

The Rev. Luke Selles
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“But Mary treasured all these words and pondered them in her heart.” In the name of the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit. Amen.

I like to imagine Mary telling this story to Luke, the writer of our Gospel. That last line that Mary treasured all these words and pondered them in her heart, is a small window into what that strange and glorious and perhaps terrifying night might have been like. There’s a lot of things that would have been confusing for her as it is for us. There isn’t much to say to something as stunning as shepherds running to you after your child has just been born to declare a vision of angels, and these from the mouth of strangers.

Some say that she probably was having a quiet, devotional moment, but I imagine that from the beginning of the story from her journeying through to Bethlehem on a donkey several months pregnant unsure of where she would end up, to finally finding a place in a stable, not really a fit place for a birth, and then the terrors of the actual birth. And then to be greeted the next morning by strangers declaring what a wonder her child is. In the Greek the word for “treasured” can also be translated as “preserve, keep safe, maintain.” And there’s this echo to the Hebrew in which the same word, the same concept was used to talk about the Jewish observance of God’s Law, the Torah. It’s a diligent, attentive effort to maintain the condition or state. So, it’s not only the sense that Mary, as a new mother, was lovingly holding her child, holding onto those moments. She was also doing theological work. The word for “pondered” was used in the Greek to talk about and was used in settings in which they would gather to discuss wisdom, and it emphasized reflection and discernment. And in the New Testament, it always took on a spiritual dimension. And of course, “heart,” as we’ve spoken about before, was used to talk about the core of the human identity and spiritual life, the place where God communicates with humans and where faith and understanding reside.

She could not have understood all that was said and done, but she received it in faith. When we think about the Incarnation, God, the Almighty God, the God that had been testified to by her ancestors, the Scriptures that she would have known, it's almost impossible to imagine her reaction to now considering this child, this child who has taken on her flesh, our human form, as that God. And then to have these strangers testify that "Glory to God in the highest," that indeed, the Almighty God is *here*. Whose face, whose tiny face she's looking into.

Some have called Mary the first disciple. And I imagine that as she went through her life caring and nourishing Jesus her son, she had many moments to ponder and consider. But she is one of the few disciples that remained with him to the very end to see that holy and beloved flesh on the cross. The mystery of the Resurrection is also present here. Jesus came as a tiny, vulnerable baby. He came upon the Earth without thrones, without dominions, without powers, and he goes out in the same way. And yet, throughout his life, throughout his birth, and his death, and his resurrection, there are always the echoes of Eternity. Amen.