

## **Sunday 27<sup>th</sup> December – Reflection Luke 2:15-20**

It's funny that as I searched for the recommended reading for the first Sunday after Christmas and the reading we have just heard read came up, my gut reaction was "that can't be right" We're so used to squeezing the whole nativity in before Christmas that we forget that the shepherds visited after Jesus' birth! So before you think I am being tardy - I am just clarifying that I am not one for tardiness, Matt will confirm that! I am right on time as we think about these burly character who visited Mary & Joseph after the birth of Christ!

The first thing that strikes me about this passage is the contrast between the birth of Jesus and the birth of his cousin John. John was born to a priest and his righteous wife, announced in the temple in the centre of the Jewish nation. Instead Jesus is born to a young mother, married to a carpenter- a normal Jewish family of average social status, living in rural anonymity, but because of the census were without lodgings in a major town. Yet whose birth evokes an angelic chorus? That'll be Jesus! As humble as his birth is, it is noticed by both great and small – it's a cosmic event. This baby's arrival is the beginning of God doing a new thing that brings joy, wonder, gratitude and reflection – which is why Mary pondered these things and the shepherds went back to their fields glorifying God.

Whilst the angels have sung about things almost too wonderful for the shepherds the angelic message is earthed in concrete terms. You'll find the baby in a manger, that's what the angels said in the verses just before those we had read today – how kind God is. A manger is something in a shepherd's vocabulary, that was something they understood, an animal feeding trough. How easy it would have been for them to think "Not quite sure what that was about - we'll have a little think, maybe sort out a sheep-sitter for tomorrow night and go then", but no - they allow their lives to be interrupted and what's the outcome? We are still talking about them, social outsiders, nobodies 2000 years later. They made a good call, it turned out. They got to meet the Saviour of the World. The shepherds had the same response as the disciples whom Jesus called later in his ministry. When Jesus calls Matthew to leave the tax booth - he does it without delay, when he calls the fishermen, they leave their nets - they do so straightaway. The shepherds have the type of response that God loves. Obedience and trust. Not just with their lips but with their lives. The response of the shepherds to meeting Jesus is equally rapid, they didn't need a formal evangelism program to train them up and send them out, taught how to share what they had experienced of God. They just repeated what they had heard and seen, what they knew to be the case about the Christ. That's all that witnessing is, really. Nothing fancy. No secret formula. Just telling others the good news that you yourself have heard and received and believe. The mouth speaks what the heart is full of. So when your heart is full of the good news of Jesus, guess what? Your mouth is likely to follow suit! Do you want to be a spectator, just looking on, at a distance or do you want to find your voice and be a commentator?

And Mary how does she respond to this new infant she has been entrusted with? To the visit of the shepherds? To the wonderful things they share about her son? "She treasured up all these things and pondered them in her heart". Any parent/grandparent/aunty/uncle will tell you that they treasure up those precious moments with a newborn. But quickly after, there will be discussions and comparisons about how early the child started smiling, how well they are able to crawl or walk, banding around how capable and advanced the baby is. Mary didn't do this, she had much more than most, to brag about. But her experience and thoughts are too precious to be casually tossed around.

We tend to like admiring things based on simple external things. But there's great value however in looking deeper, pondering, treasuring up all the things we see. You see, Mary didn't simply admire what was happening. Mary treasured these things up on the shelves of her heart for her to pull down and recall and remember when necessary. And would they ever be necessary as she would watch her Son die. If she hadn't taken the time to ponder the lessons God taught her in life would she have been present in that upper room waiting expectantly for the Spirit to be poured out at Pentecost. Would she have lived with such humility, love and hope. Today can I ask you - what do you ponder on? What life experiences have you known where God has held you? Ponder on those moments, rejoice and give thanks. But today if that is a painful question, can I encourage you to take time to wonder at the truths that we can all find in God's word. God calls you his child, he promises to be with you. He is for you. And whether this side of heaven those things you long for take place or not, may God give you the peace and trust of Mary, the hope and joy of the shepherds, and the confidence of knowing that God is with you. At this deeply challenging point in history, at this worrying time in our lives let's choose again to ponder on God's love, his faithfulness & goodness.

Amen