

## Column

Christmas and the weeks leading up to it are a reservoir of memories. For the young, it is a time for filling up that reservoir. For the more advanced in years, the process is often reversed. Memories are drawn out of that pool.

More than that, there seems no rhyme or reason why some events in the past are privileged and remembered while others go sailing off into oblivion. Some of my early Christmas memories are of things which seem today quite mundane. For example: in the first grade bringing an ornament from home to go on the classroom tree, the following year of cutting strips of construction paper and fashioning them into a decorative holiday garland, and every year attempting to keep all the strings of lights on our 10-foot red cedar tree burning (in those days if one when out, all went out).

Then, of course, there was that week before Christmas when much time was spent lying on the floor in front of the tree feeling and shaking the gifts which had your name on them. Many of these were wrapped in red or green tissue paper and were fairly easy to discern the contents (socks for example), but others took more ingenuity and imagination. Even then, on Christmas morning there could be some surprises.

You no doubt have your own reservoir of memories into which you both add and draw. Mary, Jesus' mother, was no exception. In particular, she seems to have done a lot of the former. For example, when the shepherds came and announced what the angel had said concerning the child lying in the manger, we are told she "kept all these things, and pondered them in her heart" (Luke 2:19).

Later, when Jesus was presented in the Temple according to directions of the Law of Moses, we find Mary listening carefully to the prophetic words of aged Simeon and equally aged Anna, a prophetess. At the time, the full meaning of their words was hid from her; nevertheless, she stored them away.

In like manner, when Jesus, aged 12, became separated from His earthly parents following the feast of Passover and was later found, His words -- "Wist ye not that I must be about my Father's business?" -- were stored up for later reflection. "His mother kept all these sayings in her heart," we read in Luke 2:51.

Memories for Mary led to more than nostalgia: they led to understanding, understanding of who her Son was, His mission and her place in God's scheme of

things. No doubt, our memories of Christmases past should do the same thing. The gifts we squeezed under the tree as children pointed beyond themselves to a greater gift, the gift of God's own Son.

Though years have passed and the world and ourselves have changed, one constant remains: The Word became flesh. God has come down to where we are, and from this fact, comes the everlasting promise: "As many as received him, to them gave he power to become the sons of God, even to them that believe on his name" (John 1:12).

Memories and beyond memories is what the day we shall soon be celebrating is all about. Receive the Christ of Christmas and receive life.

*O LORD, raise up, we pray thee, thy power, and come among us, and with great might succour [help] us; that whereas, through our sins and wickedness, we are sore let and hindered in running the race that is set before us, thy bountiful grace and mercy may speedily help and deliver us; through the satisfaction of thy Son our Lord, to whom, with thee and the Holy Ghost, be honour and glory, world with out end. Amen.* (Collect for the Fourth Sunday in Advent from the Book of Common Prayer)

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