantly to those in need and consistently follow rules and laws and best practices in your jobs and at school. And if we truly ponder being the most powerful transmitters of love – find time every day to pause long enough to really look someone in the eye and tell them you love them or care about them, or if you've been fighting with someone, stop the spiral of anger and resentment and forgive them or apologize. Like Mary, we can ponder, we can be sacraments. We can act as if God is really with us!

When you leave here tonight, whether it's to a quiet night at home alone, or to a big family gathering, wherever you go, think about mystery and the many ways you experience God. And as you enter 2016 to encounter whatever joys and sorrows await, don't forget that the mystery of Jesus' birth is bookended by the mystery of his death and resurrection. God didn't just show up for the joy of birth, but also showed up for the pain of loss and the grief of death. There may be times when you can't shout for joy, when times are hard, when you're hurt or sad or scared. But as the prophet Isaiah foretells, Jesus our Emmanuel, Jesus our God with us, will ultimately remove the rod of oppression and transform the blood of our pain into fuel to keep us warm and shed new light.

Christ wasn't just born in Bethlehem 2000 years ago. Christ is the sacrament that is born every day, every time we act as if God is with us.

So one more time, with gusto: Merry Christmas!