

Sunday, December 27, 2020

Jesus was Presented in the Temple

Text: Luke 2:22-40

²² When the time came for the purification rites required by the Law of Moses, Joseph and Mary took him to Jerusalem to present him to the Lord ²³ (as it is written in the Law of the Lord, “Every firstborn male is to be consecrated to the Lord”), ²⁴ and to offer a sacrifice in keeping with what is said in the Law of the Lord: “a pair of doves or two young pigeons.” ²⁵ Now there was a man in Jerusalem called Simeon, who was righteous and devout. He was waiting for the consolation of Israel, and the Holy Spirit was on him. ²⁶ It had been revealed to him by the Holy Spirit that he would not die before he had seen the Lord’s Messiah. ²⁷ Moved by the Spirit, he went into the temple courts. When the parents brought in the child Jesus to do for him what the custom of the Law required, ²⁸ Simeon took him in his arms and praised God, saying: ²⁹ “Sovereign Lord, as you have promised, you may now dismiss your servant in peace. ³⁰ For my eyes have seen your salvation, ³¹ which you have prepared in the sight of all nations: ³² a light for revelation to the Gentiles, and the glory of your people Israel. ”³³ The child’s father and mother marveled at what was said about him. ³⁴ Then Simeon blessed them and said to Mary, his mother: “This child is destined to cause the falling and rising of many in Israel, and to be a sign that will be spoken against, ³⁵ so that the thoughts of many hearts will be revealed. And a sword will pierce your own soul too.” ³⁶ There was also a prophet, Anna, the daughter of Penuel, of the tribe of Asher. She was very old; she had lived with her husband seven years after her marriage, ³⁷ and then was a widow until she was eighty-four. She never left the temple but worshiped night and day, fasting and praying. ³⁸ Coming up to them at that very moment, she gave thanks to God and spoke about the child to all who were looking forward to the redemption of Jerusalem. ³⁹ When Joseph and Mary had done everything required by the Law of the Lord, they returned to Galilee to their own town of Nazareth. ⁴⁰ And the child grew and became strong; he was filled with wisdom, and the grace of God was on him.

Jesus was presented for purification rites as required by the Law of Moses (verse 23 – “as it is written in the Law of the Lord, ‘Every firstborn male is to be consecrated to the Lord’”). There was also a sacrifice of a pair of doves or two young pigeons that was to be followed. Mary and Joseph took this law seriously and wanted God’s favor upon Jesus.

Today, Christians practice the rite of Baptism. Parents present their children for the entrance into God’s family through this action. Parents who seriously practice their faith accept the responsibility to bring their children up in the faith; making sure they are taught (usually in Sunday School), attend worship as a family on Sunday, participate in congregational activities and teach them the Lord’s Prayer. Those families that have a deep love for God and their faith live a life that provides an example for their children of what they feel Jesus has asked them to. The congregation also promises to help in the growth of this child’s faith.

It saddens me that many children are brought forth for Baptism by parents who are participating in this rite only because mom, dad, grandma, or grandpa have asked them to. They stand before the congregation and make promises to bring their child up in the faith, but when the event is over, they return to life as normal which may

not include any further development for the child. The congregation also fails in their responsibility for helping the child in their faith growth in such cases.

As a child I was not baptized nor were any of my siblings. My mother had some background in her faith as a child and was baptized as an infant. My father was from an unchurched family. However, my parents believed in God. This did not stop my parents from living a life example that showed us that we should take care of others whenever there was a need and even when there was not. They had a strong willingness and empathy to help others and I am so glad that it rubbed off on me. We were “an unchurched family” as we had no regular church or membership. My father would attend church with me on special occasions, but it was later that I learned that because he only had a fifth-grade education that he had great anxiety about it. My mother had decided that we, her children, could make up their own minds about baptism. We, well at least three of us did, as adults but only because of influences by either our mates or our children’s mate’s family. For you see, two brothers and a sister died before I, the youngest was born. My maternal grandmother, however; did make sure that each of us had a Bible placed in our hands as a Christmas present.

I was 26 years old when I was baptized along with my eldest daughter on December 26, 1976. My eldest was adopted by my spouse. My first husband was Catholic. His parents were devout Catholic and because he had been married before we were not allowed to join the church. They wanted us to let them raise her in the Catholic faith. Since we were not attending church there was no baptism. My husband now had a strong faith background, and we were practicing our faith together, so we were baptized. When the Spirit came alive in me, I was sometimes considered obnoxious as I wanted to share what I had found with everyone. I soon learned that it was best just to walk the walk instead of pushing the talk.

My heart aches for the families who have not made God more of a priority in their lives, those who feel that “jumping through the hoops” is enough to please family members. Being baptized does not provide the keys to the kingdom alone. My heart aches for those parents and grandparents whose hearts ache because their children do not place emphasis on their faith life. My heart aches for the church and God’s family because many today do not include him as a priority.

Life could be so beautiful if we let ourselves become aware that God is with us through this journey. If we feel like he is not, we only need to ask ourselves, “Who was it that turned away?”

Let us pray: *Dear Heavenly Father, we pray that the hearts of all those who are distant may be opened to the call you have for them in your Kingdom. May their hearts be softened so they yearn to come back to you and to grow in the teachings that you have for them. We ask that you ease the ache in the hearts of those who have concerns for them and may you lead each and every one of us to do whatever it is we can to encourage them to return to the flock. May we all live our lives putting you first, others second and ourselves last. May we all be of the will to judge less and love more. Amen*



Monday, December 28, 2020

Rejoice in the Lord

Text: Isaiah 61:10-62:3

¹⁰ *“I delight greatly in the Lord; my soul rejoices in my God. For he has clothed me with garments of salvation and arrayed me in a robe of his righteousness, as a bridegroom adorns his head like a priest, and as a bride adorns herself with her jewels. ¹¹ For as the soil makes the sprout come up and a garden causes seeds to grow, so the Sovereign LORD will make righteousness and praise spring up before all nations. For Zion’s sake I will not keep silent, for Jerusalem’s sake I will not remain quiet, till her vindication shines out like the dawn, her salvation like a blazing torch. ² The nations will see your vindication, and all kings your glory; you will be called by a new name that the mouth of the LORD will bestow. You will be a crown of splendor in the LORD’s hand, a royal diadem in the hand of your God.*

God looks on his servants and provides each individual gifts and tools to share the gospel with those who are lost. We only need to listen to his call on our hearts and souls to step forward when he presents the opportunity to do the task. It only requires your faith to step forward and to love another person enough to share. You only need to be yourself, true and honest.

Sometimes the thought of a person will come across and I wonder what I am supposed to do. I pray first, then I send them a card that I am thinking about them or call and see how everything is going in their life. Sometimes I spend time listening and then to end the conversation I ask if I can pray with them. It does not have to be an elaborate prayer; I just use whatever comes to mind. Sometimes I use my standard prayer that has helped me so often. You can find it in the evening vespers in the hymnal.

Lord God, you have called your servants to ventures of which we cannot see the ending,

By paths yet untrodden, through perils unknown.

Give us faith to go out with good courage, not knowing where we go,

But only that your hand is leading us and your love supporting us;

Through Jesus Christ our Lord

Amen

On Facebook during these times I like to share things that will put a smile on someone’s face or bring a chuckle to their soul. I also find many faithful messages that others share with me. It is the least that I can do for my brothers and sisters.

God takes care of us as he does others. But he needs you and I to provide the human aspect of his love. You may be the only “Jesus with skin on that people see.” We are to “bloom where we are planted” and to reach out to others. We must remember though, that we may plant seeds, someone else may water them and someone else may see them bloom. We work together as a team stepping forward in our faith and love for Jesus Christ to make sure that his story is told.

Let us pray: *Heavenly Father, please help us to shed the thought that we cannot pray as well as others or that it is too difficult to step out and share the gospel with others. Help us to share what gifts and blessings we have seen in our own journey with others in a loving way. May we be the ones who plant seeds or water those seeds so they sprout or be the ones who are blessed to see them bloom. Help us to work as a team on your behalf for the blessings you have shown us and make us courageous in taking that first step. Amen*



Tuesday, December 29, 2020

A Time for Everything

Text: Galatians 4:4-7

⁴But when the set time had fully come, God sent his Son, born of a woman, born under the law, ⁵to redeem those under the law, that we might receive adoption to sonship. ⁶Because you are his sons, God sent the Spirit of his Son into our hearts, the Spirit who calls out, “Abba, Father.” ⁷So you are no longer a slave, but God’s child; and since you are his child, God has made you also an heir.

Jesus came to teach, provide an example of what he expected our lives to be, and to adopt us as God’s child. We were chosen, whether Jew or Gentile, to be heirs in his kingdom. When a child is adopted, they receive the feeling that they are truly wanted because they were chosen. Our children should know that we love them just as much as if they were not biologically ours.

My children have been wonderful gifts in my life, and I love them unconditionally. There may be times that I wish choices they had made were different, but nothing they do will change my love for them. God knows that we are slaves to sin, but he has through his Son given us the opportunity to receive forgiveness. We however must strive to avoid those sins as much as we can and remember to acknowledge them and ask for forgiveness. This is no different than apologizing to a parent for doing something that had made their heart ache. I want the best for my children, but I also understand that their life is a journey I cannot live for them. So, I pray for them and ask God to intervene wherever he is able. I also understand that my children are a gift from God that is only loaned to me for a time. If I am lucky enough my children will outlive my journey.

I know that God will do the same for them as he has done for me but only in the way that my children will accept. I learned a long time ago that my brain was too small to understand why God does what he does, but he has allowed me to accept what he does unconditionally. That has made life so much simpler for me. I have also learned without doubt in our lives, there would be no reason to have faith. Some questions are to remain unanswered, but our faith will carry us through.

Let us pray: *Dear Heavenly Father, thank you for caring and loving me so much. May I always remember that you are by my side and that you provide the motivation and gifts that I may use on your behalf sharing with others the gospel and love that you provide. Please help us all to be the partners that you wish us to be during this life’s journey. May we always support and share the joy you give to each of us with others we encounter. Amen*



Wednesday, December 30, 2020

A Prayer for Blessing

Text: The Letter of Jude

¹Jude, a servant of Jesus Christ and a brother of James, to those who have been called, who are loved in God the Father and kept for Jesus Christ: ²Mercy, peace and love be yours in abundance.

³ Dear friends, although I was very eager to write to you about the salvation we share, I felt compelled to write and urge you to contend for the faith that was once for all entrusted to God's holy people. ⁴ For certain individuals whose condemnation was written about long ago have secretly slipped in among you. They are ungodly people, who pervert the grace of our God into a license for immorality and deny Jesus Christ our only Sovereign and Lord.

⁵ Though you already know all this, I want to remind you that the Lord at one time delivered his people out of Egypt, but later destroyed those who did not believe. ⁶ And the angels who did not keep their positions of authority but abandoned their proper dwelling—these he has kept in darkness, bound with everlasting chains for judgment on the great Day. ⁷ In a similar way, Sodom and Gomorrah and the surrounding towns gave themselves up to sexual immorality and perversion. They serve as an example of those who suffer the punishment of eternal fire. ⁸ In the very same way, on the strength of their dreams these ungodly people pollute their own bodies, reject authority and heap abuse on celestial beings. ⁹ But even the archangel Michael, when he was disputing with the devil about the body of Moses, did not himself dare to condemn him for slander but said, "The Lord rebuke you!" ¹⁰ Yet these people slander whatever they do not understand, and the very things they do understand by instinct—as irrational animals do—will destroy them. ¹¹ Woe to them! They have taken the way of Cain; they have rushed for profit into Balaam's error; they have been destroyed in Korah's rebellion. ¹² These people are blemishes at your love feasts, eating with you without the slightest qualm—shepherds who feed only themselves. They are clouds without rain, blown along by the wind; autumn trees, without fruit and uprooted—twice dead. ¹³ They are wild waves of the sea, foaming up their shame; wandering stars, for whom blackest darkness has been reserved forever. ¹⁴ Enoch, the seventh from Adam, prophesied about them: "See, the Lord is coming with thousands upon thousands of his holy ones ¹⁵ to judge everyone, and to convict all of them of all the ungodly acts they have committed in their ungodliness, and of all the defiant words ungodly sinners have spoken against him." ¹⁶ These people are grumblers and faultfinders; they follow their own evil desires; they boast about themselves and flatter others for their own advantage.

¹⁷ But, dear friends, remember what the apostles of our Lord Jesus Christ foretold. ¹⁸ They said to you, "In the last times there will be scoffers who will follow their own ungodly desires." ¹⁹ These are the people who divide you, who follow mere natural instincts and do not have the Spirit. ²⁰ But you, dear friends, by building yourselves up in your most holy faith and praying in the Holy Spirit, ²¹ keep yourselves in God's love as you wait for the mercy of our Lord Jesus Christ to bring you to eternal life. ²² Be merciful to those who doubt; ²³ save others by snatching them from the fire; to others show mercy, mixed with fear—hating even the clothing stained by corrupted flesh.

²⁴ To him who is able to keep you from stumbling and to present you before his glorious presence without fault and with great joy— ²⁵ to the only God our Savior be glory, majesty, power and authority, through Jesus Christ our Lord, before all ages, now and forevermore! Amen.

God gave Moses the Ten Commandments, a list by which we could live our lives. God knew that because we are saint/sinner at the same time, we could never perfectly follow these guidelines. However, with faith in God that he will forgive our sins if we repent, he gives us the opportunity to live as closely to them as we can and when we slip, he will be there to help if we ask. Can you imagine how chaotic our world would be without these commandments?

Jude tells how important it is for us to be God's servants in sharing the Gospel with others without judgment. We need to share the message and then let God and his Spirit do the rest. If he needs extra help, he will call us for that also. For when Christ comes again there are going to be those who have not heard the story, have not experienced God's love through a human, or have been scorned and hurt along the way by someone claiming to be a servant but not living the life as Christ set the example. We are not to judge; we are to spread the Gospel to all that are willing to listen and for those who do not listen, we have at least planted a seed for someone else to tend when the time is right in their lives.

This lesson is a call for perseverance for the family of God to keep on “keepin on” with the task that lies at hand. We are called to stay grounded in our faith and prayer to the Holy Spirit to help us to keep going and we are to keep ourselves in God’s love as we look forward to Jesus’ mercy in bringing us home to eternal life. In the meantime, have mercy towards those who have doubt. To those that shun you, wipe off the dust from your shoes and move on, there will be others behind you that may be able to reach them. We can only do the best that we can with the gifts that we give. God and the Holy Spirit will do the rest.

Let us pray: *Dear Heavenly Father, keep me vigilant in the task that you call me to do. May I forever improve the skills that you have so lovingly provided and the gifts that you have so graciously given so that I may continue to serve you by reaching out to those who do not know you. Give me strength over the fear of the unknown and continue to help me stretch my comfort zone when it comes to the things you call me to do. May I always remember that you walk the path before me, that you walk the path with me and that you will carry me home when the time is right. Amen*



Thursday, December 31, 2020

A Time for Everything

Text: Ecclesiastes 3:1-13

1 There is a time for everything, and a season for every activity under the heavens:

2 a time to be born and a time to die, a time to plant and a time to uproot,

3 a time to kill and a time to heal, a time to tear down and a time to build,

4 a time to weep and a time to laugh, a time to mourn and a time to dance,

5 a time to scatter stones and a time to gather them, a time to embrace and a time to refrain from embracing,

6 a time to search and a time to give up, a time to keep and a time to throw away,

7 a time to tear and a time to mend, a time to be silent and a time to speak,

8 a time to love and a time to hate, a time for war and a time for peace.

9 What do workers gain from their toil?

10 I have seen the burden God has laid on the human race.

11 He has made everything beautiful in its time. He has also set eternity in the human heart; yet^[a] no one can fathom what God has done from beginning to end.

12 I know that there is nothing better for people than to be happy and to do good while they live.

13 That each of them may eat and drink and find satisfaction in all their toil—this is the gift of God.

Yes, in our life’s journey there is a time for everything. It is never the same time for everyone and even when an event happens to a group, it is never the same message for everyone. Our lives are as individual as we are unique from one another, even in family groupings. Many of us my age and older remember the song, “Turn! Turn! Turn!” (to Everything There is a Season) by The Byrds. Every time this reading comes around, I immediately hear the lyrics in my head.

*To everything (turn, turn, turn)
There is a season (turn, turn, turn)
And a time to every purpose, under heaven*

*A time to be born, a time to die
A time to plant, a time to reap
A time to kill, a time to heal
A time to laugh, a time to weep*

*To everything (turn, turn, turn)
There is a season (turn, turn, turn)
And a time to every purpose, under heaven*

*A time to build up, a time to break down
A time to dance, a time to mourn
A time to cast away stones, a time to gather stones together*

*To everything (turn, turn, turn)
There is a season (turn, turn, turn)
And a time to every purpose, under heaven*

*A time of love, a time of hate
A time of war, a time of peace
A time you may embrace, a time to refrain from embracing*

*To everything (turn, turn, turn)
There is a season (turn, turn, turn)
And a time to every purpose, under heaven*

*A time to gain, a time to lose
A time to rend, a time to sew
A time for love, a time for hate
A time for peace, I swear it's not too late*

Source: [LyricFind](#)

Songwriters: Peter Seeger

Turn! Turn! Turn! lyrics © T.R.O. Inc.

The phases of life that we experience from birth to death are all unique. What happens throughout the seconds that we live have a way of shaping the unique being we will become. We should be blessed by this and not catch ourselves comparing ourselves to others. We are who we are, no more and no less, because the call placed on our lives by God if we allow will be as unique as we are. What we can do is learn from each other and help each other along the way. We should support each other, hold each other when needed, walk with one another when life provides the opportunity. We are all God's children, no one better than the other, just uniquely

different. What we learn through our experiences may be helpful to others in their time of need. Life will present opportunities for us to share with others and it will also provide others to share with us exactly what is needed when it is needed to remind us that God is always there, he just may have a different face than what is expected.

Let us pray: *Dear Heavenly Father, may you always remind us of what a blessing our lives can be to not only us but to your other children and to those lost sheep that are waiting to be enlightened by your grace. May your children find common ground to work together to bring your story to the world, to those that have not heard it yet, and to remind those who have lost perspective of it along the way. May we be instruments that hear your call and provide the care that others need in this life of mountain top and valley low experiences. May we be the hands, feet, and heart of you to them when it is needed. Amen*



Friday, January 1, 2021

Divine Majesty and Human Dignity

Text: Psalm 8

¹ LORD, our Lord, how majestic is your name in all the earth! You have set your glory in the heavens.

² Through the praise of children and infants you have established a stronghold against your enemies, to silence the foe and the avenger.

³ When I consider your heavens, the work of your fingers, the moon and the stars, which you have set in place,

⁴ what is mankind that you are mindful of them, human beings that you care for them?

⁵ You have made them a little lower than the angels and crowned them with glory and honor.

⁶ You made them rulers over the works of your hands; you put everything under their feet:

⁷ all flocks and herds, and the animals of the wild,

⁸ the birds in the sky, and the fish in the sea, all that swim the paths of the seas.

⁹ LORD, our Lord, how majestic is your name in all the earth!

As Paul wrote in 1 Corinthians 13:11: “When I was a child, I spoke as a child, I understood as a child, I thought as a child; but when I became a man, I put away childish things.” I only wish that I could have held on to that innocence into adulthood. What a blessing it would be to move into adulthood but to hang on to that childlike faith, just think how much better this world might be. In what ways have our lives become so deluded with what we think the world requires of us? God provided us with the ability to take care of all that he put upon this earth and how we have handled that care has probably been not the best that we could have done. As children we had a

simpler life and an unquestioning faith life. We had people to care for us. Then we grew up and began to look at the world in a way that we thought we were supposed to. To provide was to have nice things, then came advertisement and marketing which kept telling us what we deserved and what we needed to make our lives easier. As I reach the time in my life where the years left are fewer, I look back to see how much we have accumulated that we thought we just had to have and now we have to find a place for it where it will get some good use or just be heaved onto the pile of disregarded whatchamacallits. How I long that I had lived a simpler life, one not so full of “stuff”. I know that I was blessed by parents who did not place much importance on having the most modern material items. I remember the first recliners that my brother and sister had in their household. My father found firm frames that were fixable in the junkyard and my mother reupholstered the chairs. There was no need to change the whole decor of rooms just because new styles came out. There was no need to have the most expensive material items (or their closest knock offs), but still, we continue to accumulate items. How would our lives have been different, if we only used what was needed to go from day to day? Material things are just things; you can’t pack them in that eternal suitcase, in fact you don’t even get a suitcase to make that final trip.

If we could have the faith of a child our whole lives, which we know is impossible because we have to grow up, life would have been easier. However, if we remember that we are children of God and that he provides all our needs, not our wants, then we can still incorporate that childlike faith without question. All we need is the simple acceptance and faith to follow.

Yes, the Lord is majestic and divine. He loves us unconditionally. He wants us to have a good life and he wants us to make sure that future generations have a good life. I am sure that as adults he would want us to take care of what he has provided and be wise enough to know what we can do differently to give honor and glory to his creation.

Let us pray: Dear Heavenly Father, turn our heads from worldly considerations that are placed upon us and give us the desire to want to do your will here on earth. May we not only be blessed by you, but may we become a blessing to others through you and our service to you. May we look for the simpler life and realize what is important. May we learn to pray for those who think differently that they may hear your word and come to have a desire to live in peace. May we all come to accept that we should come together in our similarities and be able to have open and honest communications with acceptance about our differences. May we always praise you and give glory to you in all that we do. Amen



Saturday, January 2, 2021

[The Word Became Flesh](#)

Text: John 1:1-18

***1* In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. *2* He was with God in the beginning. *3* Through him all things were made; without him nothing was made that has been made. *4* In him was life, and that life was the light of all mankind. *5* The light shines in the darkness, and the darkness has not overcome it. *6* There was a man sent from God whose name was John. *7* He came as a witness to testify concerning that light, so that through him all might believe. *8* He himself was not the light; he came only as a witness to the light. *9* The true light that gives light to everyone was coming into the world. *10* He was in the world, and though the world was made through him, the world did not recognize him. *11* He came to that which was his own, but his own did not receive him. *12* Yet to all who did receive him, to those who believed in his name, he gave the right to become children of God— *13* children born not of natural descent, nor of human decision or a husband's will, but born of God. *14* The Word became flesh and made his dwelling among us. We have seen his glory, the glory of the one and only Son, who came from the Father, full of grace and truth. *15* (John testified concerning him. He cried out, saying, "This is the one I spoke about when I said, 'He who comes after me has surpassed me because he was before me.'") *16* Out of his fullness we have all received grace in place of grace already given. *17* For the law was given through Moses; grace and truth came through Jesus Christ. *18* No one has ever seen God, but the one and only Son, who is himself God and is in closest relationship with the Father, has made him known.**

What a gift God gave to us when the Word became flesh. Someone to see and touch. Someone to give the example of how we should strive to live. Someone who took on our sins to provide us with an opportunity for eternal life in the kingdom. Someone that others could document the stories that have been passed down from generation to generation and stories that apply to our time and place. It has always amazed me how I can read a portion of scripture and each time I learn something I did not understand before just because it continues to speak to me where I am at in each different moment of my life.

Life to me is a gift and one that hopefully leaves the feeling of a gift with those that I encounter through my life's journey. A gift that presents a sense of what Jesus is like and what a blessing he is in the life of others. I am who I am because of what has happened in my life. As one would say the good, the bad and the ugly. Through each event, each mistake, each success, each thought, and action, I have been prepared to be a gift and a blessing to someone else. Sometimes I have found myself as a possible obstruction in one's life. I am not sure how Jesus uses that to help them, but I have faith that he does. How honored to be a vessel through which God and Jesus can touch the lives of others. I could not have seen everything that has happened or will happen before the day I return home to heaven. I am so glad that I had to take it a step at a time. The day that my brother had surgery and it was discovered he had cancer, I sat in the hospital chapel and shared with Jesus that I could not ever understand the vastness of his love or greatness in my life or the events that happen to any of us, so I only asked him to be able to accept whatever was to be in my life's journey. My mantra has become, "It is what it is, this is who I am and that is all I have to give."

Let us pray: *Dear Heavenly Father, thank you for making me who I am. Even when I have made a choice that I had to learn from that would send me back on course, my life has been full of blessings. May I continue to seek your guidance throughout my remaining days to reach out, be Jesus to others who need you. May I continue to be a servant that tosses the pebble in the pond and then watches as the ripples reach beyond where I can go. That is the greatest memory of your love that I carry. I so enjoy and love being a Child of God. Thank you for your wisdom and guidance wherever I go. Amen*

