

Dec 24, Xmas Eve

TREASURES OF THE HEART

Our journey to Bethlehem has come to an end. The question that needs to be answered is this. Have we found the joy of that first Christmas that others found? Does Christmas still excite us? Oh, not for the presents under the tree, but the presence of God found in a manger? We here have journeyed these weeks of Advent preparing for this night. Songs have been sung reminding us of the Christmas story, the story of Christ's birth. We have followed Mary and Joseph and their trip to Bethlehem. We have listened to the angels telling the shepherds that to them and the whole world a Savior has been born. We have followed the wise men following a star leading them to this very scene where Mary and Joseph and the whole world continue to celebrate the birth of God's Holy Child. It's a simple story, but one that has rocked the world for centuries.

As we come this Christmas Eve and sit in front of the manger scene I wonder what Mary and Joseph are thinking? I wonder what Jesus is thinking? Mary did God let you in on what was to come? Mary did you know the rejections that faced your son? Did you know the heartaches you would feel on his behalf? Mary did you know this little baby you gave birth to on this night would have many, many people celebrating his birth year after year? Did you know lots of lives would be changed all because of this night? Mary, did you know all that? Through all those years following Jesus' birth did you treasure each event, each healing, each joy, each praise in your heart so that when things got tough you had the strength to carry on? As you looked down upon your baby that night...the night when Christ was born, Mary did you know how the world would be changed and you would be remembered forever?

“Mary did you know that your Baby boy would one day walk on water? Mary did you know that your Baby Boy would save our sons and daughters? Did you know that your Baby Boy has come to make you new; this Child that you delivered will soon deliver you... .. Mary did you know that your Baby Boy will give sight to a blind man?”

Mary did you know that your baby Boy will calm the storm with his hand? Did you know that your Baby Boy has walked where Angels trod? When you kiss your Baby Boy, you kiss the face of God!.... Mary did you know that your Baby Boy is Lord of all creation? Mary did you know that your baby Boy will one day rule the nations? Did you know that your Baby Boy is heaven's perfect lamb? This sleeping Child you're holding is THE GREAT I AM!"

What do you remember of past Christmases? Do you remember traveling to be with family in the snow? Do you remember last minute shopping getting that last gift that you had forgotten? Do you remember certain Christmas Eve services that touched your heart strings? Do you remember the joys of opening a gift or two on Christmas Eve or sneaking down early in the morning to see what Santa left you? Do you remember singing Silent Night Holy Night as lights go out in the sanctuary and candles are being lit? What thoughts of Christmas have you treasured in your hearts, those memories that brought you joy?

Our choir sang, *"Mary rest upon the hay, now your labor's done. Next to you in swaddling clothes, lies your firstborn son."*

On this night Mary did not know all the fuss and commotion that one day would come into the world because of this birth. Did God give her a peak into the future about these things, about her Son? Perhaps not because then, well she would not be able to face the future. That's why God doesn't let us know very much about our future. He just says, "Fear not! I am with you." Ah yes, Mary, Joseph and the shepherds had heard those words to fear not. All she knew was it had been a strange, but wonderful 9 months since that visit from the angel that told her she had found favor in the eyes of God. The message she was given that she had been chosen to be the mother of God's son. Through the power of the Holy Spirit she would become pregnant as a virgin and deliver God's only begotten son when the time had come. A shocked Mary, and later a shocked Joseph tried to understand it all. Thankfully, God's messengers kept assuring them that this gift

she was carrying was a gift to the whole world. This time had been planned from the beginning of creation. The angel told her that Jesus would be his name for he would be Savior of the world. He would be called Emmanuel because he would be God with us. As Mary thought of these things she treasured them in her heart.

Then she visited her cousin Elizabeth to tell her what had happened. She too was pregnant. She had never been able to conceive yet even in her old age God blessed her with a pregnancy. She was to call his name John, for he would lead the way for the Savior. When Mary arrived at Elizabeth's home the baby inside of Elizabeth jumped with joy and she said to Mary, "*Blessed are you among women, and blessed is the child you will bear.... Blessed is she who has believed that what the Lord has said to her will be accomplished.*"

Nine months later, a trip from Nazareth to Bethlehem's rocky roads on a donkey, finding no room at any inn because they were full, she was miserable because it was time to deliver her baby. Her husband pleaded and begged for a place at each door he knocked without finding one. But, when doors are closed God opens others, and at the last inn on the outskirts of town, before he shut the door for the final time, the innkeeper looked beyond his inn to a stable and pointed, "You can rest there, if you'd like. It's not much, but water is available, and not many animals are there. You can find warmth from the cold night so your wife can have her baby." So Mary and Joseph made their way to the stable and Joseph set Mary down to rest as he set up a place for her to have God's only begotten son. He swept out the dust, got fresh hay bundles to block some of the cold and make it a little more comfortable. He took the trough that some animals had drank from and cleaned it out with fresh water and lay hay in it for a bed for the baby and when all those chores were done, he sat beside Mary and they waited for the baby to be born.

Mary tucked all these things in her heart. The kindness of the innkeeper... Joseph willing to still take her as wife even though she was pregnant. What a miracle that was.

It had to be the hand of God. She thought of the many miles they traveled to this point and now, they sat and waited. What would God's Son look like? How would they raise him? With every pain came more excitement until.....until.....until a cry of a baby being born. And when it did the heavens seemed to light up so brightly that it was almost as if it was daylight. It seemed the angels from heaven sang "Joy to the world the Lord is come. Let earth receive her King." The animals that were grazing in the fields made their way to the manger and plunked on the ground to see the baby as if they knew what was going on and they too had come to worship their King. Joseph handed the baby to Mary to nurse and to clean and when she finished she sang lullabies she knew from when she was a child and her mother sang to her. She was happy and thanked God for the gift that was given to her.... The gift that would change the life of the whole world. And she and Joseph beamed with delight that night, the night when Christ was born.

But that was just the beginning for angels sang of his coming to the lowly shepherds in the field in Bethlehem as they told them that unto them a child had been born in a manger who was Christ the Lord. They could see the light of a star shining brightly reaching from heaven to a spot that seemed to be calling them to come and see. So they left their flocks and traveled to see this new baby. When they arrived at the manger a startled Mary and Joseph just looked at them. They said, "We have come to see the Christ child. We have come to see God's Son whom he sent to us and the whole world so that whoever believes in him can have eternal life. We have come to worship him." Then they knelt in adoration. And Mary smiled, and touched Joseph's hand with glee. How did they know? How did they know? And Mary felt her heart pound with joy as they worshipped and she treasured all of it in her heart.

Later, 3 wise men came and they too knelt in front of Jesus and told their story of following the star and they came in search of the King of kings. When they knelt before him, one presented the precious gift of gold, a gift for royalty, a gift fit for a king, another frankincense, a gift that would anoint his ministry and his death, and the last the

gift of myrrh, a gift that one day he would suffer and die to set the world free from the bondage of sin. Mary cuddled Jesus in her arms as she came closer to the wise men in order for them to look deeply into his eyes...or perhaps so Jesus could look closely into their eyes to see their hearts full of joy, to smile at them in recognition of their gifts. And Mary treasured these memories in her heart.

This Advent season our choir and each message has guided us to this night, this stable, this little baby lying in the manger who is Christ the Lord. Each Christmas since the church began to celebrate Jesus' birth people have joined in this celebration. This is no ordinary night to remember. It's the night when Christ was born. This is no ordinary baby lying in the manger, it's God's only begotten son, Savior of the world. Those we place at the manger year after year are those who help us remember the greatest gift that God could give the world, his son, the gift of salvation, for as Scripture states, "for unto us a child is given who is Savior of the world."

In a few moments as we leave this sanctuary and go to our homes with our families we go with the knowledge that God loves us so much that he gave us his son. Let's never forget the power and mystery of this moment. Let's recapture the joy that it brings year after year, for unto us a child is born that is our Savior.

I hope we too will treasure all these things in our heart. Treasure the knowledge that the gift of salvation awaits all who will receive. Treasure the knowledge that like the shepherds, all are called and invited to come to the Savior. Treasure the knowledge that the wise men came bringing their gifts and worshipped the King. Treasure in your heart that the little baby boy lying in the manger grew up to show us God's love. Like a hymn states, "what gift can I give him? I give him my heart."

The treasures of our hearts aren't always the gifts that are under the tree each year. The treasures of our hearts is knowing he came to this earth just for me...just for you...for the whole world.

Listen as our choir sings its final tribute to Mary and Joseph, and to baby Jesus. Follow along reading the words to YOU ARE LORD. Let your heart be at peace. Let the joy of Christmas once more be a reality to everyone. Tonight maybe a miracle has happened in someone life. Maybe you have found that peace you were seeking. Maybe you have found the answer to your prayers. For Christmas is a time of miracles for unto a child has been given who is the Christ. Merry Christmas! May the joy and miracles of Christmas live on.