

Christmas Morning 2019

And Mary treasured all these words and pondered all these things in her heart.

If you have a chance over the Christmas season, it is worth reading the whole of the first two chapters of Luke's Gospel straight off, perhaps with a sherry and a nice mince pie on the side. There is such richness in the detail of his account of the setting of the scene for the nativity firstly of John the Baptist and then of the Lord. Not only is his writing designed to make you wonder at God's outpouring of love, but the fact that this outpouring is achieved through quite ordinary people whose lives are then transformed through the Holy Spirit.

In these first two chapters also are three of the greatest 'hymns' of the Church – the Benedictus (the Song of Zechariah), the Magnificat (the song of Mary) and then the Nunc Dimittis (the song of Simeon) – all used daily in Christian worship. And all three vividly capture God's working in and through people and the radiancy which flows outward from that inward working, with a sense of the world being turned upside-down.

On this day when we celebrate the Nativity of Jesus Christ – true God and true Man – Luke calls us on a journey of openness to God's light within our own lives – the way in which we both order our lives and touch the lives of those amongst whom we live. His ecstatic vision of a multitude of angels crying aloud, 'Glory to God in the highest and peace to his people on earth,' calls each of us to remember that Jesus IS the Prince of Peace – the exemplar of who we are called to be. Each one of us.

We remember too that in calling the shepherds to visit the manger first, God loves the marginalised and excluded within society as much as the most proper or those who feel that they are perfect (there are so who do!). The shepherds can do none other than tell those around them about God's grace revealed through Jesus, and again, they become people we should emulate.

In Luke's Gospel, we also see Mary – a young Nazorean girl, who not only has said 'Yes' to God's call, but now contemplates the extraordinary acclamations of the shepherds as they tell others what the Lord had made known to them.

On this Christmas morning, we can do none other than join her in wonder at God's love revealed through the birth of our Saviour.

Ultimately, in a world where division and self-identification leads people to separateness, the Christmas message is one of ultimate connectedness; to God through Jesus Christ the one born in a manger; to our brothers and sisters of faith - and indeed to all to all people, as we join our voices to the heavenly host, 'Glory to God in the highest heaven, and on earth peace, goodwill to all people.'

And so with Mary, let us all treasure these words and ponder them in our heart.

In doing so, we join outstanding company. A very Blessed Christmas to everyone.



Angels Announcing Christ's Birth to the Shepherds - Govert Flinck 1639 (Musee du Louvre)

Isaiah 9: 2-7

² ^[a] The people who walked in darkness
have seen a great light;
those who lived in a land of deep darkness—
on them light has shined.

³ You have multiplied the nation,
you have increased its joy;
they rejoice before you
as with joy at the harvest,
as people exult when dividing plunder.

⁴ For the yoke of their burden,
and the bar across their shoulders,
the rod of their oppressor,
you have broken as on the day of Midian.

⁵ For all the boots of the tramping warriors
and all the garments rolled in blood
shall be burned as fuel for the fire.

⁶ For a child has been born for us,
a son given to us;
authority rests upon his shoulders;
and he is named
Wonderful Counsellor, Mighty God,
Everlasting Father, Prince of Peace.

⁷ His authority shall grow continually,

and there shall be endless peace
for the throne of David and his kingdom.

He will establish and uphold it
with justice and with righteousness
from this time onwards and for evermore.
The zeal of the Lord of hosts will do this.

Titus 3: 4-7

⁴But when the goodness and loving-kindness of God our Saviour appeared, ⁵he saved us, not because of any works of righteousness that we had done, but according to his mercy, through the water^[a] of rebirth and renewal by the Holy Spirit. ⁶This Spirit he poured out on us richly through Jesus Christ our Saviour, ⁷so that, having been justified by his grace, we might become heirs according to the hope of eternal life.

Luke 2: 8-20

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 Saviour, who is the Messiah,^[a] 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 favours!'
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.