

Christmas Day 2022
Luke 2:8-20
St Peter's Lutheran Church, Elizabeth
Greg Bensted

Merry Christmas everyone! from God our Father, Son, and Holy Spirit, one gracious God, now and forever. Amen.

Mary treasured all these words and pondered them in her heart. Let's pray:

Here we are, Saints. Just us and the baby. Surely, today of all days, is time to celebrate; time to party! However, today's sermon is pretty low key. Really, I think that's what Christmas Day calls for. As I get older (put your violins away), Christmas Day feels more like a day for reflection than proclamation. Today is a day to treasure all we've heard and ponder the words in our heart, like Mary.

One reflection I'd like to share is when Kathy and I were backpackers living in London, England. On Christmas Day in 1994, we travelled from where we lived on the northern outskirts of London, to Ashford Hospital in Surrey to the west of London, to share Christmas Day with a friend who had to work there that day. One thing that stood out (other than snow on Christmas Day), was that as we passed through the centre of one of the world's major cities, there was not a soul to be seen. The calm and peacefulness were almost tangible.

Likewise, it's so quiet this morning, so calm, so empty, and yet, so overflowing. I think this is my favourite service of the year. It's one of those breathe-deep-and-take-in-the-beauty kind of occasions. It's just us and the baby.

There's no pageantry, no crowds of people filled with Christmas Eve excitement and anticipation. The angels are back in heaven and the shepherds have returned to their fields and flock. It's just us and the baby.

It's a great day, isn't it, Saints? But, there's still a risk here this morning. The risk is that we say too much; too much about what has happened, too much about how it happened, too much about what comes next. Do any of us really know? Did Mary? Did Joseph? Maybe that's why neither Mary nor Joseph say a word in today's gospel. They're completely silent.

How well do we really understand the awe-inspiring mystery of Christmas? How fully can we comprehend the significance of God becoming a human, born of a virgin? We're so familiar with the beautiful and humble story of the birth of the Saviour of the World, but how much can we ever hope to truly understand it?

Let's simply marvel and wonder this morning. Christmas morning is for treasuring and pondering, like Mary. It's just us and the baby.

The shepherds went with haste to Mary and Joseph and told them what the angel had said to the shepherds about this child:

“Do not be afraid; for see – I am bringing you good news of great joy for all the people: to you is born this day in the city of David a Saviour, who is the Messiah, the Lord. This will be a sign for you: you will find a child wrapped in bands of cloth and lying in a manger.”

Luke 2:10-11

And “Mary treasured all these words and pondered them in her heart.”

How could Mary ever explain to anyone, how she conceived? How could Mary ever possibly understand or explain that she had just given birth to her own Saviour? It's not possible. To say anything would risk saying too much. She can only treasure and ponder.

“To you is born this day ... a Saviour, who is the Messiah, the Lord.”

Those words aren't meant to be understood or explained. They're words, good news of great joy, a truth, a reality, for you and me to treasure and ponder. It's just us and the baby.

So, Saints, let's be drawn into the mystery of our faith. Reflect, today, with Mary, the blessed Mother of God. Ponder the Incarnation. Insert yourself into the scene of that first Christmas. Hear the sounds of the town. Smell the smells of the stable. Watch as the shepherds come forth in adoration. Enter the mystery more fully, acknowledging that the more you know about the mystery of Christmas, the more you realise how little you actually know and understand. Yet, that humble realisation is the first step to a deeper understanding of who and what we celebrate today.

It's just us and the baby.

This morning it's just us and our baby.... Did you catch that? Our baby. Not *the* baby, *our* baby. It's just us and our baby to treasure and ponder.

Merry Christmas, everyone! Amen.

And the peace of God, which surpasses all understanding, will keep your hearts and your minds safe in the One who to us is born this day in the city of David a Saviour, the Messiah, the Lord Jesus Christ, our baby. Amen.