**Pondering Pondering**

*A Sermon by The Rev. Patricia Rhoads Davis*

*Christ Church Episcopal*

Luke 2: 15-21

Holy Name

Jan. 1, 2017

On our way to church is a home that pulls out all the stops for Christmas. Every year the decorations are bigger and better, lighted figures littering the front lawn, wreaths and bows on every window, every fence post, every shrub. There is Santa, of course, but also penguins and snowmen, deer and reindeer, candy canes, Christmas trees, angels, even a Christmas dinosaur! It’s fantastic, and people come from miles around just to see this outrageous display of Christmas cheer. But apparently they don’t know that the 12 days of Christmas come after Christmas Day, because the day after Christmas, it’s all gone, the lawn returned to its barren winter dreariness. Which, more than we like to admit, mimics our own return to reality. We do have to go back to work of course, and the children back to school, so we may as well get it all put away so we can begin our real lives again.

And it’s verified by the coming of the New Year. Here we are, 2017 already and we’re already behind…nothing to do but get to work, clear out the Christmas fa la la, and get on with it. And then we come here and the Gospel of Luke says Mary treasured the words of the shepherds “and pondered them in her heart.” And she had a new baby, for God’s sake, so where did she find time for pondering anything? And that’s the story of our lives. For we find time for worrying and fretting, for fuming and fantasizing, for considering and cogitating --- but pondering? To ponder means to consider and meditate upon something both mentally and emotionally significant. Given that definition, not many of us can say we spend any time “pondering.” And I’m wondering if we don’t take down the decorations and toss out the tree in short order because we really don’t want to spend time pondering. What might we learn if we were to ponder the significance of this baby in our lives?

And yet. This day is aptly suited for just such pondering, a conjunction of Christmas, New Year’s and Holy Name Sunday, all bringing their own weighty food for thought. Yes, the reality is that we do have work and school and appointments and things that must be taken care of. But still --- what difference has this Christmas, or any Christmas, made? Is it just one more thing we’ve successfully gotten through --- and now on to other things?

There is a wonderful little movie, only half an hour long and made ages ago, with Jimmy Stewart. It’s called “Mr. Krueger’s Christmas.” In it, Stewart plays an isolated and lonely old widower, prone to daydreaming or, as we come to learn, to pondering. In one scene he travels in his thoughts to the manger on that first Christmas. And though it’s only in his imagination, it somehow feels more real than real life itself. Seeing the baby Jesus, and the babe looking at him, he says, in that uniquely Jimmy Stewart voice, “Hello there... I-I-I-I... Oh dear... Oh... Oh, you're-you're... I didn't bring a gift, I, but I, I guess that's not important. Thank you for everything you've done for me. As long as I can remember you've been right by my side. I'll never forget when you walked with me right in those first few hours after I lost Martha. I-I've always been able to count on you, when I felt dark inside and when I... You were right there, right, every time, right there. Even when I didn't feel good about myself, I knew that you cared for me enough, and that, that made me feel better. Like that time I got mad with Mabel Huntington because she broke her pipes on purpose just so she could have somebody to see while I came up and fixed them for her. Boy, I hollered at her, boy I hollered real loud. But then, then I got to thinking - you loved Mabel just as much as you loved me and I should treat her the way you want me to. I believe I talked to you about that at the time. Well, I started visiting her and we became friends. I saw her almost every day until the day she died. I love you. You're my closest, my finest friend. And that means that I can hold my head high, wherever I go. Thank you. Thank you. Thank you.”

Do you see? To ponder is to recognize that, time and time again, the infinite breaks in on the finite. To ponder is to find that very fact so arresting that we must stop, must recognize what is happening and must thank God for it. For this world and this life are not all there is but only the merest glimpse of the life that awaits us. And we know this because this mortal life has been consecrated by the immortal presence of the God who chose to be born and live among us. How incomprehen-sible is that! And yet, Christmas day reminds us that it’s true, that the infinite has once more broken into the finite so that we might know: we are never alone.

So, while still observing the 12 days of Christmas, we’ve come to the New Year, on a day honoring the name of “Jesus.” So perhaps we might start this new year with some pondering of our own. We might start by pondering the way we use this earthly time. Perhaps we might make a resolution we can actually keep, a resolution to allow some time and space for pondering the presence of God in our lives. Perhaps this year we might determine to make the Sabbath a real Sabbath, to disconnect from all our devices, to stop with all the errands and chores, to slow down on Sundays at least, to look and really see how God has been present in our lives, and where, during those ordinary moments of life, the infinite continues to break through. Because it is remarkable, isn’t it, that God continues to make himself known in the flesh: in the feel of a new baby’s skin, in the embrace of a friend, in the kindness of a stranger… And then perhaps, we might see afresh, like Jimmy Stewart’s Mr. Krueger, that God has walked with us all along, that God has been right there, every time, right there, even when we didn’t feel good about ourselves. And then, we can truly give thanks for the One who is our closest, our finest friend.