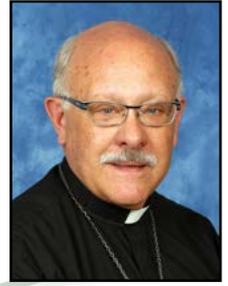




Hear the Word

from Pastor James N. McEachran



Gather... Encourage... Equip... Send...

First Sunday of Christmas (observed as Epiphany of Our Lord)

January 1, 2017

He Grew Up!

Luke 2:41-52

When last we gathered, Jesus was but a babe in a manger. The center of a whole lot of attention: crowds of angels, some Magi from the East, a gaggle of shepherds, a faithful Mom and Dad, Mary and Joseph.

Faith filled parents lived 1) According to the Law of the Lord. This mom and dad were incredible as the promise was graciously given. Think about it...their rapid response to God, spoken most often in the power of the Holy, in the face of some pretty incredible obstacles. They were truly the servants of the Lord their God.

Within their family values, they were observant Jews who uploaded him into the Abrahamic covenant at the end of the eighth day and named him "Jesus." After all, that was the name given by heavenly messenger!

To the letter of the Law, Mary came for purification, with Jesus to present Him to the Lord. They made the appointed sacrifice of remembrance. And, as it to confirm it all, they were met by two old crocks 2) Simeon and Anna. Luke likes "twos." As in Zechariah and Elizabeth, Mary and Joseph, Simeon, who blessed Jesus as one who "was looking for the consolation of Israel" and would you know, he has been led by the Holy Spirit.

And, don't forget, Anna, an 84 year old prophetess who had waited too, never left the Temple, waited in fasting and prayer until she saw Him "and spoke of him to all who were looking for the redemption of Jerusalem." In so many ways, the first two to affirm that Jesus was Messiah.

Then, time for 3) Going Home! Get it? True to the First Commandment, they fulfilled all righteousness "according to the law of the Lord," returned home to their hometown, Nazareth. And Luke adds: "...the child grew and became strong, filled with wisdom, favored by God." Cutest kid in the land!

He Grew Up! Imagine, like any young man. At home, with family and friends, cousin John came round, I bet, and he reached the age of 12. Carpenter's son, Mom still pondering things in her heart, and learning Torah and the way of the First Covenant.

As observant faithful family, we next find him when he was 12 years old...near adolescent...who kept Passover every year.

Only Luke records a childhood account of Jesus. There are others, but none has the sense of truth as Jesus at the Temple. Recall that Passover by nature is a huge gathering and many arrived in "city crowds" who traveled together. Jesus stayed behind.

Three days lost. Ever lose track of a child? I have, about five minutes that seemed like 3 days in Bellevue Square. Frantic! But, they found him, among the learned in the Law and the elders marveled at His wisdom.

Meanwhile, back on the mom and dad front: Can you imagine it? "Young man, why have you done this to us? Your father and I have been half out of our minds looking for you." Not much restraint in that...Imagine losing a son, let alone the Messiah!

"Why were you looking for me?" Not the best of human responses! Jesus doesn't seem worried at all. "Did you not know that I had to be here, dealing with the things in the household of my Father?" {"F" in caps/upper case.} Therefore, the icon on your Sermon Notes. "But they had no idea what he was talking about." Can you put a caption under the picture once they were home? Like, "Jesus explain to your Mom!" Note the orb of divinity, this son of Mary, Son of God!

But, this much is Luke's way of saying that both Jesus and Mary got His calling...this is a transition story...from manger to Baptism. This young man who kept the commandment to "Honor your father and mother that you may live long (Jesus next appears near the age of 30!) upon the land that the Lord is giving you."

Obedient son, observant young man, he "increased in wisdom and in years, and in divine and human favor." While mother Mary "treasured these things in her heart."

On this first day of 2017, New Year's Day. We are called anew to see in Jesus the Way, the Truth, the Life who calls us to grow up with wisdom and strength, led by the Holy Spirit to be about the Father's business. That the "Promise Graciously Given is Faithfully Received" in this place.

2016 – DiscipleFit. A theme that challenged each one of us to spiritual maturity, physical care, and mental engagement. A three fold emphasis towards the whole person we were created to be, redeemed to be in Christ. The clearest expressions were encircled with the word "discipleship." A challenge to be in worship, in Bible Study, and at prayer. Not are a mere "work" but as a key to growth which leads to ministry in the community.

In the past year, the marks of Christ's love were present both locally and globally. Within our core values of outreach and servant ministry, we housed the homeless, fed the hungry, encouraged education at every level.

We continue to support MaaSAE Girls School, the nursing education center, and made a clear statement of continuation with over 50 members learning about and committed to support the work of The Plaster House. A witness that others too might "become fellow heirs, members of the same body, the sharers in the promise in Christ Jesus through the gospel." When we work locally and in the world we do so in the name of Jesus. And soon in Bihar, India.

In the past year, we sent Pastor Wes and family to serve Our Savior Lutheran Church. At the request of the Bishop he interviewed and accepted the Call after serving in this place for 5 years to the day. Missed they are, close by they will be, and we look for opportunities to serve together in the area as the Holy Spirit leads.

2017 – 500th Anniversary of the Reformation. Recalling the center of Luther's renewal of the Church, by grace, through faith alone, in Christ. We stand upon a very firm foundation of over 60 years of ministry in this place. We now enter a time of discernment about the directions we will follow in the next year.

You your new Council will embark on a time of looking forward. As with other healthy congregations that will include a team serving as Vision 2650 to work towards the implementation of our shared ministry in the 1, 2, and 5 year increments which will place us in a vision of re-formation and new staff positions for the next generation. Stay tuned in prayer and in support for your voice will be important in this process to renewal.

2017, some would say, is filled with uncertainty and change. In each instance, we trust the Holy Spirit to guide us with the kind of confidence that Paul teaches to the church at Ephesus: the assurance that our common mission and the ministries we share are “in accordance with the eternal purpose that he has carried out in Christ Jesus our Lord, in whom we have access to God in BOLDNESS and CONFIDENCE through faith in him.”

The Time of Epiphany will show us the many ways that Jesus is shown to be the real deal, the One who carries our sins to the Cross, and is Risen that we might be built up into the Body of Christ, being about the Father’s work in the world. As we move forward in Christ, I challenge you with two questions towards “New Years’ Revolutions: 1) Where is your part, your place of growth and service in our congregation? Where are you being called anew to be about the Father’s business? 2) How do share Jesus with others? Who do you invite into the life and ministry of this faith community?

In a short time, we will share words from Martin Luther. The words he wrote to express the truth and power of the Third Article of the The Apostle’s Creed. How timely for us!

Sheer grace. What we are about in this place is not of our own doing. How often I am reminded that our stewardship our life together is a response to the generosity of God.

There is no deficit in matters of grace and generosity breeds generosity and that leads to the utter truth that the work we do is because we have been with Jesus and are a people reconciled to serve until He comes again.

For we believe, teach, and confess that “Daily in this Christian church the Holy Spirit abundantly forgives all sins---mine and those of all believers.” And it is this same Holy Spirit that has “called (us) through the gospel, enlightened (us) with his gifts, made (us) holy and kept (us) in the true faith.” How true? Most certainly now and forever!

Our prayer as we enter 2017, the Year of our Lord: “Build us up Lord, build us up; help us bear good fruit for you, Lord, give us vision and keep us sure. Grant us faith that’s steadfast and true. Growing in Christ, we plant seeds for the kingdom; we follow in faith what’s begun! Lord, set in our hearts the power of your word to spread the news of your Son!” Thank God, He grew up! May do likewise in Christ! Amen.