

Good Shepherd Presbyterian Church

Reverend Dr. Daris Bultena

December 27, 2009

First Sunday after Christmas

1 Samuel 2:18-20, 26

¹⁸Samuel was ministering before the LORD, a boy wearing a linen ephod. ¹⁹His mother used to make for him a little robe and take it to him each year, when she went up with her husband to offer the yearly sacrifice. ²⁰Then Eli would bless Elkanah and his wife, and say, "May the LORD repay you with children by this woman for the gift that she made to the LORD"; and then they would return to their home.

²⁶Now the boy Samuel continued to grow both in stature and in favor with the LORD and with the people.

Luke 2:41-52

⁴¹Now every year his parents went to Jerusalem for the festival of the Passover. ⁴²And when he was twelve years old, they went up as usual for the festival. ⁴³When the festival was ended and they started to return, the boy Jesus stayed behind in Jerusalem, but his parents did not know it. ⁴⁴Assuming that he was in the group of travelers, they went a day's journey. Then they started to look for him among their relatives and friends. ⁴⁵When they did not find him, they returned to Jerusalem to search for him. ⁴⁶After three days they found him in the temple, sitting among the teachers, listening to them and asking them questions. ⁴⁷And all who heard him were amazed at his understanding and his answers. ⁴⁸When his parents saw him they were astonished; and his mother said to him, "Child, why have you treated us like this? Look, your father and I have been searching for you in great anxiety." ⁴⁹He said to them, "Why were you searching for me? Did you not know that I must be in my Father's house?" ⁵⁰But they did not understand what he said to them. ⁵¹Then he went down with them and came to Nazareth, and was obedient to them. His mother treasured all these things in her heart.

⁵²And Jesus increased in wisdom and in years, and in divine and human favor.

"Christmas Clean-Up: Taking Out the Trash"

The packages are all unwrapped. The crumpled paper needs to be swept up and put into the trash can. The garbage haulers come in the morning. It is time for Christmas clean-up. Wow, all that was fast. All those preparations and in a blink it has come and gone.

In a blink—that describes the movement of the Scriptures. There is no lingering at the manger here. From Friday to Sunday—there is twelve years of movement. For us the manger is still warm and we are looking for the wise ones with their star of wonder, star of might. Oh for the flicker of starlight.

But not for the lectioners—when they gave us these lessons for the day they knew that we had best not tarry too long in the stable of Bethlehem. In only a matter of a day we will have the Baptism of the Lord that marks the fullness of the ministry of Jesus.

Today we have the only adolescent story of Jesus in the canonical Gospels.

Mary and Joseph had gone to the festival of the Passover—and they had all traveled together—a whole community of them from Nazareth had gone and now they were returning home. They did not directly have their eye on their son, Jesus, but they were not startled at all. They knew that he was in the group—probably among the other twelve year olds playing along the way.

After the first day of travel they began to really wonder. He did not roam to where they were at all in the course of the day. Upon such a realization they began to call for him, and then to search for him. Then the realization set in that he was not among the group. Amber alert. A child is missing. They start heading back the other way—back down the dusty path that leads to Jerusalem.

They find him. Alas they find him there. All their fears about the horrible things that could have happened to him were not realized. Understand that first century Palestine was not a friendly place for

innocent children. There were plenty of opportunities for harm to come to them. It was in too many regards no different that it is today.

Alas they find him there. They find him there in the temple. There he is in the Temple! Of all places he's still in the temple—and not only is he in the temple, but he is seated among the teachers and listening to them. They are asking and answering questions. The teachers of the law—the handlers of the Word of God—are amazed at the theological depths and insights of the child Jesus.

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Mother Mary—good Jewish mother that she is, bursts in to find him there. “Oy! Jesus—how could you do this to me? Didn't you know that I was worried sick? Oy-vey-Jesus-you are going to give me a heart attack. Your father Joseph—he's already having palpitations. He thought you fell among the goy.”

Jesus—almost astonished—says, “Mom, of course, I was right here in my Father's house. I thought you would have known that is where I would be?”

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Then we are told that Jesus increased in wisdom and in years – in both divine and human favor.

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It was clear that parenting the child Jesus meant that Mary and Joseph would have to understand that not everything was understandable with this child. He fit into a reality that was greater than their scope of being. They were surprised but not alarmed—they had met such reality before. They met this same reality in the angelic messenger that had first proclaimed, “Hail favored one.”

For Mary and Joseph, their assumptions about Jesus always needed to be checked. Those assumptions often needed to be altered, amended, and even cleaned up.

There is a story about a certain village in Italy. In that village they do not dress up or go to parties on New Year's Eve. Rather as midnight nears, the street traffic disappears, the pedestrians go home, and the police take cover because they know what is about to happen.

It is a tradition in that little village. It is a tradition that goes so far back no one remembers how it started or why is started, but it part of the life of that village.

At the stroke of midnight, the windows of every village house open up. With those windows open, and with reckless abandon the citizens begin throwing away worn-out furniture, chipped glasses, cracked dishes, old clothes, old pots and pans, worn out shoes, and pictures of boyfriends who are no longer boyfriends and girlfriends who are no longer girlfriends.

All those things that people do not want to haul with them into the New Year—all of that goes. It is thrown out the window and onto the street below.

What a wonderful tradition. I wonder if we would do better with that as a New Year's tradition that with the whole ball dropping in Time's Square and fireworks at the Inner Harbor thing.

I cannot help but think about Mary and Joseph when I think about that little village. Parenting the child Jesus meant that they had to toss out the window some of their ideas about Jesus. They had to clean-up and toss away their notion that he was only their child.

It was about boundaries. They had to see that this child of theirs was bigger than just their nuclear family. They had to lose that idea.

It is like Elkanah and Hannah—every year they would bring Samuel a little robe that his mother had made. She was able to give Samuel over to the work of serving with Eli there in the temple. She was able to let go of the idea that he was only hers. Mary and Joseph would have to grapple with that too.

I'm so captivated by that vision of throwing open the windows and doors and tossing things out that I cannot help but think of the story. I'm thinking about the Bethlehem scene—I'm just not ready to leave that story yet.

I cannot help but think of those shepherds out there in the fields keeping watch over their flocks by night. And then into their reality burst this angelic messenger who says, "Don't be afraid."

Ya, right...

"Behold I bring you good news of a great joy. To you is born this day in the city of David a Savior who is Christ the Lord. And this will be a sign for you—you will find the babe wrapped in bands of cloth and lying in a manger."

After the angels had departed from them—the shepherds did something—they left, they went. They made the journey—even if it was a short one—they made the journey into the city of David. They found the child. They found him there with Mary and Joseph.

That is the astonishing thing—they left. Sheep—I guess they had to fend for themselves. Who knows? But there they were—and off those shepherds went to find the one who was born, as the angels said it, “To you!”

Yes, they had to throw open the windows of their hearts and rip open the doors of their lives. They had to open themselves up to the reality that they were more than shepherds. They had to realize that the Holy of Holies—the God of Creation had reached out to THEM!

They had to clear out their old notions and throw out the limitations and open themselves up to the limitless God!

Oh wow—there it is—that with Mary, and Shepherds, and even with a little village in Italy we need to throw away and clean out that which does not fit anymore.

As we stand at the start of a new year—what needs to go varies for all of us, but there are some things that we have in common. What needs to go, what just does not fit anymore is the belief that it will not and it cannot. That does not work. It will and it can—because God will and God can.

What needs to be thrown out is that idea that someone else will bear this message and tell this story.

You are the one—you are the one appointed by God—you are the ones to whom the angelic message has come. We are the recipients of the Good News. What are we going to do with it? Will we ponder it quietly in our heart never taking that pondering beyond? Will we go out there into the world with it?

Will we allow it to touch our reality in such a way that we will throw open the windows and doors and lose those negative ideas and thoughts that God cannot or will not with you. Will we?

Will we? This is the time. This is the season. This is the year. This is the moment to begin with the reality that is calling us to be the bearers of this wonderful news—without limitation.

Clear away the clutter. Clean up your vision. Oh disciples—oh shepherds...

Where we have said, “Oh, I’m only a little shepherd... or oh, I’m not wise enough or learned enough, or, or, or...get out of it and get moving...”

Throw out those limitations because God has!! That is the manger, and the temple, and the empty tomb. In Christ the limitations are gone! Amen.