Mary kept all these things, and pondered them in her heart.

What things? All these things. All that had happened over the past nine months. And that was quite a lot! Things that had changed this young woman’s life forever. For which all generations would called her blessed (Luke 1:48b).

It started when the angel Gabriel came to her and told her that she was going to be a mother. Good news of great joy, certainly! But . . . not after she was married, but before. And . . . not because of her unfaithfulness, but because of her faithfulness. And . . . she was not just going to have a son, but God’s Son, who would not just be her son, but her Saviour. And the Saviour of the world. That’s all something to ponder! That God would do that. And that God would choose her.

Then there was her time with her relative Elizabeth, who was also miraculously with child. She was part of the plan, too. Her son would prepare the way for Mary’s son. And so these two women and their two sons would be forever linked. And she pondered that . . . God’s plan and purpose, all coming together, in them.

After those three months with Elizabeth, she returned home only to find out that her betrothed, Joseph, was planning on divorcing her. Who could blame him? But what would become of her? Wedding dreams turned nightmare. Until the angel came to Joseph, too, and told him of the plan. He, too, was needed. He, too, was important. He would be the guardian of God’s Son, his own Saviour. And so Joseph remained faithful to his pledge. He cared for Mary. He cared for her son as his own. And Mary pondered . . . God had planned for this, too.

Then came the news that Caesar Augustus decided a tax would be a good thing, and everyone would have to go to the city of their family’s origin to be enrolled and pay this tax. By this time, Mary was very pregnant. It would not be an easy trip. And they weren’t wealthy. But they had no choice. So off they went, to Bethlehem - a trip that would not soon leave her mind! That she would ponder again and again. At least there would be family there they could stay with . . . right?

Well, turns out, no. All the guest rooms were already filled. But there was a spot, with the animals. It wasn’t much, but they could have it if they wanted it. Not the delivery room
Mary expected nine months ago, but beggars can’t be choosers. At least it would be warm there, with the animals. And so her son was born, and she laid him in the manger that was there. A tough way to start a life! But nothing about her son’s life would be easy, she would learn . . . and pondered in her heart.

But still Mary had more to ponder, for God wasn’t done yet. Still had more up His divine sleeve. For the angels had come back again, this time to shepherds, to announce to them the birth of their Saviour. And they came to see Him. Today, with all of our security, they wouldn’t have gotten near Him! But then, they did. And they marveled. Not just at a baby, but at their Lord, like this! Come for them. Come to save them. And Mary pondered this - not just the shepherds, but all that God was doing. Nine months that all led up to this day, this moment.

But more than nine months, actually. Thousands of years of prophets, priests, and kings, all leading to this day, this moment. This moment that not only changed her life forever, but would change the world forever.

That’s a lot to think about! To ponder!

So how about you? What are all the things you are keeping and pondering in your hearts?

Christmas brings many memories, many thoughts, old and new. Maybe for you there are lots of old memories, of Christmases past. Maybe you are pondering a loved one who isn’t with you this Christmas. Or maybe a loved one who is with you for the first time this year. Perhaps you are pondering an uncertain future, or rejoicing in the blessings and gifts you have received. Like Mary, there is certainly no shortage of things for us to ponder - of the past, present, and future. Of joys and sorrows. Of hopes and disappointments.

But Mary didn’t just remember or just think about these things - she pondered them. The Greek word there is things thrown together. Which could either be things thrown together randomly, or things thrown together like following a recipe, making something greater and more delicious than the sum of its parts. Mary knew that’s what it was - the work of God, working something far greater than she knew. Nothing by accident, nothing left to chance. All according to God’s Word and promise. All things working together for good (Romans 8:28), no matter how they might have seemed at the time. Mary pondered that, and marveled at that.

Marveled, because what all this teaches us is that it is not only Mary and you and I who ponder - it is also God. Our Lord pondering us in His heart. That you are always in His heart and on His mind. That what He is doing is not random, but always for you and your salvation. We may not always understand it, how God’s recipe works. It may not make sense to you, how all these ingredients, all these things happening in your life can
possibly come together into something good . . . And yet, we see tonight that they do, indeed. That after nine months of mixing and stirring up, after thousands of years of prophecies and actions, to us a child is born, to us a son is given. The people who walked in darkness have seen a great light. The darkness of sin, of confusion, of unbelief, has been lightened by this child, that we see the hand of God, the plan of God, and the mercy and love of God. The recipe just right, and doing something far greater than we could imagine, or which we could hope for.

And so amidst all our ponderings this night, we ponder this, too: the love of God for us this night. The love of God that would cause Him to send His Son into the world like this. The love of God that would cause Him to send His Son to the cross, God and sinners to reconcile, the innocent to die for the guilty, and then rise to give life to the dead. The love of God that would cause Him to send His Son to us still, tonight, as we receive that same Body and Blood born of the virgin Mary, held in her arms, and laid in the manger - now placed into our mouths for the forgiveness of our sins. The forgiveness He won on the cross and the life that sprung forth in His resurrection, now given to you, to each of us. For a life which cannot end.

And ponder how this recipe of God is still happening today. How it has brought you here, to this place, tonight. A random series of events? No. God coming for you, working for you. For always you are in His heart and on His mind. That you receive the greatest gift of all - His Son - by grace through faith.

That’s a lot to ponder! And marvel at. Just as Mary had so much to ponder, too.

But let me give you one more thing to ponder, and that is how God is now throwing you into the mix, using you in His recipe for others. Just as He blessed Mary and used Mary, just as He blessed Joseph and used Joseph, as we heard from Paul’s letter to Titus tonight, so He also blesses and uses you. A people zealous for good works. For you have pondered God’s recipe in the past, and are zealous to see it in the future. How God is still working all things for good, and using you in that. Maybe you’re just as unlikely as an unmarried virgin to have a baby. Maybe you’re just as unlikely as shepherds to be the first to set eyes on their Saviour. But this night, ponder that as well. With Mary. How the mercy and love of God is still working in you, for you, and through you.

That’s a lot to ponder! To throw together in your heart and mind. But what joy and confidence it brings. To know that God can and is doing all this. For you. And one day, maybe soon, you will get to taste what the Lord has been preparing for you all along; the recipe all this has been leading to - the feast of heaven, which will have no end. We gather for this meal, this night, but knowing that as great as this is, the greater is still waiting for us.

Ponder that, too! And then whatever else Christmas is for you this year - joy or sorrow,
hope or disappointment, alone or with others - it is a night of wonder. The wonder of God born for you.

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