The scripture lesson for today is probably one of the most well-known in the Bible. In the chapter before we read that Mary and Joseph have made their way to Bethlehem for the census issued by Caesar Augustus. Because there is no room for them in the inn, they resign themselves to the stable where the baby Jesus is born.

The first guests to the stable though are not foreign dignitaries or the power players of Bethlehem. As we move from the description of the manger scene, we read that there are shepherds who are in fields near the town. Shepherds had a very simple profession. They were nomads who slept outside with their sheep and took care of them. They probably dressed in rough clothes and due to their trade did not always smell the nicest. Shepherds were just ordinary people.

However, these shepherds are the first to hear about birth of Christ our Lord by angels, messengers from God. They are told that their Lord is a baby wrapped in a manger and in the city of David’s home. They are suddenly surrounded by a heavenly hosts that surrounds them with praises and words of peace among the people of God. The scene is one that brings both comfort and awe that God speaks to humans through such a sight in the night sky.

After the angels leave, the shepherds have to see about this good news themselves and so they travel to see what the angels have told them. They begin to spread the word and become the first missionaries about the King of Kings who has been born. They leave the house giving praise for all that they have witnessed. We hear that these things are special to Mary as she treasures them in her heart.

This has always been one of my favorite scenes in all of scripture. There are several things that stick out to me about this Nativity story and things that always amaze me.

The first is about who receives the news of Christ’s birth. Shepherds are the first to hear about Jesus’ birth. Even though they are nomadic people who spend more time with animals than people, they are the ones to hear that the Lord has come to them. In the Gospel of Luke, we always hear about the diversity of people whose lives were touched by Jesus. In this Gospel, we read more about women, Gentiles, the unclean, and those who do not receive attention in the other Gospels. The writer of Luke wants to focus on the fact that Jesus gives attention and love to all sorts of people.

The passage reminds us that our Lord comes to all people and that his birth was to bring salvation to all. We are also reminded that the Lord can use all different types of people to do good in this world. Shepherds were not great learners like the priests in the synagogue or Roman soldiers with ties to the greatest empire of the time. They were people who had low key jobs and lived simple lives. Yet they were the first ones to see the Christ child and the first ones to deliver the good news to all
those around them. God used them to be the first missionaries to tell others about Jesus and what his birth meant to the world.

I think this passage always reminds me that God uses unusual people to do extraordinary things. We are also reminded that we can never claim to be simply ordinary without any gifts or talents. No matter what jobs, degrees, or age we may be attached to, we can still give glory to God by being messengers of the good news of Jesus Christ.

The second thing that sticks out to me is the verse about Mary pondering and treasuring these things in her memory. We cannot exactly know what she was doing or thinking, but we can learn a lesson from what she is doing. In the Christmas season, I believe that all of us can get caught up in having the “perfect Christmas.” We have to make sure we go to all the parties, buy everyone a present, and make sure the feast is absolutely perfect. While it is certainly a time to rejoice and enjoy a season that can take a step aside against the pain and sorrow in life, there are days I wish that we could slow down. The season is one where we are to marvel at the Incarnation, that Jesus Christ came to earth and was born as a small babe. It is a time to remember that hope has come to the earth and that no other force or power should be the sole one we rely upon. Jesus is our hope and he is the one who overcomes death, fear, and darkness. It is Jesus to whom our trust and allegiance should belong.

But realizing that should give us opportunities to pause and have time where we let that sink into our minds and hearts. If you do one thing this Christmas season, I would encourage it to be to take one moment of your busy schedule and ponder what it meant for Jesus Christ our Lord to be born and to come into this world. And as you ponder, wonder what that means for you to realize that good news and how it changes you and the way you see others, your community, and the world.