



# PONDERING

Pastor Charlie Berthoud

Sunday, January 5, 2025

“Pondering” | Luke 2:8-20 | Pastor Charlie Berthoud

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"To ponder...meant to hold, carry, and transform tension so as not to give it back in kind, knowing that whatever energies we do not transform we will transmit."

Ronald Rolheiser in *Sacred Fire: A Vision for a Deeper Human and Christian Maturity*

We are still in the season of Christmas, and today's reading is a Christmas reading. But I invite you to listen to the words without all the trappings of the holiday, and just think about this as God's word for you, today. Notice that the messages of good news and peace are for all people. Pay particular attention to how Mary, the mother of Jesus responds. Listen for God's word.

<sup>8</sup> Now in that same region there were shepherds living in the fields, keeping watch over their flock by night. <sup>9</sup> Then an angel of the Lord stood before them, and the glory of the Lord shone around them, and they were terrified. <sup>10</sup> But the angel said to them, "Do not be afraid, for see, I am bringing you good news of great joy for all the people: <sup>11</sup> to you is born this day in the city of David a Savior, who is the Messiah, the Lord. <sup>12</sup> This will be a sign for you: you will find a child wrapped in bands of cloth and lying in a manger." <sup>13</sup> And suddenly there was with the angel a multitude of the heavenly host, praising God and saying, <sup>14</sup> "Glory to God in the highest heaven, and on earth peace among those whom he favors!"

<sup>15</sup> When the angels had left them and gone into heaven, the shepherds said to one another, "Let us go now to Bethlehem and see this thing that has taken place, which the Lord has made known to us." <sup>16</sup> So they went with haste and found Mary and Joseph and the child lying in the manger. <sup>17</sup> When they saw this, they made known what had been told them about this child, <sup>18</sup> and all who heard it were amazed at what the shepherds told them, <sup>19</sup> and Mary treasured all these words and pondered them in her heart. <sup>20</sup> The shepherds returned, glorifying and praising God for all they had heard and seen, just as it had been told them.

Protestants don't pay a lot of attention to Mary, for a variety of reasons, and that's a shame. She has a lot to teach us. She's probably best known as the mother of Jesus, and as the one who sang a song about the world turning upside down, in the Magnificat in Luke 1.

Perhaps her most admirable quality is her thoughtfulness. In today's reading we hear that she pondered.

We hear the same thing elsewhere early in Luke's gospel.

And the angel came to Mary and said, "Greetings, favored one! The Lord is with you." But she was much perplexed by his words and pondered what sort of greeting this might be. (Luke 1:28-29)

Then the boy Jesus went down with them and came to Nazareth and was obedient to them, and his mother treasured all these things in her heart. (Luke 2:51)

Ponder is a good word. It is defined as:

to consider something deeply and thoroughly; meditate

to weigh (a matter words) especially before making a decision or reaching a conclusion; to think over, consider, reflect upon something

It's good to ponder, to sit and think. Or even just let your mind wander.

We don't do that very much.

I hope we can do some more pondering.

We have invited the congregation to get in the habit of daily Bible reading, with the focus on reading Luke over the months of January and February.

We've split the 24 chapters of Luke into daily readings for January and February, so each day has a few paragraphs. I know many people have started, and I encourage you to persevere.

If you've been keeping up, then our scripture today is right on schedule with Luke 2. If you haven't started, I encourage you to do so. To help stimulate our thoughts on the Luke text, we have our devotional available—hard copies and online.

Along with the Luke reading, I encourage you to follow Mary's example, and ponder. After you finish the Luke text and the devotional, take some time to think about the words you read, to open yourself to listen for God, to be open to new ideas and inspiration. Ponder.

This is hard to do. We like to keep moving and get things done, to check things off the list.

I'm one of those people who has to do lists, and sometimes if I do something that isn't on the list, I'll add it to the list, and promptly check it off, just for the satisfaction.

Too many of us are overly busy, running from one thing to the next, supposedly with no time to just sit and think. And when we do have some free time, too many of us are overly distracted if not addicted to our screens.

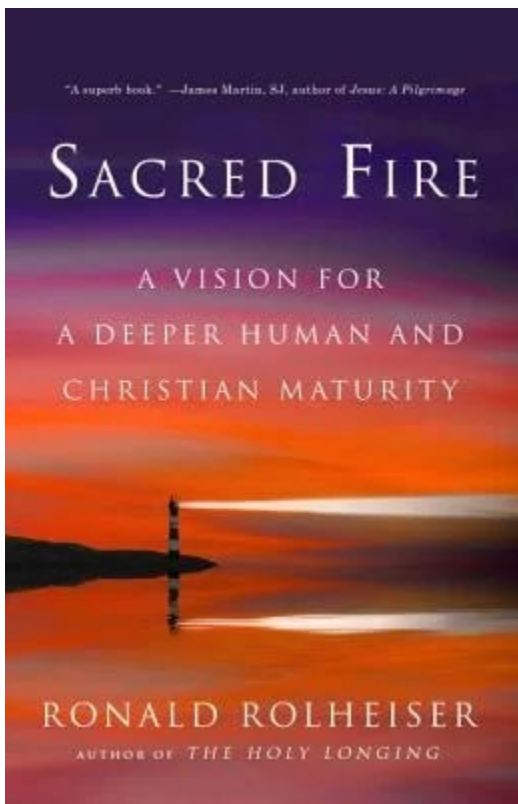
So with Luke, I have to resist the temptation to just get the reading “done” and move on the next thing. I’m trying to do more than have my eyes skim over the words and really take a few minutes to ponder after each reading.

It’s good to just sit and think sometimes.

To take a few minutes, without a screen, or even words and just look around.

I find that God speaks in those quiet times.

Remember the Bible tells us that God is with us, Emmanuel. The question for us is: Are we with God?



I want to make pondering more of a priority for me.

I got deeper appreciation for pondering a couple months ago, from a book I read in a small group at Upper House, a center for Christian study and hospitality on UW campus.

The book is called *Sacred Fire: A Vision for A Deeper Human and Christian Maturity*, by Ronald Rolheiser. The book is a deep exploration of Christian maturity; it’s not a quick read.

The author highlights Mary’s pondering as a vital part of Christian discipleship. He not only notes how Mary pondered early in the gospels, but he also sees Mary pondering at the cross, where Jesus died. When the other disciples fled in fear, Mary stayed, standing by the cross, despite the sadness and the danger.

And the author imagines Mary thinking to herself:

“Today, I can’t stop the crucifixion; nobody can. Sometimes darkness will have its hour. But I can stop some of the hatred, bitterness, jealousy, and heartlessness that caused it—by refusing to give it back in kind, by transforming negativity rather than retransmitting it, by swallowing hard, in silence, and eating the bitterness....” (P. 148)

He makes it clear that there are times to resist and complain and fight, but other times we are called to a different response in the face of evil. To ponder it, and maybe to transform it.

He understands pondering to be not just thinking, but an act of transformation—a sort of purification and cleansing process.

He writes that pondering isn't just a conduit, but more like a filter that it takes in water and

“holds the toxins, dirt, and impurities inside of itself and gives back only pure water. It absorbs what is negative, holds the negative inside itself, and gives back only what is pure. Human energy passes through us in the same way: either we are act as a simple conduit, or we act as a filter.” (p. 161)

His understanding of pondering reminds me of one of my favorite Bible verses and one of the most challenging teachings in scripture:

Do not be overcome by evil but overcome evil with good. (Romans 12:21)

So if I'm hearing it right, when we slow down and listen and think and be quiet, we can filter out some of the negativity and sadness and hurt in the world.

This is a lot to ponder on a chilly January morning.

Let us pray....

Holy God, thank you for the example of Mary. Help us to take time, to make the time, to read your word. But help do more than read. Help us to ponder and let your words soak into our hearts and lives, so that we can be transformed and so that we can be agents of transformation. We pray in the name of the word made flesh, Jesus. Amen.