

You have already started pondering what things will be like in 2019. How you might feel younger, lose a few pounds, exercises more, a better vacation if there aren't unexpected bills, maybe promotion at work, complete a few lingering projects. How in 2019 the sun might shine brighter, the grass greener, kids will only need to be told once, housework gets easier, you'll be more romantic to your loved one. We're all pondering somehow 2019 will be better than 2018. We all know it probably won't be.

Mary pondered all these things in her heart, namely, miraculous birth, the appearance of shepherds sent by angels; this promised Baby, people waited 1000s of years. She kept all those things, pondered them in her heart. Her lot as the Mother of God had already been hard. She bore the shame, for awhile, of her beloved Joseph's suspicion. She bore the shame as a young pregnant girl, of the wagging tongues in Nazareth; if they ever called her 'the Virgin Mary' it was to in mock her.

She also knew the hardship of primitive traveling while pregnant, of poverty, of being place in a town full of relatives and no one gives her a room; and no doubt she felt shame of a filthy nursery and animal feeding trough to lay her Child. Already, immediately upon His birth, the world wanted a peek at, a piece of her Son. Shepherds came barging-in and told everyone. There was not much rest for Mary. Forty days and she and Joseph took Jesus to the Temple in Jerusalem and there Simeon prophesies while they marvel. But -a warning; a sword will pierce Mary's pondering heart. Soon mad Herod will come looking for blood and a trip to Egypt. Jesus will escape that attempt on His life, but He will submit to death. Mary is destined to outlive both her husband and her Son, a burden in itself as great and onerous as any mortal has known.

The shepherds exuberant. Joseph marveling. Simeon singing and departing. Mary is pondering, her joy is tempered by life's reality. Things are not as they should be. She shouldn't have been out of doors in winter with a newborn; should've a better place to lay Him than a manger. She shouldn't be shamed by people, for the honor God has bestowed on her.

But most of all, Her Son should not have to die. That is why He was born. For if He doesn't die -Mary, shepherds, Joseph, Simeon, all of you, would.

Mary knows joy, peace in Christ, knows union with God. But also knows sadness for this life is not as it should be. So too for the Church and your lot as well. Your sorrow is not yet ended. Life, even for His people, on this side of eternity, not yet full, incomplete, still a longing for better, more; still sorrowful. Mary knows that Bethlehem, Jerusalem, Egypt, even Nazareth are not her home. That she will not really rest or be at peace until she is home with her Son in the place He prepared for her? Is that what she ponders?

This is how it is for you. You are forgiven in Christ; there is no one to accuse you. The devil and hell cannot prevail against you. You are holy, righteous in

Jesus. You bear His name, all that comes with it. As the Psalmist wrote, **the Lord is with me, I will not be afraid, what can man do to me?** No one can stand against you.

But you still hurt. Your heart pierced as well –broken with children who do not honor you, who've grown in ways you don't approve; supervisors, customers don't appreciate you; for that matter, family doesn't appreciate you; health issues, cancer, disease, poverty; cities full of violence; so much against you.

Your Christmas didn't measure up to Hallmark's standards. The warm fuzzies melted quickly, the world returned too soon. While you washed dishes all alone or picked up the living room, 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 a wonder more people commit suicide this time of year?

Yet, no matter how unsatisfied, how frustrated, tired you might be, no matter how deeply your own heart is pierced: Jesus, born of Mary for you. No matter how alone or confused or unappreciated. Jesus, born of Mary, just for you, knowing you would be sitting there to hear that. Ponder that for awhile.

Life on this side of glory is not as it should be. Spouses should love and honor at all times. Children should honor their parents, no one speaks ill of you, and everyone serve others first. But they don't. Not even most the time. And yet, no matter how much life has failed you, friends betrayed you, your own flesh abased and shamed you: Jesus born of Mary for you,

And that is enough; enough to bestow joy, 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 to bring you home. He does it all for you. And not just that, but promises to daily attend to you, that a hair cannot fall off your head apart from His protecting, providing, watchful eye.

This love -will not yet remove all your pain, struggles, stop all the violence and immorality, and family issues. But it will. It will make all things right and new and wipe away every tear. In the meantime, it will give you the strength to carry on. It will comfort and console and heal. For Jesus loves you. He gives His Body, Blood to strengthen, nourish you unto life everlasting. This is most certainly true. Ponder that awhile, with Mary.

And you behold the child no less than Simeon, why we sing that song of heaven, after the Sacrament. Simeon prayer answered, He wouldn't see death until He saw the Christ. You will not see death either. Like Simeon, you can depart from this place, out in the thick of things in 2019, even depart this life, in forgiveness, peace, eternal life- that's yours. What will 2019 bring, what great things the Lord has in store -namely forgiveness of your sins. 2019 will be a great year for you, you do not go it alone. He's with you every step, the favor of God is upon you. Ponder this as well.