

It's Christmas Eve and I'll be heading to Candlelight Service at church. A time to gather and share the joy of the miracle that took place over two thousand years ago. We will be singing the traditional carols that we have all come to love. Their words embracing the image that, through the centuries, has become the picture of a sweet baby lying in a manger surrounded by animals, shepherds, a smiling mother, and father. All in tranquility. All we really know is that they got to Nazareth, Mary had a baby and put him in a manger because there was no room in the inn.

*Joseph also went up from Galilee, out of the city of Nazareth, into Judea, to the city of David, which is called Bethlehem, because he was of the house and lineage of David, to be registered with Mary, his betrothed wife, who was with child. So it was, that while they were there, the days were completed for her to be delivered. And she brought forth her firstborn Son, and wrapped Him in swaddling cloths, and laid Him in a manger, because there was no room for them in the inn. Luke 2:4-7*

Here is a couple who must travel 90 miles. Mary is due to have a baby with all the discomfort that brings. Joseph is contending with trying to get where they are going, before she goes into labor, and to find a place for them to stay. Then they get there and there is nowhere to stay. The scripture simply says that “*she brought forth her firstborn Son, and wrapped Him in swaddling cloths, and laid Him in a manger*”. Mangers were located wherever livestock were kept, places like stables, corrals, or caves. They were certainly not sanitary, tranquil places. Mary was able to wrap “*Him in swaddling cloths*” which would have been clean. I'm not even going to mention the whole labor and delivery scenario.

Then they get visitors! Shepherds! The first birth announcement went to the lowest of low people in the land. Shepherds were considered dirty, grimy, ignorant nomads. To me, that shows what great love God has for us all. The angels could have appeared to kings or Jewish Pharisees or the high council, but they appeared with the announcement to shepherds. Who, although terrified at first, heard the words of the angels and then followed their instruction.

*And they came with haste and found Mary and Joseph, and the Babe lying in a manger. Now when they had seen Him, they made widely known the saying which was told them concerning this Child. And all those who heard it marveled at those things which were told them by the shepherds. But Mary kept all these things and pondered them in her heart. Luke 2:16-19*

Another thing that catches me in those passages is Mary's reaction. “*But Mary kept all these things and pondered them in her heart.*” Here's my personal thoughts... Up until now, Mary was going on her faith alone in following God's instruction. Having a baby without “knowing” a man? Um, OK. Having to travel 90 miles in the last days of that pregnancy? If You say so. Going into labor and having a baby surrounded by animals? If that's what You want. Now these shepherds show up telling her the Angels told them “*For there is born to you this day in the city of David a Savior, who is Christ the Lord*”? (Luke 2:11) These things affirmed that she had not imagined any of the last 9 months. This was the true proclamation that she, in fact, had given birth to our Savior.

As this night passes into daylight, between the presents and the food and the commotion that is Christmas day, find a few quiet minutes to thank our Father above for giving us His Son. For making Him into flesh and blood, born in lowliness, raised in near poverty, tortured, and nailed to a cross like a common criminal so what we will become heirs to the Kingdom of heaven!

My you be blessed with the knowledge that Mary pondered in her heart, *For there is born to you this day in the city of David a Savior, who is Christ the Lord* !



Cindy Lee Nonnemacher  
Author