

Overwhelming and Ordinary - God, Mary & Us (VI)

Bible Reading:
[Luke 2: 8-20, 41-52](#)



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Scripture: Luke 2:8-20, 41-52

Monologue - Thirteen and Pondering Everything

Understanding so much and so little. *[chuckles]*

It is good of you to come and visit me, Luke.

Though whether it is out of concern for me or for your history, I'm not sure. . . .

No one ever had it more clearly spelled out. Prophets. Angels. But though the words were sweet in the mouth, many times they proved bitter to the soul. Who could know the full meaning except in hindsight? It was better that I didn't.

There were other comings and goings that night. Shepherds from the hillside came at the angels' bidding. Angels too had a big part to play in this whole story!

Then, several weeks after, the Magi. We'd been up to Jerusalem to present Jesus in the temple and have him circumcised. We were back in Bethlehem and ready to start for home when they turned up.

I didn't realize until later what this represented--the Gentile nations coming to worship the Son of God.

Oh I know it's all through the prophets, but we didn't see it then.

Goodness knows what the people of Bethlehem thought. It was like a circus parade. Horses and servants everywhere. They could have traveled a bit more discreetly, but no, they had come to honor a king--and so they did. Very impressive. I just wish they had not impressed Herod quite so much on their way through Jerusalem.

As soon as they turned up we knew trouble was ahead. God confirmed that in dreams--to us and to the Magi.

Get out, fast, God said.

We hid the Magi's gifts as best we could in our baggage, and Joseph found a caravan heading down to Egypt that night. We fled, and just in time.

We heard horses coming as we left town, but it wasn't until later that we learned the full horror of that night--the deaths of all those children.

Those poor mothers!

MESSAGE

Have you had times when life comes at you in a rush; lot's of things all at once, piling up.

How do you handle that?

I'll tell you how I deal with it, at least sometimes. Actually there are two coping mechanisms I have developed.

Mechanism #1 is Run, fast and faster.

Mechanism #2 is dump it on a corner of my desk. And if the corner fills up, then in the middle. Leave it.

And hopefully when I get to looking at it in a month or so it will have become irrelevant.

I'm not sure how terribly appropriate these techniques are, but nonetheless, they're there.

So how about you?

How do you handle the crazy moments of life?

Or, never minding the really crazy moments, how about the day-to-day sort of stuff? Are you the sort of person that goes, goes, goes, and never really stops for a break? Are you, perhaps, the opposite sort of person, the one who keeps everything at bay, locking as much out as possible, kind of going through the motions without engaging the brain, if at all possible?

As we leave Christmas behind; as we leave 2001 behind and enter a new year of moments, challenges, appointments and opportunities, let's consider Mary.

Think of all that she dealt with, in her part of the Christmas story -

- teenager living a typical Jewish life
- engaged to be married, with all the anticipations and preparations that brings
- angel vision
- pregnancy
- struggles with her boyfriend, engagement almost ended
- then **he** has an angel vision

How would you like to have a year like this.... all well before you're twenty?

And then - then the events of the birth, and the escape to Egypt.
Not to mention that last bizarre event in the temple!

How does Mary deal with all this?

The Bible tells us:

"But Mary treasured up all these things and pondered them in her heart." (Lk 2:19)

And

"But his mother treasured all these things in her heart." (Lk 2:51)

She took a timeout, withdrawing as best as a first-time mom can, and quietly started sorting through it all in her mind and heart, thinking about it, praying about it.

She took a step back, so to speak, looking at the big picture. That's what "*pondering*" means. Ditto for "*treasured*".

It seems to be a pattern in her life, a habit she had cultivated - **pondering**: stepping back and trying to make sense of the events of life, to think about developments, sort things out.... to say, as it were, "*Lord, what's happening here? Where's it all headed? Why? What do you want me to do next? What might you be trying to teach me through all this?*"

Pondering - a time out to sort things out, meditation time.

That's Mary's approach to handling the sometimes confusing and wild events of life. That's Mary's approach to keeping things headed in the right direction.

And here's the interesting part that I want us busy people to get;
we people who are part of a society that lives in perpetual overdrive.

Before we head off into a new year for more of the same hyperactivity, I want us to get this next part –

I want us to get that not only was this pondering, meditating activity something for Mary -

- the Bible **strongly** recommends it to **us all!**

Yes - to me and you also!

Listen to these words from Prophet Jeremiah, penned in the Old Testament Lamentations 3:21-26:

Yet this I call to mind and therefore I have hope:

Because of the LORD's great love we are not consumed, for his compassions never fail. They are new every morning; great is your faithfulness.

I say to myself, "The LORD is my portion; therefore I will wait for him."

*The LORD is good to those whose hope is in him, to the one who seeks him;
it is good to wait quietly for the salvation of the LORD.*

We've seen pondering illustrated in the real-life example of Mary.

Shepherds are on some heavenly high. They're so excited they can't shut up. All the way back from the stable they yak to everyone who will listen, and probably to some who won't, telling them about everything that has happened.

"Guess what we heard! You'll **never** believe what we saw!"

And then notice the first word of v.19 - setting up the contrast between the shepherds and Mary. See the word?

-->> **BUT**

Wild, excited, noisy, talking shepherds:

dancing holy jigs all the way back to the fields.

BUT

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

Quiet.

No noise.

No talk.

Quiet.

Somewhere along the way this young Jewish gal had picked up on the advice from Lamentations 3.26:

"It is good to wait quietly for the salvation of the Lord."

It's good to stop, and sit down, and let your mind focus on the things that God is doing in your life, whatever they might be.

It's good for Mary.

It's good for us, too.

Friends, I don't need to tell you - we live in a noisy world. It's almost as if we are addicted to noise. Some people actually are afraid of silence. It's also a very busy world. Lot's of things keep us running. They clamor noisily for our attention.

It's the old squeaky wheel gets the grease thing. I don't know how many people I talk to who say something like, "*Ken, it just seems like my life is filled with running from one project to the next; putting out one fire only to discover another one or two that have sprung up somewhere else.*"

Know the feeling?

And in that kind of a world we need time apart - pondering time. Time where, for a time, the squeaky wheels can be put to the side, or shut outdoors.

I mean it: we **need** that pondering sort of time. Because it is in those quiet, set-apart, focused times that we can begin to hear God speak.

The bible tells us of a man named Elijah who went up on a mountain to meet God, to hear His voice. He was at a point in his life where there was a lot of confusion, some major disappointments and heartaches, and a **lot** of work facing him. Danger, too. I mean, this guy had some major sorting out to do with God.

So out in the desert he is called to climb this mountain where he will hear the voice of God and get some direction.

Up he goes.

First he hears a great wind... but no God.

Then there is an enormous earthquake.... but no God.

And then - a firestorm.... but still no God.

It all quiets down.

Nothing.

Until... until....

yes,

a still, small voice.

And **there** was God.

Great big powerful God.

Speaking in a still, small voice, bringing words of comfort and hope and direction to his discouraged prophet, Elijah.

And that picture speaks volumes of how God comes across. More often than not he **doesn't** come ramming across like some Andre Roy in the offensive zone.

Though.... hey, sometimes he does. Don't ever box God in and say, "He can't. He doesn't." I sometimes get the feeling He waits for the just the moment we say that to show us otherwise.

The still small voice.

God calmly waiting until we are ready to listen. Until we stop, and focus on Him, giving Him our full attention. Waiting until we are ready to do some serious pondering, having put our many distractions to the side for the moment.

Waiting.... and then - the still, small voice.

That's why Lamentations 3 says what it says.

That's why Mary's reaction is contrasted with that of the Shepherds. She **needed** the quiet time. She **needed** the time with God, to focus on Him, to draw closer to Him, to gain some sense of what was all happening to her life.

Moments of pondering, meditating; moments of silence.

Those are the moments when God can give us gifts of being able to see and hear things more clearly from a spiritual perspective. It is those moments that can slowly help us in the process of starting to see things God's way, and to respond accordingly.

There are a number of things that can happen when believers "ponder" matters in their heart, laying them out before God.

One is that at some point they begin to make sense. Pieces of the puzzle begin to fall into place. You can see the connection between A & B.

Sometimes, though, things never get figured out. They don't make sense. But then there can come, sometimes after a short while, and sometimes after a long hard struggle - there can come an ability to cope, to live with the circumstances, to gain a measure of acceptance, perhaps a lot of acceptance - peace.

If those times of silence don't give us answers, they can help us to surrender it all into the All-Wise, All-Controlling hands of our loving Heavenly Father. Those moments of quiet meditation, of pondering the things of life before the face of God can help us make the sometimes agonizing trip to the place where we can finally say,

"God - take it! Here. I can't handle it.

*I can't control it. **You** drive!"*

A promise from the Bible that came to mind as I was sorting through all of this was the following:

"Those who wait upon the Lord will renew their strength. They will soar on wings like eagles; they will run and not grow weary, they will walk and not faint..."

Those who wait upon the Lord **will** renew their strength.

Oh, it won't be that they suddenly will walk on water.

It won't be that they won't have anymore problems.

It won't be that they will develop superhuman emotional or spiritual strength.

But as they become willing to drop the confusing, hurtful, bewildering and uncertain elements of life into God's lap; and as they become more and more able to **wait**, to stop once in a while from the frenetic pace of life and retreat into a little corner with God

- as they become able to do that, they find that God **does** come through.

He really does - keeping the toehold into life from crumbling away, helping their grip to keep fast, picking them up when they **do** fall.

And it happens in so many different ways:

Through the prayers of a friend, a gentle hug, a listening ear, an encouraging phrase, through renewed mental energy, sustained emotional strength, so-called coincidences that come together in an up-building way, and sometimes through a special awareness - a real, tangible sense that they are **not** alone; so real that they sometimes tell me they feel they can almost reach out and touch Jesus right there beside them.

Skeptics try to write all this off as wishful thinking, or the power of positive thinking, or good group dynamics, or hallucinations of some sort.

NOT!

Simply not true!

Rather, it's a powerful spiritual truth.

One that we need to remember as we enter a new year.

And one that we need to remember not only for the really crazy, mixed-up moments of life, the painful and confusing times.

We need this principle of pondering, meditating, spiritual time-outs also to help us keep a proper focus, a healthy perspective, in the day-to-day grind of life, the mundane hum from one week to the next.

We need it to help us keep things in their proper balance.

We need the time to ponder, to ponder with Mary. So as you leave here, and enter a year of moments and challenges, I'd like to give you a project, a homework assignment, if you will.

I want you to think about the following:

Do you have a quiet place to retreat, to ponder, to meditate?

Do you have a time where you can do that?

Where you work through some of the crazy stuff of life?

Where you can keep some of the mundane stuff in proper perspective?

If you don't, let me offer some suggestions:

-the car. Don't immediately flick the button to Y105 or even CHRI. Drive in quiet. Focus on the Lord instead of the Rankins.

-lunch time at your desk.

-the quiet moments at the beginning of the day

-a bit of time after the kids go off to school

-a bit of time before bed (*though not many function well here - they're pooped out after a hard day*).

They're just a few ideas. Certainly not an exhaustive list.

But the bottom line is - we all need such a place and such a time somewhere along the way. Where and when is not important.

The fact that we **do** it, that we **do** stop to ponder, to meditate, to wait quietly for the salvation of the LORD, to put away the squeaky wheels and listen for the still, small voice of God speaking to us -- that deliberate work **is** important.

It's critical.

For this new year.

For eternity.

