

“But Mary kept all these things and pondered them in her heart. Then the shepherds returned, glorifying and praising God for all the things that they had heard and seen, as it was told them.”

Dear Fellow Redeemed,

How could Mary possibly take it all in? As we said yesterday, when she looked at her child, she was looking at the face of God. The facts are pretty easy to learn. Even our children know how Jesus is the eternal God who was placed into Mary’s womb by the Holy Spirit. So He was both God and man. But who can really comprehend the wonder of the incarnation? Mary was the closest to it. We know the facts but she carried Him in her womb and gave birth to the One who created her. She held Him in her arms and nursed the One who spoke to Adam and Eve, to Noah and Abraham. All she could do was ponder such amazing things. Mull it over in her mind.

Then there were the shepherds, their whole life changed the night the angels appeared to them and then they went and saw their Lord and Savior lying in a manger. I’m sure they never forgot that night. When it says that they “returned, glorifying and praising God for all the things that they had heard and seen, as it was told them.” I’m sure that wasn’t just talking about that night when they returned to their sheep. That no doubt describes the rest of their lives. They told their children and grandchildren for years to come. Some of them may well have lived to see the day when Jesus grew up and began His ministry. They may have heard His preaching and seen His miracles. They may have even lived to see Christ the Lord, die on the cross and rise again. And now they are still glorifying and praising God in heaven.

How can you fully comprehend what has happened? You can’t really. All you can do is Ponder in wonder and amazement and give Praise to God. And the more you ponder, the more you will be moved to true heartfelt and joyful praise. Still for us today there is

So Much to Ponder and Praise.

Today I would like to Ponder with you another amazing passage in 2 Corinthians 8:9, *“For you know the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, that though He was rich, yet for your sakes He became poor, that you through His poverty might become rich.”*

This is so amazing that every phrase deserves a moment to Ponder. “For you know the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ.” This is not anything new to you. You already know the amazing grace of our Lord Jesus Christ. You already know how everything Jesus did was done by His grace. Jesus was moved by a deep love for you that you do not deserve. We know that as a fact, but Paul reminds us again so that we can ponder the wonder of His love and be moved to praise.

Now Paul describes His grace in this way, “Though He was rich, yet for your sakes He became poor, that you through His poverty might become rich.”

“Though He was rich!” Talk about an understatement. We can’t even imagine. When we think about someone being rich, all we can relate to is people in this world who have a lot of money. We see the lifestyles of the rich and famous. We can see the power and privilege that goes along with that wealth. But that doesn’t even begin to describe what Jesus had. He was God in heaven. He had absolutely everything. He didn’t need any money because He had unlimited power and privilege. He had the entire universe at His fingertips. He had all the angels at His disposal. Oh yes, He was rich with a wealth we can’t imagine.

“Yet for your sakes He became poor.” What Paul is describing here is what we call Christ’s state

of humiliation. That is how Jesus the Son of God humbled Himself. Paul explained it in Philippians 2:6-8 like this, Jesus was “in the form of God, [yet He] did not consider it robbery to be equal with God.” He didn’t think He had to hang on to His wealth and glory as God. Instead He “made Himself of no reputation, taking the form of a bondservant, and coming in the likeness of men. 8 And being found in appearance as a man, He humbled Himself and became obedient to the point of death, even the death of the cross.”

When Paul says He “made Himself of no reputation,” it literally it says “He emptied Himself.” This really is one of the most amazing things to ponder. It is something that is so difficult to understand. How could Jesus be the omniscient God who knows absolutely everything and yet He had to grow up and learn to talk and learn to read? He had to learn everything just like we do. How could Jesus be the omnipotent God who had absolutely all power in heaven and on earth, and yet He was helpless in His mother’s arms? He had to grow up and get stronger just like the rest of us. Can you imagine having the power to do anything you want just by thinking it and yet living His life just like the rest of us? He never used His power to make His life easier. Even to the point where He was starving to death after not eating for 40 days, yet He would not use His power to make food for himself to eat. That’s all included in “He became poor.” Jesus went from the highest and richest of all, to being the lowest, poorest of all. And it wasn’t just giving up His power but His position and His glory as God. He went from being honored and glorified by angels to being despised, rejected and even crucified by the creatures He made and those He came to save.

Why did He become poor? It wasn’t some disaster or a stock market crash or anything that took His riches away from Him. He gave it all up. He made HIMSELF of no reputation. He Humbled HIMSELF. He did all that willingly “FOR YOUR SAKES.”

The best illustration that I can think of to describe this was an experience I had the first time I went to India. We had just landed in India and were going to our first hotel. We crossed over a river in Chennai and the smell was overwhelming. It was the smell of raw sewage and death and rotting fish. It was the most sickening smell I’ve ever experienced. Thankfully I was in that smell for less than a minute as we drove over the bridge. When we were on the bridge though, I looked down and there were people living along that river. It was the most pathetic sight. They lived in the most run down shacks and were milling about in the mire. That memory still haunts me as I think about those poor people.

Now can you imagine any one of the rich people in the world giving up everything they have and going to live with those people. To work with them in the mire and become a part of their life? There is no way. The most that I could ever imagine happening is a very wealthy person taking pity on them and buying property and buildings to give them to live in to get them out of the mire and the stench. But even that hasn’t happened yet. Yet that is what Jesus has done for us. He left his throne in heaven, forsook all His power and glory and came to live in the mire of this world. He came to dwell among us, as we heard yesterday. The holy God who is repulsed by sin, who hates sin, came down and lived among sinners and even endured the abuse of their sinful hearts. Yes, He became poor in ways that we can’t even begin to understand or imagine.

He did all that for your sakes so that “you, through His poverty, might become rich.” That’s right, Jesus gave up everything so that you could have everything. The prosperity gospel that is so popular today makes a mockery of this promise. They say God wants you to be rich and they are talking about the worldly riches. What a paltry offer they make of God’s gift. It’s like someone wants to give you a mansion and you settle for a sandcastle. The riches of this world are so small

and fleeting compared to the true riches of heaven that Jesus gives all who trust in Him.

Jesus doesn't just give us a few presents, like we give to one another at Christmas. No, He gives us His perpetual presence in our life. He is our Immanuel, 'God with us' (Matt. 1:23). Not just "God made us." Not just "God over us," or even "God thinks of us." But God WITH US. He is where we are: at the office, in the kitchen, on the plane at school, always. We may forget him, but God will never forget us. We are forever on his mind and in his plans.

That's life changing. He has changed our lives forever. Taking us from the most horrible poverty, a life separated from God, a life worse than those poor people in India living along the putrid river. Jesus gave up everything and came to live with and has given us a life with God forever. He gives us all the riches that He had before He was born in this world. We will share in His glory. Truly rich in every way possible that will make our life "the fullness of joy" forever.

Shall that not also change our heart forever? Shall we not change our reason for living, that we may "live no longer for ourselves but for Him who died for us and rose again?" There is so much to Ponder. But let's not just ponder these things in our mind. Like Mary may we ponder them in our heart where it will move us to a life of Praise. Let us glorify and praise God with the Shepherds our whole life long, telling all the wonders of His love. And may we glorify and praise God with our lives and actions, with our gifts and offerings, with our whole heart and soul. Then we will keep the true joy of Christmas in our heart forever.

Amen.