

*Sermon for the Eve of the Nativity of Our Lord, Year B, 24.xii.2005, 7:30 p.m.  
Evangelical Lutheran Church of Saint James the Apostle / Brogue, Pennsylvania  
Holy Eucharist –LBW I  
Titus 2:11-14; Luke 2:1-20*

# Hodie natus est Christus Dominus Noster! \*

Grace to you and peace from Him Who is and Who was and  
Who is to come! ✎ Amen.

*"But Mary treasured all these words  
and pondered them in her heart."  
--Luke 2:19*

He was a big man, the trucker. He said he was from Leesville, Virginia, and his broad drawl confirmed that fact, just a Virginian in Pennsylvania hoping to get back to his kids before midnight the day before Christmas Eve, like he had promised them. He liked talking about them and the presents he had bought for them in different places on his route, three children whose thoughts would now be locked onto their father like radar until he came through their kitchen door, tired, but *home*. And he liked talking about their mother, his high school

sweetheart who had carried them and given birth to them and given them her love. It was their thirtieth wedding anniversary, you see, and there was no one else to talk to but the pert little woman who had stopped at the same truck stop to buy milk her husband had forgotten to pick up. And there would be no one to talk to and no more anniversaries, because in her early forties time had just run out for the neo-natal nurse so beloved that the hospital named the wing she served in for her. I am praying hard for the big man from Leesville and his kids tonight, as I know their mother is, as I believe the Mother of our salvation is praying for him, now holding his broken heart near her own, in the place where her Son once lay his head and fell asleep.

People carry any number of things in their hearts, and those things they treasure, those things they cherish, those things they *ponder* because they know they will never finish understanding them are things they are not always averse to speaking about in the course of a long trip, far away from home. Any waitress

knows this, especially at this time of year. It's something you can experience even in the check-out line in a truck stop convenience store.

Now, pondering on a long trip can take us in at least a couple of different directions. We can ponder on this or that person, even or opportunity in our lives, and then reproach ourselves that we did not act while there was still time, act so that there would have been a better outcome. Or, we can ponder and ponder on those missed opportunities until we find someone to *blame* for the future that did not become our present. Wonder and gratitude, self-reproach and guilt or blame and bitterness can be the result of our pondering. It is easy to see which way Blessed Mary chose.

Though she could have said 'No' to Gabriel's frightening angelic greeting, the Child she had carried for nine months under strange circumstances, the Baby now in her arms, or lying in a feeding trough for a bed, that little being put an end to all

self-doubt, to all bitterness, to all fear of persecution. Hold a baby in your arms, especially if that baby is your own descendant, even a cranky, crying baby, and there is no room for anything but hope, hope in a future that does not belong to you or me, and not even so much to the child itself as it does to the real Giver of all life. And so, she cherished all the things that had been said by men and angels about her and her Child, all the things that had happened in her young life until now, and the very fact of His life, a fact with a *weight* out of all proportion to her Baby's tiny frame. 'So, this is God's future and I am part of it!' I can so imagine her saying.

My favorite painting of the Blessed Virgin Mary with the Child Jesus is by a nearly forgotten Italian painter of the 19<sup>th</sup> Century name Corsio:



There are a number of interesting things in this painting through which a statement is made about Christ as that One held most closely in the arms of his Blessed Mother. For one thing, the artist positions the Virgin's arms so that she is *not* holding her Baby *up* but rather *to* her. The cloud that seems to envelop both mother and child— God's unfailing love?--provides all the support the two need. And, what of Jesus's swaddling clothes

and Mary's veil? It appears to be the same continuous flow of cloth, shrouding both Mother and Child.

The Child Jesus is looking distractedly (or contemplatively) off in the distance, but the Blessed Mother is looking us square in the eye, and that, together with the painting's warmth and color, is what I so like about it, Mary's look. In that look straight at us, that look straight at the people who will one day make this Mother a surviving parent, Mary shows what her pondering of the mystery of God's action in her life is going to produce—hope in a fulfillment of God's purpose that is bound to happen.

May that be where our pondering leads us this night of Our Lord's Nativity! No matter what loss we bring to this night, no matter what dread and worry for the peace of the world or for our ability to get through tough times that seem to just get tougher, the power of the Holy Spirit has overshadowed us, each of us a member of Christ's Church by Holy Baptism, and has placed this Infant in *our* arms. Now, what do we intend to do?

As we receive Our Lord in His Blessed Sacrament on this holy night, let our answer be that of Mary, and may He grow in us full of grace and truth to touch the lives of countless others. ✍️  
Amen.



Now to Him Who loves us and has freed us from our sins by His blood and has made of us a Kingdom, priests to His God and Father, to Him be glory and dominion with the Father and the Holy Spirit, now and for ever. ✍️Amen.

