

A mystery to ponder



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Katharine Smith *reflects on* Luke 2:15-21

Mary has many treasured words to ponder now that her son has been born. As she watches over him perhaps she is thinking again about the Angel Gabriel's words. He said that her baby would be called the Son of the Most High and would reign over the house of Jacob for ever. Mary asked then "How can this be?" and perhaps she still asks the same question – how can this baby, so little, so helpless and vulnerable, so humbly born, be the holy Son of God?

The shepherds though have just confirmed Gabriel's words. They spoke of angels proclaiming that the Messiah, the Lord, had just been born in Bethlehem and giving them a sign, a way of knowing how to find the baby.

Now she and Joseph must name their baby with the angel-given name of Jesus and circumcise him to affirm his identity as a true child of the people of Israel. It's a name that means "God saves," and perhaps Mary again ponders that name and wonders how her son is to fulfil his destiny to save his people from their sins.

Perhaps it's just as well that for now she doesn't know the answer to that mystery. It is enough for her that she loves this child and will care for him and protect him whatever the future holds. She trusts God to help her do just that. ☺

Lord Jesus, you were born to save your people from their sins. Help us to look to you when we carry heavy burdens of guilt and regret and to receive your forgiveness and the assurance of your love and compassion. Amen.

Betwixmas

by Catherine Reid

It's a strange time between Christmas Day and New Year. Many people are off work, still in celebration mode, revving up for the grand finale of Bacchanalian excess that the New Year's Eve celebrations have come to represent. In the meantime others, particularly key workers, are tasked with mopping up after them – staffing Accident and Emergency departments, responding to the many road accidents that, sadly, happen when so many people are on the

move. Others are marginalised by loneliness, lack of funds, worry or grief.

For all we bemoan the commercialism of Christmas, it's probably true to say that in most towns around the country there will have been some kind of shared Christmas Day celebration, designed to ensure that nobody was left out. Yet it seems that once Christmas is out of the way we stop caring, forget about sharing.

Even if you don't recognise this description yourself, it's worth giving it some thought and prayer. What are your plans for tomorrow? Can you find a way of keeping the spirit of Christmas compassion alive over the New Year and beyond? ☺

“Christmas celebrates the awesome and amazing fact that God is grander, wiser and more mysterious than we could have ever imagined.”

Dan Schaeffer (born 1958), pastor and author

St Basil the Great

by Caroline Hodgson

Basil the Great (330-379), is commemorated on Tuesday. He was a bishop of Caesarea in Cappadocia, in modern-day Turkey, and an influential theologian. He, his brother Gregory of Nyssa and friend Gregory of Nazianzus, are collectively referred to as the Cappadocian Fathers. They helped to shape Christian theology, in particular the doctrine of the Trinity. Theologians have always pondered how a human child could also be God, and the role played by the Holy Spirit.

How, for example, could God be created in the form of the Son, if God is the creator? The Cappadocian Fathers helped to formulate an idea of how this could be, by declaring that the Father, Son and Holy Spirit are of "one substance in three persons".

You might, as I do, find it hard to understand how ancient thinkers could become so exercised about this kind of thing. We tend to value individual thought, and many Christians accept that we can't understand the mystery of God. But Basil's intellectual rigour shaped our faith, and I for one believe we can give thanks for that. ☺