

Bishop Shelton: Welcome back to my home! The last time you were here in March, the movers had arrived, and I was sitting in the midst of boxes and stuff. Life is much more settled now - in my home and in my heart. One reason is because my husband, Joey, is now here with me in NC.

Joey Shelton: Merry Christmas, North Carolina United Methodists!

Bishop Shelton: We have had quite the year...or two. It's time to "be still" and "reflect."

In Luke, chapter 2, we hear the birth story of Jesus, beginning in verse 13 of Eugene Peterson's translation, *The Message*:

"At once, the angel was joined by a huge angelic choir singing God's praises: 'Glory to God in the heavenly heights, peace to all men and women on earth who please God.' As the angel choir withdrew into heaven, the shepherds talked it over. 'Let's get over to Bethlehem as fast as we can and see for ourselves what God has revealed to us.' They left, running, and found Mary and Joseph, and the baby lying in the manger. Seeing was believing. They told everyone they met what the angels had said about this child. All who heard the shepherds were impressed. Mary kept all these things to herself, holding them dear, deep within herself."

"Mary kept all these things, holding them dear and deep." Friends, that is reflection. There is an alluring temptation to jump from one thing to the next. One month to the next. One year to the next. How are we holding things dear and deep...how are we reflecting? Be still. Intentional reflection offers opportunity for growth. In fact, even in the business world, Harvard Business Research says, "Research shows the habit of reflection can separate (the) extraordinary...from the mediocre...The practice of reflection itself is all about learning...It requires sitting with yourself, taking an honest moment to think about what transpired, what worked, what didn't, what can be done, and what can't. Reflection requires courage. It's thoughtful and deliberate."

So, what should you reflect upon? At least 1,000 things happen during the course of the week. How do you sort which experiences are most significant for your development? Simply put, which of the myriad of things that flew across your life are worthy of scrutiny? Well, the research goes on to say, "(they asked) 442 executives to reflect on which experiences most advanced their professional development and had the greatest impact on making them better leaders. Their responses were genuine...Three distinct themes arose through our analysis: surprise, frustration, and failure. Reflections that involved one or more of these sentiments proved to be the most valuable in helping our leaders learn and grow..." (Harvard Business Researcher Bailey Says).

Scripture tells us that Mary reflected, pondered, kept things dear and deep in her heart. That is my prayer for you and me this Advent and Christmas Season. That we can make space for reflection. When did you experience surprise, frustration, even failure? It's in those moments we

[Reflecting on Christmas \(Christmas 2023\)](#)

Bishop Connie Shelton, Rev. Dr. Joey Shelton



learn of our dear and deep need for Jesus, our Savior, Emmanuel, God-with-us. We learn of our dear and deep need for one another.

Henri Nouwen said it this way, “A life that is not reflected upon isn’t worth living. It belongs to the essence of being human that we contemplate our life, think about it, discuss it, evaluate it, and form opinions about it. Half of life is reflecting on what is being lived. Is it worth it? Is it good? Is it bad? Is it old? Is it new? What is it all about?... Reflection is essential for growth, development, and change,” Nouwen goes on to say. “ It is the unique power of the human person.” (*Can You Drink the Cup?*, Henri Nouwen)

This Christmas, don’t rush through without reflection. Christ has come. Christ is come. Christ will come again. Merry Christmas.