

How much time and energy do you spend getting ready for the next big thing? What happens after it takes place? Is there any time to reflect on what just happened?

Christmas is a perfect example. Think of everything that you have done over the past couple weeks to get ready for tonight and tomorrow. Will there be any time for you to just sit back and enjoy yourself? And after Christmas Day has come and gone, will Christmas stay with you?

We are great at looking forward to things. We're stuck on "What's Next." We're not so good at "What Just Happened?" We don't give ourselves much time to reflect—or even much time to enjoy the moment.

Now, having said that, I've met plenty of people who have a defining experience in their lives that they think about often. For some, that defining experience was their military service in a war. For others, it has to do with their first taste of independence, or meeting their future spouse, or becoming a parent. For still others, that defining experience may be decidedly negative: the breakup of a marriage and family; a horrible accident, or just cruel, heartbreaking words that can't be forgotten. I would guess that most of us do have a memory that we return to time and again—one that seems to define us, for better or for worse.

On this Christmas Eve, we are invited into the defining experience of a young virgin mother named Mary. We are invited to put the brakes on the holiday express—if only for a few moments—and think about what happened there in Bethlehem, for Scripture tells us that "Mary treasured all these things and pondered them in her heart."

What are the things that Mary treasured and pondered? I think she started with the angel Gabriel's announcement to her: that she would conceive and have a son named Jesus, who would take the throne of David and be the Son of God. Then to feel the unmistakable signs of that life growing inside of her. Certainly she would have reflected on Joseph's reaction to this news—his own experience with an angel messenger—his acceptance of her and her miracle baby. She would have remembered the rough road to Bethlehem and the mounting frustration of being turned away again and again until the stable was offered as an option. Then there was the pain of childbirth, surpassed only by the wonder of this baby boy. As she held little Jesus that night, she pondered the promises the angel had made; surely she ran them through her mind again.

"He will be great and will be called the Son of the Most High God. And the Lord will give him the throne of His ancestor David. He will be King over the people of Jacob forever, and his kingdom will never end." We can only wonder if she heard those words as she wrapped her little one in strips of cloth to keep him warm and secure. I'm sure later on she pondered the abrupt arrival of shepherds from the fields, breaking the stillness of the stable with a fantastic story. No doubt she would treasure the memory of their weather-worn faces as they reported their angelic encounter. She now had more words to turn over in her mind: "A great joy will come to all the people: the Savior, who is Christ the Lord, was born for you today in David's town. This is how you will know him: you will find a Baby all wrapped up and lying in a manger." That was her

boy they were talking about. It was all happening just as the Lord had said. It is no wonder that Mary pondered these things.

As I mentioned before, this big event called Christmas is a timely example of “What’s Next” versus “What Just Happened?” But it is hardly the only one we could name. The fact is, we jam pack our lives—with stuff. Our homes are filled with possessions, our calendars are filled with events, our hearts and minds are filled needs—but how much of that “filling” is truly “of God?”

This Christmas Eve there is good news of great joy for you, because God still does what He did in Bethlehem. He breaks into our reality. The power of His message breaks into our lives like a brick being thrown through a pane of glass. Jesus comes to you whether you’re ready for Him or not; whether you’re looking for Him or not; and His arrival in your life demands a response.

Jesus was not born into our world of a virgin mother so that you and I would have an excuse to party. Jesus, the eternal Son of God, did lower himself into a feeding trough so that you could have a day off from work. No. The shadow of a cross falls across the manger where that baby lies. He will grow up to do what you and I could never do—that is, live a perfect life; exactly the way God wants us to live. But then he does something unexpected with that perfect life—He gives it as a sacrifice. He breaks into this world to lay down his life for you. He becomes one of us in order to switch places with us—he gets our sin and our death; you and I get his forgiveness and life. And He broke into our world not just to die our death but to defeat it. A ray of morning light also falls across the manger where the baby lies! He rose from the dead physically, three days after dying. He broke into our reality to change it—to give us confidence that death is nothing more than a doorway to a new kind of life made possible by his resurrection.

In your hearing of these words, the good news of a Savior, Jesus has broken into your reality right now. He wants you to know the peace of forgiveness. He wants you to know the confidence of life with him that never ends. He wants to show you the best way of life there is. He wants you to follow Him.

But first, he wants you to believe that He broke into this world to make a connection with you—a connection that gives you hope and happiness tonight—a connection that will never be broken. In the stillness of the Christmas stable, His arrival demands a response. What is yours?