

## The Sunday after Christmas

Luke 2:22-40

December 26 – 27, 2009

In the Name of the Father and of the +Son and of the Holy Spirit. Amen.

Mary had kept all these things, namely, the birth out-of-doors, the appearance of shepherds who claimed to have been sent by angels, and her own knowledge that her Son was conceived without knowing a man, she kept all those things and pondered them in her heart. Her lot as the Mother of God had already been hard. She had borne the shame, at least for a little while, of her beloved Joseph's suspicion. She borne the shame of the wagging tongues in Nazareth and if they ever called her "**the Virgin Mary**" it was certainly in mocking tones.

She also knew the hardship of traveling while pregnant, of poverty in general, and of there being no room in the inn. Already, immediately upon His birth, the world wanted a peek at, and a piece of, her Son. Those uncouth shepherds came barging in and told everyone. There was not much peace or rest for Mary. Forty days and she and Joseph took Jesus to the Temple in Jerusalem and there Simeon prophesies while they marvel. But there is a warning. A sword will pierce Mary's pondering heart. Soon mad Herod will come looking for blood and as far as Bethlehem is from Nazareth, from mother and sisters, Egypt will be even further. Jesus will escape that attempt on His life, but He will eventually submit to death. Mary is destined to outlive both her husband and Her Son, a burden in itself as great and burdensome as any mortal has ever known.

The shepherds are excited. Joseph is marveling. Simeon is singing and departing. Mary is pondering. It is not that she is less than joyful. It is simply that her joy is

tempered by the reality of the curse. Things are not as they should be. She should not have been out of doors in the winter with a newborn. She should have a better place to lay Him than a manger. She should not be shamed by men for the honor that God has bestowed on her. But most of all, Her Son should not have to die. Of all those ever born, this One is innocent, this One has not sinned. He should not die. But He does. He dies. That is His sole purpose and objective. That is why He was born. For if He doesn't die, than Mary and the Shepherds, Joseph, Simeon, Elizabeth and Zacharias, and all of us, would. If He didn't die then we would die.

Mary knows joy and peace in Christ. She knows union with God. But she also knows sadness for this life is not as it should be. We have not yet arrived. Our sorrow is not yet ended. Life, even for Christians, on this side of death is not yet full. It is still incomplete, still sorrowful. Far from Nazareth Mary knows that Bethlehem, Jerusalem, and Egypt are not her home. *Does she know that Nazareth is not either? That she will not really rest or be at peace until she is home with her Son in the place prepared for her? Is that what she ponders?*

This is how it is for you. You are forgiven in Christ and there is no one to accuse you. The devil has nothing to say. You are holy, righteous, and innocent in Jesus Christ. You rose to life out of the watery grave of God's Name in Holy Baptism. No one can stand against you. But you still hurt. Your heart is pierced as well - broken with children who do not honor you, who have grown in ways you do not approve; with supervisors who abuse you; with neighbors who forget you; with a church that goes the ways of men and follows dollars and prestige instead of the Word; with a government full of self-serving bureaucrats; with cities full of violence; with rivers full of garbage and the skies full of smoke; with cancer, war, and poverty. Your Christmas didn't measure up to Hallmark's standards. The warm fuzziness

melted quickly like credits rolling on the big screen. The mundane, workaday world returned too soon, while you washed the dishes all alone or picked up the living room or ran out of toys and distractions before dinner. Christmas just doesn't satisfy like it seems it should. Something is always a little wrong, someone missing, someone mad, someone alone. *Is it any wonder that it is reported that more people commit suicide at this time of year than any other?*

And yet, no matter how unsatisfied, how frustrated or tired you might be, no matter how deeply your own heart is pierced: Jesus was born of Mary. He laid down His life under Pilate. He struck the guards dumb on Sunday when He rose. Life on this side of glory is not as it should be. Husbands should always love their wives. Parents should always remember their children. Pastors should always preach the Truth and serve others. But they don't. Not even mostly or most of the time. And yet, no matter how much life has failed you, friends betrayed you, your own flesh abased and shamed you: Jesus was born of Mary. He laid down His life under Pilate. He struck the guards dumb on Sunday when He rose!

And that is enough. It is enough to bestow joy and hope to your pondering heart. This sad life is not all there is. This fallen world will not last. Jesus was born and died and rose and will bring you home. This love will not yet remove all your pain, stop all the violence and debauchery, bring your children back. But it will. It will make all things right and wipe away every tear on the Last Day. In the meantime, it will give you the strength to carry on. It will comfort and console. For Jesus Himself, born of Mary, alive out of death, loves you. He gives His Body and His Blood to strengthen and nourish you in the true faith unto life everlasting. And that is most certainly true. Ponder that for a while.

In Jesus' Name. Amen.