

Pondering Things in Our Hearts
Christmas Eve December 24, 2024
Luke 1:1-20

- Introduction

Somewhere in the back of my mind I remember reading something about an Italian philosophical group who maintained that our perception that life goes quickly is pervasive but untrue. I was startled by the claim, because it has always seemed to me that life speeds up as we age. Life crawled when I was in junior high school. In seventh grade my freshman year of high school seemed an eternity away. But it came and went, as did high school graduation, then marriage, then college, etc. My daughter, due to give birth soon, was a little girl only a few years ago, it seems, and the last ten years of being back in Marshalltown have flown by. The Italian group maintained that life is actually long but seems short because we need to take more time to ponder; to ponder life, the everyday, each other, the promises of Scripture. (I added the "promises of Scripture" part) In the midst of all that happens in our passage for tonight, I find it notable that Mary pondered all these things in her heart.

- Set the Stage

Luke, chapter two is eventful. It starts out with bad news, that the Empire of Rome requires everyone to return to the town of their ancestors, and ancestral records, to take part in a census. Back then this always led to high taxes. While taxes were never welcome, Joseph had the added trouble of trying to reach his hometown of Bethlehem with his betrothed, Mary, due to give birth, which is a terrible time to travel. \Once they reached Bethlehem, a small village then as well as today, they found that all the rooms available for rent were taken and there was no place for them. One innkeeper helped by giving them room in the stable, which was probably a cave. There are lots of them in the area. Mary goes into labor in these circumstances, and when she gives birth, they dress the new baby in clothes that poor people would have and laid him in a feeding trough. That's how our Savior made His entrance into the human race. But things were happening outside of the village.

Shepherds, people who were not at the top of the social ladder, were keeping watch over their sheep. Watching sheep was a 24-7, 365 days a year type of job. But tonight would be different. They, of all people-not the religious or the political leaders in Jerusalem, received angels telling them that the Messiah had been born in Bethlehem. They left their posts and rushed to the village to see the new family, and they told everyone who would listen what happened. It was quite a stir, but Mary pondered it all in her heart.

- Main Point: "Our Town"

The word for "ponder" literally means "to throw together." Mary took in all that happened, possibly with not much speaking, she was recovering from giving birth after all. But she paid attention and considered everything that happened to her and around her. It is possible that she had been thinking about all that happened for some time after all was over. When something happens in your life that is notable, pay attention. In fact, go out of your way, especially on a busy day, to look around you and take in what your life is like at that moment.

This is the main point, I believe, of Thornton Wilder's classic play, "Our Town." The tragedy of the play is that much happens every day, even on ordinary days but people miss much of it because they get too busy to stop and pay attention. Take time to ponder life.

Take time to ponder Scripture as well. The meaning of the word "to ponder" and the word "to meditate" are similar. Pondering Scripture the way you should ponder does wonders for a person's soul.

- Application

Record and ponder your requests in prayer. You might realize that the Lord has answered them over time without your notice.

- Conclusion

I don't remember the Italian philosophical group's name, or even if they referred to themselves as a "philosophical" group. I just remember being struck by the point they made. Time still seems to go quickly for me, but I find it helps to stop and ponder, ponder the people around me, the neighborhood in which I live, the people I see every day. Mary, the mother of Jesus, in the midst of all that happened surrounding the birth of her son, took time to ponder. She sets a good example for us, to ponder our prayers, to ponder the truth of Scripture, to take time to ponder people, and take time to ponder a God who actually joined the human race.