

*In those days a decree went out from Emperor Augustus that all the world should be registered. 2This was the first registration and was taken while Quirinius was governor of Syria. 3All went to their own towns to be registered. 4Joseph also went from the town of Nazareth in Galilee to Judea, to the city of David called Bethlehem, because he was descended from the house and family of David. 5He went to be registered with Mary, to whom he was engaged and who was expecting a child. 6While they were there, the time came for her to deliver her child. 7And she gave birth to her firstborn son and wrapped him in bands of cloth, and laid him in a manger, because there was no place for them in the inn.*

*8In that region there were shepherds living in the fields, keeping watch over their flock by night. 9Then an angel of the Lord stood before them, and the glory of the Lord shone around them, and they were terrified. 10But the angel said to them, "Do not be afraid; for see—I am bringing you good news of great joy for all the people: 11to you is born this day in the city of David a Savior, who is the Messiah, the Lord. 12This will be a sign for you: you will find a child wrapped in bands of cloth and lying in a manger." 13And suddenly there was with the angel a multitude of the heavenly host, praising God and saying, 14"Glory to God in the highest heaven, and on earth peace among those whom he favors!" 15When the angels had left them and gone into heaven, the shepherds said to one another, "Let us go now to Bethlehem and see this thing that has taken place, which the Lord has made known to us." 16So they went with haste and found Mary and Joseph, and the child lying in the manger. 17When they saw this, they made known what had been told them about this child; 18and all who heard it were amazed at what the shepherds told them. 19But Mary treasured all these words and pondered them in her heart. 20The shepherds returned, glorifying and praising God for all they had heard and seen, as it had been told them.*

But Mary treasured all these things and pondered them in her heart.

The story of Jesus birth is a story to be treasured,

And pondered.

I looked up that word in the dictionary. To ponder. to consider deeply, to meditate. to weigh carefully in the mind or consider carefully. That is what Mary did with all these things – the angel coming to announce that she would give birth, the journey to Bethlehem, no room in the inn. The angels coming to shepherds, the shepherds coming to see and their telling Mary. Mary pondered all of these things.

Long ago the Lord spoke these words through the prophet Isaiah. "My thoughts are not your thoughts neither are my ways your ways," declares the Lord. "For as the heavens are higher than the earth so are my ways higher than your ways and my thoughts higher than your thoughts."

For ages people had imagined how God would come and rescue God's people. They imagined a leader coming with a sword to slaughter every enemy of God and of God's people, Israel. But no one had ever imagined this. A

woman still a virgin giving birth to one called the Son of God. That is what the angel had promised, that is what had come to pass. It was a situation that surely had the neighbors whispering, pointing an accusing finger – maybe the decree from the emperor that forced Mary and Joseph to journey to Bethlehem was met with relief. Mary could get away from the judgmental stares and the gossiping tongues.

And what about that decree? Had the almighty caused the emperor to order it just so that God's Son might be born in the hometown of David, the great king of Israel? God could do that. Was it a way for God to show how God is at work, unseen, unnoticed within the great and momentous events in the world? Was the manger also part of God's plan? No room in the inn – part of God's plan. Why might God want that for God's own Son? The thing about pondering is that there is no answer given, no one who responds. Just thoughts, questions, considering.

The angel coming to the shepherds - of all people shepherds. On the employment ladder they were on the bottom rung, minimum wage hired help. But it was to them that angels came. Only they heard the announcement: "To you is born this day in the city of David, a savior, who is the Messiah, the Lord."

To you. The angels did not make an impersonal announcement. Though they announced that they brought good news of a great joy for all the people still when they declared the birth they said, "To you." I love everybody is a far different word than I love you. Jesus may be sent for all but he is born for you - to you. God does not seek that you know some things about God – God's Son was born of Mary so that you might know God. To you is born this day in the city of David a Savior who is the Messiah, the Lord."

And then the darkness of the night transformed by the glory of heavenly host, singing "Glory to God in the highest heaven and on earth peace among humans whom God favors."

Peace. Ever since Cain killed Abel there has been no peace on earth yet the angels sang as if peace was achieved already. Did they sing with the knowledge of what was to be or was theirs a song of faith? Did they sing trusting that wherever God's Son is God's peace will be, even if there should be war or flood or earthquake? Peace on earth because Jesus is among us – no matter what is happening all around. Peace on earth.

And then the shepherd's coming to Bethlehem and telling of all that they had heard and seen.

They were the first of all to tell the good news - shepherds now, later fishermen. Common people – not fancy people but everyday people. God chose them to tell.

It is the same way now. No matter who you are in the eyes of the world God chooses you to ponder and to tell. God chooses you to tell what you have heard from shepherds of long ago and shepherds of God's people today. The word pastor means shepherd. It is not my education that matters nor my love nor wisdom. What matters is that I tell about Jesus whom God has sent to be good news for all the people.

In years to come Mary would have much more to ponder. Her Son would become popular. Her son would be loved. Her son would be hated. Her son would be crucified. Her son would be alive once more.

But as the sun rose on the new day Mary treasured all these things and pondered them in her heart. Amen.

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