

Second Sunday After Christmas
January 3, 2016

Pastor Lew Upchurch
Luke 2:41-52

“The Jesus Routine”

Here we are gathered once again for worship at Hope Lutheran Church and this is, of course, the first weekend worship service of 2016. Happy New Year! Over the past couple of weeks, we've covered a lot of Jesus and the beginning of his earthly life haven't we? We've celebrated his birth. That was a big deal. And last weekend, we saw another milestone for the infant Jesus as he traveled to Jerusalem at 40 days old to be presented at the temple. It was there that he was recognized as the promised Christ by Simeon. Today, we don't skip a beat and pick right up where our reading ended last week. But Jesus is now 12 years old and he is heading back to Jerusalem with his family and friends to celebrate the Feast of the Passover.

Yes, that's right. On this, the second Sunday after Christmas, the way the lectionary is set up, Jesus is already 12 years old! Now, you may be thinking, what happened to the baby Jesus? We just celebrated his birth. We just had all these special Christmas Eve services that told the story of our Savior. And I'm right there with you. In fact, I can't help but be reminded of the character Ricky Bobby in the movie *Talladega Nights* who said, “I like the Christmas Jesus best.” We like to hang on to the baby don't we? Even as the trees and the lights of Christmas come down, we still cling to the baby. But as a father of five, I assure you— the babies grow up—every one of them, including the baby Jesus. And today, the baby whose birth we celebrated only a few days ago, as we read in Luke Chapter two is almost a teenager. The promised Messiah has moved from the solitude and simplicity of Bethlehem's manger to one among many gathered at Jerusalem's Temple.

Perhaps this scene helps those of us in the church understand why so many people only come to worship on Christmas Eve. I mean we had a lot of people here on December 24th. 1994 people attended one of our five services that night! But apart from Easter, that many people don't show up here every weekend. Could it be that the simplicity of the Christmas baby is what they equate with the faith or could it be that once or twice a year is all they can handle because this whole Jesus thing can become a little too routine?

I hope that's not the case but it makes me wonder why we see some folks only once or twice a year. Of course that's not you. You are here on a regular basis. But if you're honest, it's not that easy to get up, get ready, and come to worship every weekend is it? It is so easy to just do something else — maybe sleep in or go shopping. Maybe catch up on your favorite TV shows, work around the house, or go to soccer practice with your kids. Besides, if you skip a weekend or two, it's not like you're really going to miss anything. Every service we hear God's Word in the readings, the liturgy, and the sermon. Every service we confess our sins. Every service we make a public confession of faith in the words of the Apostle's Creed. Every Service Christ comes to us in the Sacrament of Holy Communion. Every Service we pray the words that Jesus taught us to pray in the Lord's Prayer. I mean miss a couple of those services and it's easy to pick back up, right?

I hope you picked up on to my sarcasm because I'm laying it on pretty thick. But seriously, even with all the gifts we receive in worship, it's still not that easy to make this a routine part of our or our family's weekend. And maybe it is because of all those things I just described. Maybe the readings, the creed, the sermons, the Communion, the prayers-- are too routine. You've heard the story. Jesus Christ was born. He lived a few years on earth as the Son of God and then he died. On Easter he rose from the dead proving that the work he did on the cross was satisfaction to God for all our sins. Now all with faith in Him shall never perish but have eternal life. You've heard it and you get it. Miss a couple of weekends and you still get it. I actually agree with that. But stay away for an extended period of time because you see it as nothing but a dull routine yet you still think you get it? Well, here is where I disagree.

How in the world is it routine when average sinners like you and me gather around Word and Sacrament each week and have the assurance that Christ himself is here with us? How is it routine when we confess our sins and we have the assurance of his absolution and the assurance that he comes to us in the bread and wine at his table? We might call it routine because it might feel that way but it's not routine at all. The danger here is that we either get to the point that we think that we need some new plan that will somehow take us to the next level with God because "the ordinary routine" is not good enough or we convince ourselves that this stuff doesn't really matter at all.

But it does, because here in God's house we are being conformed to Christ's image, which means forgiveness before God and a life that bears fruit for the good of our neighbors. What starts out as a routine gathering on any given Sunday quite frankly

turns non-routine for each one of us. It turns unusual and non-routine because Christ is present in his Father's house.

And it's been this way for a long time. When Jesus shows up in his Father's house, the results are anything but routine. Look at what happened in our reading today. Jesus showed up at the Temple. The teachers and the folks sitting around listening hear a 12-year old boy throw down some knowledge! The text says, "All who heard him were amazed at his understanding and his answers!" What an unexpected privilege this must have been. But it wasn't routine.

And what about Mary and Joseph? Even though they had already been through a lot with this child and knew he was special, they seemed to kind of "slack off" because they didn't realize they had left town without him! But when they finally found him in the temple, the text says that they were "astonished." That's a strong word. No doubt they were worried and even kind of ticked at his disappearance, but when they came back to the temple and heard him, they were blown away. And Jesus' response? "Why were you looking for me? Did you not know that I must be in my Father's house?" For Mary and Joseph, this temple experience was anything but routine.

So what about you today? Jesus is present in His father's house just as much today as that day when he was twelve. But this Jesus, our Jesus, is no boy. Our Jesus is the man who traveled back to Jerusalem some twenty plus years later to finish this thing for us all on the cross. And there was nothing routine whatsoever about this death. Criminals died on crosses, which back then, was part of the Roman routine. But God's own Son who took the sins of the world upon himself to the point of death was about as non-routine as it gets. And to add to this non-routine event even more, the now resurrected and ascended Christ comes to us each and every time we are gathered in His Father's house and delivers his means of grace to us through Word and Sacrament, which means forgiveness to repentant sinners. Talk about a reason to come here on a regular basis! Christ is present. He shows up for us!

So here's the deal. I know that some believe the weekly routine of preaching, sacraments, prayer, praise, and fellowship is too ordinary and predictable. Many just tune it all out until the Christmas Jesus makes another appearance. And others search for that "special something" that will take them to the next level with God...as if that kind of thing has been revealed in the Scriptures.

But what has been revealed to us, Paul summarizes in the first chapter of his letter to the Ephesians, which is our epistle reading today. In Christ, God has blessed us with every spiritual blessing in the heavenly places. In Christ, we have redemption through his blood, the forgiveness of our trespasses, according to the riches of his grace. In Christ, God the Father has set a plan to unite all things in heaven and on earth. And in Christ, we have received this inheritance.

It is in the Christ, Jesus our Lord, who is present here in his Father's house and who is made known to us in what may seem like the common pattern of worship week after week who gives us life forever. This is not normal; this is not ordinary; but this is the Jesus routine.

May this routine be yours in 2016. Happy New Year! See you next weekend...in our Father's house. **Amen.**