

## Spirituality: Source of Spirit and Life

***“Mary treasured all these words and pondered them in her heart.”***

**A Reflection on Luke 2:19**

### **Treasuring and Pondering our Stories**

The commitment we have made as a congregation to shepherding God’s creation, and the ecological conversion this entails, calls us to a particular way of being in the world. It calls us to be contemplative. This call is not only to the sisters who have chosen a contemplative way of life, but to all of us who share the goodness of God’s wonderful creation. In this reflection, we enter into the contemplative space that Luke’s Gospel calls the “heart” of Mary of Nazareth, the mother of Jesus. Reflection on the heart of Mary is integral to our spirituality. We cannot, of course, know Mary’s “heart” any more than others can really know our hearts or what is in our hearts. We can, however, try to discover what it was that Mary treasured and pondered in her heart. We may discover some surprising things about ourselves and about our world.

### **The Gospel Story (Luke 2:8-20, 51)**

<sup>8</sup>In that region there were shepherds living in the fields, keeping watch over their flock by night. Then, an angel of God stood before them, and the glory of God shone around them, and they were terrified. <sup>10</sup>But the angel said to them: “Do not be afraid; for see - I am bringing you good news of great joy for all the people: <sup>11</sup>to you is born this day in the city of David a Savior, who is the Messiah.... <sup>12</sup>This will be a sign for you: you will find a child wrapped in bands of cloth and lying in a manger.” <sup>13</sup>And suddenly there was with the angel a multitude of the heavenly host, praising God and saying: <sup>14</sup>“Glory to God in the highest heaven, and on earth peace among those whom God favors!” <sup>15</sup>When the angels had left them and gone into heaven, the shepherds said to one another: “Let us go now to Bethlehem and see this thing that has taken place, which God has made known to us.” <sup>16</sup>So they went with haste and found Mary and Joseph, and the child lying in the manger. <sup>17</sup>When they saw this, they made known what had been told them about this child; <sup>18</sup>and all who heard it were amazed at what the shepherds told them. <sup>19</sup>*But Mary treasured all these words and pondered them in her heart.* <sup>20</sup>The shepherds returned, glorifying and praising God for all they had heard and seen, as it had been told them....<sup>51</sup>Then he went down with them and came to Nazareth, and was obedient to them. *His mother treasured all these things in her heart.*

When Luke speaks of Mary’s “heart”, he is doing so against the backdrop of the Hebrew thought where the heart was not only the seat of human emotions, but also the seat of thought. The word for “heart” could also be validly translated as “mind” or “brain”.<sup>1</sup> The verb “to treasure” has connotations of remembering, of mulling over, of putting the pieces together, of saving from destruction. The participle “pondering” is more or less synonymous with the verb translated as “to treasure”. It is a cognitive activity, an activity of the brain.

What was it that Mary treasured and pondered in her “heart”? In the first occurrence (Luke 2:19), she is said to treasure and ponder “all these words”. In the second (Luke 2:51), she is said to treasure “all these things”. The Hebrew noun for “word” can designate a “word event”, and its Greek equivalent in Luke can carry that meaning. In Luke 2:8-20 Mary hears and ponders not only the word of the angels, but the whole event that has taken place. She keeps on mulling over the meaning of the words and actions of the shepherds who receive the angelic proclamation and act

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<sup>1</sup> The earliest known pictorial form of the first letter of the Hebrew word for “heart” is a shepherd’s staff.

on it. These shepherds, after finding Mary with Joseph and the child “lying in a manger”, spread the good news of the birth of the child, whom the angels have identified as the Savior and the Messiah. In other words, a contemplative reflection on the child’s birth and all the events surrounding it, including the visit of the shepherds, serves to expand Mary’s understanding. She does not have all the answers. In order to comprehend the extraordinary workings of God in her life, in her relationship with Joseph, and in the life of her son, Mary needs to “ponder” and to keep on “pondering”. A message of God’s saving action for the whole of creation resonated in the heart of Mary.

The “manger” is of special interest in this context. It is a feeding place for animals. Since there is no place at the “inn”, Mary and Joseph find themselves in the place of the other-than-human. At birth, Jesus not only shares the dwelling place of animals, but is actually placed in the trough from which they normally feed. The manger is a stark reminder of the interconnectedness of all creation. It is also a telling reminder that the “us” of “God-with-us”, to borrow a concept from Matthew, does not refer only to the human inhabitants of the planet, but it extends to all of creation.

### **SJE on the Heart of Mary**

SJE was captivated by the notion of the heart of Mary, to the point that he chose, for the Congregation, a name that reflects a symbolic representation of Mary’s heart.

Heart of Mary: it is true that all Christians can claim this title. But it belongs, in a particular way, to the Religious of Our Lady of Charity, by reason of their vocation, which has its origins in the Heart of [Mary]; by reason also of the extraordinary graces they have received from the Heart of Mary during the hard struggles that marked the beginning of the Institute; and, particularly, by reason of the consecration of the Order to the Heart of the Blessed Virgin.<sup>2</sup>

### **A Witness Story from the Process of Canonization of SME**

In the process of canonization of SME, the following story is told in the answer to question 21:

“Our Mother established the treasure of the Heart of Mary. It was a little case<sup>3</sup> in which each religious put the product of the work she had done in her free moments. Each one made efforts so as to put at least 10 francs per year in it, and the foundations even sent their annual alms to the treasure of the Heart of Mary. With this money, [she] had Masses said for the souls in Purgatory, paid the chaplain’s stipends, offered the usual stipend to the religious who preached the retreats, and even gave other alms, either to our poor houses, like one of our Italian houses to which [she], on her deathbed, sent 200Frs, or to families in need. The money in the treasure of Mary was never counted and there was always enough. It was through confidence in Providence and in the Blessed Virgin that our Mother did not wish this money to be counted.”<sup>4</sup>

For SME, the “heart of Mary” functioned as a call to the sisters to pool their resources to “shepherd” God’s people.

### **Treasuring in our Hearts like Mary**

- Our new consciousness of our interconnectedness or kinship with the whole Earth Community calls us to new reflections and ever new actions in our times. In community groups, or with one or two others, consider how the gospel references to Mary’s heart speak to us today. To what more do they invite us?
- Enter into the experience of Mary and Joseph as they place the child Jesus in a feeding trough for animals. Enter into the experience of the child. Consider how this originating event shaped his adult life. How might we live the message of this gospel as Good Shepherd Sisters committed to shepherding God’s creation?

<sup>2</sup> Complete works, X, 21, p.8 (translated from the French).

<sup>3</sup> This little case finds its home in the Oratory of St. Mary Euphrasia in Angers.

<sup>4</sup> *Testimonies: Process of Canonization SME*, p. 21.