

Looking into Mary's Heart and Soul

Part Three: Grace and Humility

Scripture Reading: Luke 2:1-20

So far, we have seen the Spirit of God reveal things to Mary through some very dramatic channels. First, she received a direct visitation from an angel (Luke 1:26-38). Then, she received the testimony of a pregnant woman who testified that her unborn child was leaping for joy at the presence of the unborn Christ-child. Remember, Mary hadn't told her anything yet, and she wasn't showing the signs of pregnancy at that time (Luke 1:39-56). Mary responded to these testimonies with faith, submission and reverence. Now, Mary is going to show us the grace of humility as she brings "*the Son of the Highest / the Son of God*" into the world (Luke 1:32,35). The place of this momentous event was a stable, where animals are kept. The child had a feeding trough for a crib. And the first guests to arrive, to honor the child, were shepherds.

A Word about Shepherds – The Hebrew people were originally nomadic shepherds. Abraham, Isaac, Jacob and his sons were shepherds (See Genesis 12 – 47). Moses was a shepherd (Exodus 3:1). As leaders of God's people, Moses and Aaron were described as shepherds (Psalm 77:20). King David started as a shepherd (I Samuel 17:12-15). God identifies Himself as a shepherd. His people are His sheep (Psalm 23; 80:1; 100; Isaiah 40:9-11; Ezekiel 34:12). The model of a shepherd gives us the picture of loyalty, nurturing, care, and protection. This godly concept also describes the Son of God (John 10:1-30; Hebrews 13:20-21).

Nevertheless, at the time of Christ, the social status of shepherds in Israel was not very elevated. After the captivity in Egypt, the Hebrew people developed a more settled culture – having towns, businesses, and agriculture. Shepherds lived more isolated lives. They held a more subordinate position in society. It was a poor and humble existence. Often, families passed the job of shepherding to the youngest son. As new sons were added to the family, the youngest got the job. Sometimes the daughters were the shepherds. There were also hired shepherds, but it wasn't a prestigious profession. It is therefore remarkable that shepherds were the first people outside the family, to be told of the Messiah's birth – and then to announce the birth of Messiah to the public. The symbolism is very appropriate, but it was, nonetheless, a humble testimony.

A Humble Birth – The angel told Mary that her Son was the Son of the Highest / the Son of God. However, Gabriel never said that there would be a wonderful reception when he was born. Details were not given. Caesar Augustus made a decree about taxation. The next thing you know, Joseph and Mary were taken away from the comforts of their home and thrust into a crowded little town called Bethlehem. These events hardly seemed to be pointing to something so wonderful as the Messiah's birth – a Roman decree... a crowded little town without the proper amenities for sleeping, let alone for giving birth to a baby!

We sense Joseph and Mary just doing the next thing, without presumption. Mary wrapped her baby in swaddling clothes. She was a very attentive and caring mother. It was a common practice for newborn babies to be wrapped in strips of narrow cloth. It helped a newborn adjust to leaving the snug environment of the womb. They would sleep better and not scratch themselves. Under nicer circumstances, there would have been ladies from the family or perhaps friends, helping to attend to such things, while the mother rested. This night, Mary would have to take care of it herself.

The Shepherds Entrance – Any visitor would have been a surprise, but shepherds were really a surprise! People who spend weeks and months outdoors with sheep might not have the cleanest, freshest-smelling atmosphere about them. They were loners. How did they know about this? This would be like gypsies showing up at the hospital to see your newborn baby! The shepherds told their story to the parents. Then they told their story, to everybody that they could find. Luke 2:18-19 tells us that the people around town “*wondered/marveled/were amazed*” at the things the shepherds said.

Next, we are told, “*But Mary kept (treasured up) all these sayings and pondered them in her heart.*” The response of the townsfolk is an understandable surprise, but Mary is receiving this as further divine confirmation. She will store this in her mind and savor its importance. Mary received direct communication from an angel. She also received the testimony of high-ranking family members. Now, she receives, with equal dignity, the words of simple shepherds – just as important to her as the words of the others. This shows Mary’s grace and humility. Truly she is “*the handmaid/servant/bondslave of the Lord*” (Luke 1:38).

Can we follow Mary’s example?

Many think that serving God will be full of privileges and excitement, but that must not be construed as a life of ease and popularity. To labor in Christ’s name is a privilege. Serving God will certainly produce times of excitement, but it will more than likely bring hard labors and will require sacrifice and suffering. There will be lack of appreciation – even persecution. Can we handle hardship and labors with the same kind of grace like Mary had?

Mary was humble enough to receive the Shepherd’s testimony concerning her Son. Some look for God to show Himself in dramatic and grand demonstrations. Many will wait for those who are highly esteemed in this world to confirm what is the truth. What about simple folks? What about those who are criticized and condemned by this world? Are we willing to identify with the faith of those kinds of people? Will we associate with them? Are we willing to learn from them?

See James 2:1-9; Matthew 18:1-4; 23:11-12; I Corinthians 1:18-31; II Corinthians 12:7-12; Galatians 5:13-18, 22-26; Philippians 2:1-16; 4:11-13; I Peter 3:13-18; 4:10; 5:5-11; II Peter 3:18 cp. II Timothy 2:1; Colossians 4:6. Consider humble little Bethlehem (Micah 5:2 – written about 700 years before Christ was born). Are you willing to be one of the “little things” that God uses?