



The shepherds went in haste to Bethlehem and found Mary and Joseph, and the infant lying in the manger.

*When they saw this,
they made known the message
that had been told them about this child.
All who heard it were amazed
by what had been told them by the shepherds.
And Mary kept all these things,
pondering on them in her heart. Luke 2: 16-19*

The most common question that we hear after Christmas is, *how was your Christmas?* Unless your family experienced some illness or loss, the universal response seems to be, *it was good. We were with our family and friends. I had a great Christmas.* I love Christmas here at St. Martin's. The crowded pews, the joyful spirits of the parishioners, the glorious decorations in our church, the beautiful music, the innocence of the children at the pageant, the humble confessions heard, the generosity shown by the empty giving tree all fill me with delight to the core of my soul.

Then, home to Brooklyn to continue the joy with family and friends. I think there was some fear I might get bedsores from sitting on the recliner too long, but I did manage get into the city (as we Brooklynites say) to visit St. Patrick's Cathedral, see the Rockefeller Christmas Tree and wait on a long half price line with my niece and nephew to see buy half price tickets for Miss Saigon. Certainly, a moving musical but rather heavy for the holidays.

I had a great Italian dinner (is there any other kind) with friends, and a visit to other friends, and then a few days in the Poconos where my niece has a vacation home. I sleepily cheered the New Year in at midnight with family and friends, and then went to bed, but not before watching at least one episode of *The Honeymooners*. I had a great Christmas!

What kind of Christmas did the Blessed Mother have? Well, as she was making plans to marry her dear Joseph, she was visited by the Archangel Gabriel with a call to be the mother of God. It is so easy to write those words but impossible to imagine what the young teen experienced in that visitation. With a trembling soul, she says yes to the God she so loves. The angel tells her that her cousin Elizabeth, a woman considered beyond child-bearing years, is pregnant. Mary makes haste to be with her. No doubt to help her, but also to speak about her own awesome news.

Then, back to Nazareth, to hear mean gossip and rumors about her sudden pregnancy. Joseph, the love of her life, is confused and does not know what to say to her. He is so very disturbed until he too is visited by an angel in a dream. Soon, due to a Roman census, they must leave their village and go to Bethlehem, the ancestral home of Joseph. After a long arduous journey of six days on a donkey, they find Bethlehem crowded with no rooms available for them. Finally, a kind man offers them a stable.

The miracle baby is born and with no crib or cradle, he is placed in a manger, a place of food for animals, but a symbol that this child named Jesus will become the *Bread of Life*. Bewildered shepherds come to the stable and report singing angels in the skies. Soon, after, wise foreigners from the East, speaking of a strange star, come, bearing gifts of gold, frankincense, and myrrh.

Being devout Jews, the couple follow the rites of circumcision and the presentation of the child in the Temple. Here, they met two ancient voices, Anna and Simeon, who proclaim this child is the Messiah, the long awaited one. Then, another angelic visit tells them they must flee home and go to Egypt since King Herod seeks to kill Jesus, the future King of the Jews.

Mary, how was your Christmas? The Gospel tells us that *Mary pondered all these things in her heart*. What did all this mean? *What does it mean to say Jesus is to be Savior of the world? How could I, a simple peasant girl from*

Nazareth be the Mother of God. Pondering and Treasuring. What is be in the days to come. It is all too much to grasp and she can only trust in God.

My friend Steve Descovich, who never has had a doubt in his life, tells me that the Irish, and me in particular, ponder too much. To me, pondering is to enter mystery and wonder. It is to seek understanding and never completely get it. It is to want certainly and to live with doubt. It is to be at peace and still worried, to be happy and yet feel a tinge of sadness. Although I admire the decisive, I am grateful for the gift of pondering.