

After everyone has gone home, you smile at the people who came, you laugh at the memory of their conversation, you smell the fading aromas of the food, the perfume, the candles; the house has more space, the cleanup helps you unwind, you go to bed, silence returns, and you start putting together the evening. How good it was to see everyone. What a festive spirit you enjoyed. How great the food tasted. Everyone had a good time. Part of the party is thinking about it when it's all over. All the little events, the colors, the snatches of conversation, the expressions on people's faces, all the bites of food start to come together into a single memory of a great night. That night, in turn becomes part of what Christmas means. In future years, when we start planning the holiday, that one memory helps create again the excitement of the feast.

After everyone had gone home, Mary, Joseph, and baby were left alone, perhaps with a few stray cattle and sheep. Luke tells us that on Christmas night, after the angels went back to heaven and the shepherds to their fields, Mary let the words and events of that evening re-echo in her thoughts. She treasured them, and pondered them in her heart. It's an important step. A part of the party we rarely plan ahead for. Even Marty Schottenheimer knows how important it is; he lets the Chiefs talk about the game up till midnight. But then they've got to start planning for the next one. Pondering the events is so necessary for us to do, that sometimes it actually becomes a distraction all by itself.

At the end of one year and the beginning of another, we may find ourselves drawn to ponder some thoughts in our hearts. It's an important part of new year's. Only then do we start putting things together. Who were the people we met? What were the big events of the year? What suffering did we endure? What triumphs did we achieve? What statements do we treasure? What gestures do we remember? One of the hardest parts of writing a paper in school is getting the conclusion together. It means calling to mind all the little points along the way and saying them now in a single thought which sums them up.

As part of your New Year's celebration this year, I urge you to do what Mary did. After everyone has gone home, think about what happened this year, think about what it all meant, and treasure the events in your heart.