

Dec 21, Blue Christmas 2022

REFLECTION: Gathered and Held in the Heart

And Mary treasured all these things and pondered them in her heart. For me, this is one of the most comforting lines in the bible. Mary had all these strange and bewildering things that have happened to Mary, she holds and treasures them. The line doesn't say she held onto only the good things. The fear and the hardship she experienced along with the joy and the love – she holds and ponders with equal love.

And that gives me comfort because despite all the notions of positivity that abound in our world these days, I'm not always so great at "good vibes only" or "letting go" or "getting over it and moving on" and I'm not sure we ought too.

This time of year, is especially hard, carols and cards and messages on TV and radio bombard us with what we ought to be feeling – joy, happiness, cheer, excitement. We ought to have endless amounts of energy to make the season bright and perfect for all the people in our lives. And if we don't feel those things, if we don't have the energy then we compound our emotions with guilt and shame.

I struggle at Christmas. I struggle at other times of the year too, but mostly at Christmas. I have a lived experience of depression, OCD and anxiety, which gets exacerbated by stress and pressure. I've always been this way, I've always found Christmas to be overwhelming in its expectations, even as a little girl.

When I was little, I would sing Silent Night over and over to myself at night in the dark. I was afraid of the dark and the words – *all is calm, all is bright* soothed me. Helped me to be less afraid and feel safe in a world that didn't always feel safe.

And so I think about Mary holding all things that that have happened to her and pondering them in her heart. She's gentle and caring with all that's happened to her. I imagine her holding all these things softly and warmly the way she held her baby, knowing this vulnerable child needed protection and love. And I try to hold my own feelings in this way as well.

I think we expend too much energy in trying to 'get over and put aside our emotions' and I think, at least for me, when I hold them and honour them, I feel little bit better. And I invite you to consider this same image, the same practice. Take a moment and think about the story that brought you here this evening. See it for what it is a part of you worth treasuring and honoring, imagine wrapping it is a warm cloth and holding it close to your heart. This vulnerable piece of you is safe here, you hold it and God holds it.

And if you feel comfortable doing so, imagine your whole being wrapped in a warmth and held close to the heart of God. You are safe there. God holds you.

Hildegard of Bingen, a 12th century Mystic wrote, *“God Hugs You, you are encircled by the arms of the mystery of God.”*

Take a few moments to treasure this message, gather it up and hold it close to your heart.