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Luke 2:1-20

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Christmas Eve A

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## Mary Did You Know?

Now *that* is a story Vicar just read. It's a true story which always makes a story better. It's an underdog story, which gives us reason to root for this humble couple. It's got a few twists in it in who ends up being participants in the story. But more than all of that it's a good story because it matters. It makes a difference, and that is clear from the very beginning – from the reaction of the very first people involved.

Look at Mary – one of the lead roles in the story herself – she was struck – trying to comprehend just how much it mattered. Luke records that in verse 19 – **Mary treasured up all these things and pondered them in her heart.**

Mary *treasured* them – considered them valuable and took care of and preserved them – noting and committing to remember all the details. And she *pondered* them. The Greek word has in it the picture of things being thrown around. That word is used in the New Testament for discussions people are having – even arguments. Mary was letting these events, these messages, this story bounce around in her head – as the different details battled each other as she tried to figure out what all this meant.

And now tonight, you're here to do that same thing – to ponder, to wrestle with, to think about this story and what it means. So let's do that. I know, you might have just come here tonight of some sense of tradition and wanted to “do your good deed”, but while you're here, let's let this message make a difference. That's what it does. That's why our world celebrates it 2000 years later. So let's try to get into Mary's head and understand just what was going on there – because what made a difference for her is the same as what makes a difference for us.

Let's ask that question I just tried to sing...**Mary did you know?** First – Mary, did you know troubles?

The answer to that is pretty obvious right? I mean, that is so much of what makes this story a story. An unwed teenage girl is suddenly pregnant and claiming that she didn't do anything wrong. That gave her some things to think about. “Will they stone me like the law prescribes for adultery?” Sure, an angel tried to ease her fear, but her neighbors didn't see that. And then, here comes her ruler with a god-complex – Caesar Augustus, and he commands that they had to go to their hometown to register. That means 90 miles to Bethlehem – and did I mention she's pregnant? – very pregnant! And they get there and they are not important enough or wealthy enough to have a place to stay. And she's got the responsibility for a pretty important child about to be born. And she can't even give him a room to be born in. And the animals smell bad. Did Mary know trouble? Yes. Of course.

Think about how those thoughts would have been wrestling around in her head, the confusion, the excitement, the fear, maybe some worry, even doubt. I know we have this image of Mary as all saintly,

absolutely confident. But you know, even those people you look up to today in much the same way – Satan attacks them too. Think of the people that look up to you. I mean, you are the kind of person who goes to church on Christmas Eve. You have it all together – yet you know that sometimes you don't feel like you've got it all together. You don't feel so saintly. You wrestle. I know that's true of your pastor, literally up here on a pedestal.

But back to Mary... Sure, she had the word of the angel that God was favoring her, but it probably didn't feel like it as much as it might have 9 months earlier. I wonder if she ever wondered if God even cared. It sure must not have felt like it. Nine months ago an angel had called her highly favored, but ever since then, she'd been dealing with the pain of pregnancy and poverty, the burden of responsibility and the reproach of the people around her. You'd think God would take better care of his Son's mom. Mary, did you wrestle with anger against Caesar, who didn't care what a burden this census would be to you? Or did you get angry at God?

I've heard of moms in the pain of pregnancy crying out to the dad – “You did this to me.” How tempting would that have been for Mary who literally had nothing to do with this pregnancy until God told her she was pregnant with His Son! And now he seems to be nowhere to be found. Her setting doesn't seem very divine.

Have you ever wrestled with some of those same things? I mean, not the immaculate conception part, but not feeling like you're experiencing what was promised. You know what the messengers from God say, right? God's all about blessings, right? God wants the best for you, right? It'll be good for you if you go to church and read your Bible and all that. But sometimes it doesn't feel like that.

Take Christmas. Christmas is supposed to be this happy, joyous, peaceful, fun time of year, isn't it? But what about the stress and cost and sacrifice, the busyness and tiredness that come in order to try to make it so? What about the Christmas debt that you piled up or the overwhelming task of balancing all the demands on the schedule? What about so many people you're supposed to please this season, or maybe the fact that you don't have the person or people you wanted to spend it with? What about the guilt from relationships broken that festers this time of year, the shame of embarrassment for those people you've let down, the fear or doubt rolling around in your heart?

Have you ever wrestled with that? “Do you care God?” “Is this really how you planned it for me God?!?” If Mary knew troubles, you do too, don't you?

Now, of course, we can always find someone worse off, right? And so often I hear people talking about that – when they are complaining, they say: “but at least it's not *that bad*”. “At least, I'm not going through what so and so is.”

But think about it. Does that actually help any? It doesn't make my problems any less – unless we are talking about the One who really knew trouble in this story – that child Mary was getting to meet.

Mary, did you know that your baby boy (that weak, helpless bobble-headed baby boy) was Lord of all creation? Mary did you know that your baby boy was heaven's perfect lamb, and the sleeping child you're holding is the great I AM?

Think about that – the Creator of the world became a creature. The one who rules the nations became one who was born in a stable in Bethlehem because Caesar said so. The one who controls the universe became one who could not control his bladder and needed a teenage girl to hold up his head.

When you consider what he came from, what he had experienced, and where he went to – oh, he knew trouble. In fact, that was the sign that he was who the angel said he was. Did you notice that? Let me read the angel's message. Verse 10: **“But the angel said to them, “Do not be afraid. I bring you good news of great joy that will be for all the people. Today in the town of David a Savior has been born to you; he is Christ the Lord. This will be the (a) sign to you: You will find a baby wrapped in cloths and lying in a manger.”**

The sign that your Savior is here...the sign that God has come to keep his promises and save you, is that you will find him wrapped in cloths and lying in an animals' feed trough.

Why? Because he came here to know trouble. He came here to know our trouble. All that junk we described in our lives – the broken relationships, the guilty feelings, our coping mechanisms and the problems they cause – all of them – we brought on ourselves. God promised that the wages of sin is death and we sinned – as a race and as individuals. We fall short of perfect love and generosity. We fall short of clean living and holy speech. We fall short of pure intentions and clean motives. We sin. So we have death and all its symptoms coming – we *earned* the guilty feelings and the shame, the sickness and loss.

But not him. That child in the manger was pure – not because he was a cute little kid, but because he was and is God's eternal Son – the Great I AM. So he was born without the failure we entered with. He just had to endure its frustration because he came to be our substitute, to be what the angel called him, our Savior.

That's why the angels in the fields could not help but trumpet the truth, breaking out in song – Glory to God in the Highest – peace on earth. That's why the shepherds could not help but share it. God sent his Son to be our Savior. Mary, did you know that your baby boy would one day walk on water? Mary did you know that your baby boy would save our sons and daughters. Did you know that that your baby boy has come to make us new, this child that you delivered would soon deliver you? Mary, did you know?

She did when the angels announced it and the shepherds reported it. She did when she saw this child she wrapped in strips of linen cloth become the man who was wrapped in linen cloth 33 years later having paid for our sins with his life. And then, on the third day, when she saw those linen cloths folded up by themselves as he had risen to life to guarantee us eternity – and peace and joy and happiness now – when we know what Mary knew.

So the real question is not “Mary did you know?” But you – do you know this Jesus? Get to know him better – right here (church – he promises that where two or three are gathered together in his name here he is with us) right here (bible – tomorrow we'll hear how the WORD became flesh in Jesus). This (Bible) is how we know him. Sure, you will know trouble, but through him, you will know the triumph he brings: What the angels could not help but sing – Glory to God in the Highest and peace to his people on earth. By God's grace, Mary did know. May you as well!

Merry Christmas! In Christ, Amen.