The excitement was over. They had made it to Bethlehem. They had found a place to have their baby, although it was not exactly the Ritz. The baby had been born. The shepherds had gone to spread the news. The baby was asleep in the manger. No doubt Mary and Joseph tried to imitate him. After all that excitement, they were wiped out. It was time for a little rest.

But Mary could not sleep. She had too much on her mind. That should not surprise us. The last year had been crazy. Mary had gotten engaged to a real gentleman, a carpenter named Joseph. Like any young Jewish girl of the day her aspirations were probably quite simple: get married; settle down; raise a family. God had other plans.

Not long after her betrothal to Joseph, the angel Gabriel came calling. What he told Mary blew her mind: **You will be with child and give birth to a son, and you are to give him the name Jesus. He will be great and will be called the Son of the Most High. The Lord will give him the throne of his father David, and he will reign over the house of Jacob forever; his kingdom will never end.**

Mary was a virgin, but she was going to have a baby. Mary was a simple peasant girl, but she would give birth to the King of kings who would inherit the eternal throne of David. Mary was a human being, but she would give birth to the Son of the Most High, God in human flesh. When Mary asked how all this could be happening, Gabriel gave her a simple straightforward answer: **Nothings impossible with God.**

Mary then went to spend some time with her older, wiser cousin Elizabeth. Elizabeth would know what to do. She could make sense out of this. Elizabeth’s words to her were no less mind-blowing than Gabriel’s: **Blessed are you among women, and blessed is the child you will bear!** Mary was so overwhelmed that she burst out in song: **My soul magnifies the Lord and my spirit rejoices in God my Savior!**

By the time Mary got home she was showing. When Joseph saw this he thought the worst. Who wouldn’t? But he was a good guy. He was not going to shame her, but he was going to divorce her. Before he could, he received an angelic visit of his own. It was Joseph’s turn to be blown away. **Joseph son of David, do not be afraid to take Mary home as your wife, because what is conceived in her is from the Holy Spirit. She will give birth to a son, and you are to give him the name Jesus, because he will save his people fr their sins.** What was happening was no sordid scandal. It was a miracle of God’s grace. Mary’s child would be none other than the promised Savior.

As she sat there in the dark all this was running through Mary’s mind. No wonder she could not sleep! Luke puts it this way: **Mary treasured up all these things and pondered them in her heart.** She thought long and hard about all that had happened. She wondered what it would all mean for her. She wondered what it would mean for the world. She thought about every word she had heard and every event that had taken place in the last 9+ months. She thought about all those Old Testament prophecies, now fulfilled. and she treasured it all.

What do you and I ponder and treasure? Often, I am not sure we ponder much of anything. We live in a world of information overload. Everything comes at us so fast. TV and radio. Cellphones and tablets. Facebook, Snapshot and Twitter. I-phones, I-pods and I-pads. Text messages and Internet. A friend of mine says that people today are afraid of quiet. We always have to have something on, some noise in the background, so we do not have to think too much. Pondering is not usually our thing.
What do we treasure? Far too often we treasure what everyone else treasures. Dollars and cents. Safety and security. Pleasure and popularity. Health and happiness. Trinkets and baubles. Gidgets and gadgets. Now all of those things can be wonderful gifts from God. But, if we are not careful, they can become our gods. Too often we become enthralled with the created and forget about the Creator. Too often we worship the gifts instead of the Giver. More often than we care to admit, in our heart of hearts, we prefer the fun and flashy to the spiritual and eternal.

It is amazing what we can learn from a humble, Jewish teenager who lived 2,000 years ago. She knew where to find treasure. And we find our treasure in the same place. For that little baby fussing and crying on a bed of straw in a little, out-of-the-way small town is the treasure. The hymn writer named him well: Jesus, priceless treasure.

When God, through the miracle of the virgin birth, took on our flesh, he gave us the greatest treasure of all. God and man, Substitute and Savior all wrapped up on one surprisingly humble package: a helpless little baby.

But oh, what mighty things that helpless little baby would do for us! That innocent little child cradled by a feeding trough was the only innocent baby ever to be born. For better than 3 decades, he lived an innocent, sinless life in the place of us guilty sinners. That little one lying on the bed of hay, quietly drawing air into his tiny lungs, would one day stop breathing. They would strip him naked and nail him to a cross. He would shed his blood and give up his spirit in payment for the sins of the world - yours and mine included. That little one all wrapped up in cute swaddling clothes would one day be wrapped up in gruesome grave garments, his lifeless body laid in the tomb. That little one who seemed so helpless would one day rise in mighty power to conquer sin and death, hell and Satan once and for all. My friends, all of this that little one would do, he did do - for you and for me and for all. In him we have pardon and peace and power. He is, without a doubt, our greatest treasure.

Don’t you think he is worth a little pondering? He is worth shutting off the phone. He is worth clicking off the TV. He is worth turning down the music. He is worth logging out of Facebook. He is worth finding a quiet moment each day to sit down with his holy Word and ponder.

My friends, do that. Ponder the perfect life he lived because you could not. Ponder the priceless blood he shed to pay for your sins. Ponder his empty tomb that guarantees forgiveness and eternal life for you and for me and for all who believe in him. Ponder how you can give thanks for his gracious gifts with a life of love for God and neighbor lived to his glory.

I am hoping that you have a little trouble getting to sleep tonight, not because you had too much Christmas dinner or one too many eggnogs. I am hoping that you have trouble sleeping because your heart is so filled with the wonder and the joy and the peace of the Word made flesh for you. I am hoping that like Mary, you toss and turn because you just cannot stop thinking about the wonderful things he has done for you. Have a blessed Christmas! Amen.

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