

## First Sunday after Christmas

Isaiah 63:7-9

Hundreds of years before the birth of Jesus, Isaiah wrote about the God Who chose to come to His people and to dwell with them. He told of God's great goodness, His compassion, and His love. Isaiah also referred to God's "lovingkindness." No, that isn't a typo. Lovingkindness refers to God's grace, that totally *unmerited* love and goodness that He grants to us through His Son. That is an idea that the world cannot understand. In order to get goodness, you have to be good! That's the world's way. God's way is that He grants love in the face of hatred and unbelief. How else could He have chosen to send His Son to live among men?

Isaiah also said that God "redeems" His people. What an example of grace this is! Jesus did not merely save us from what might have become a reality, He bought us back (redeemed us) from something that was already a reality. We weren't in a condition in which we *might* die; we were already dead in sin. Our rebellion had already caused our deaths, but the God against Whom we had rebelled reached into the grave and pulled us back to Himself.



Yet so many Christians spent this Christmas thinking that the Bible story of Christmas was too boring to spend in celebration. Yes, they celebrated the season, the family together time, the presents under the tree, the joy of the children, the food, the decorations, but did they really share the joy of knowing that Jesus' birth led to our birth out of death and into His eternal kingdom? Which part of your Christmas celebration was the most precious to you? Would your

children and friends know that the birth of Jesus was the most precious gift that you celebrated this Christmas?

We are about to begin a new year; a new opportunity to spend time getting to know our God and His lovingkindness. It's not easy to build new habits, but we don't have to do it alone—God is anxious to help us make getting to know Him better a lifelong habit!

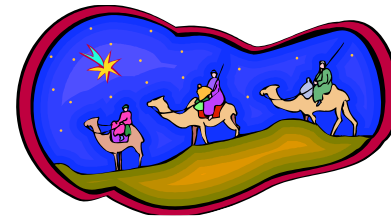
### Try a family Bible study!

*(A message from your Iowa District West Education Committee)*

## First Sunday after Christmas

Isaiah 63:7-9

1. How is the Christmas message simply stated in vs. 8?
2. While we note good gifts that we may have received from others, what "good things" (vs. 7) have we received from our God?
3. Vs. 9 notes "the angel of his presence saved them." How do we see a fulfillment of these words in the Gospel reading (Matthew 2:13, 19)?
4. In what ways had God's people experienced "distress" (vs. 9)? What were some times of distress in Jesus' life?
5. What words of hope and assurance do we find in this lesson to help us in our times of distress?
6. The Christmas season is a short season (in the church and in the world). How do we keep the message of Christmas alive in our church and in our family?



## First Sunday After Christmas

Isaiah 45:22-25

“Turn to Me, and be saved, all the ends of the earth; For I am God and there is no other.” (vs. 22) We as Christians know it already, but in this time of multi-choice spiritual fulfillment culture it’s good to hear again that there is no god but the God of the Bible. There is no way to God, but the Incarnate God, Jesus. He does not depend on us for His reality. He does not agree with those who would refrain from sharing His love with Jews or Hindus or Pagans or Muslims for fear of being *offensive*.

The angel on the hillside the night of Jesus’ birth said that he brought “good news of a great joy which shall be for *all the people*.”



Some of those who searched most diligently for the Babe were not even Jewish. Years later, after the Resurrection, the Gentile world would swarm into the Christian faith because Jesus offered so much more than they had found in their false gods.

Yet in today’s world filled with non-Christians, just days after Christmas, most of us are settling back into our post-holiday routine of getting all of the Christmas ornaments and reminders put back into storage until next year. We do this without thought of the millions of non-Christians in our country, as well as in our world, who have no idea that the gods that they worship, or even the self that they worship, will not lead to eternal unity with the real God. They have no idea that Christmas is not just a winter solstice holiday.

Witnessing the softened version of the Christmas message is pretty easy—“Love and peace to everyone; have a happy holiday!” The more difficult path is to share the reality of the Savior with our neighbors, friends, people of another culture or religion, and perhaps even some family members. They need to be loved by us and they need to feel peace, but they need something more. They need to know that the love and peace that will last for eternity is found only in Jesus.

***Give yourself a most valuable Christmas gift.***

***Make time for Bible study.***

(A message from your Iowa District West Education Committee)

## First Sunday After Christmas

Isaiah 45:22-25

1. Jesus came to be the Savior of ALL. How is this message shared in the verses of our text?
2. How is the theme of Christmas PRAISE emphasized in these verses?
3. How is the message of the first commandment conveyed in vs. 22?
4. The word “righteous” is found in vs. 24 and 25? What does it mean to be righteous? What does Christ’s coming at Christmas have to do with our righteousness?
5. How is the message of Isaiah’s prophecy emphasized and fulfilled in Simeon’s words in Luke 2:29-32?
6. The manger, the shepherds, the angel chorus and often the message of Christmas fades quickly from our heart and home. How will you keep the Christ of Christmas in your life beyond this season?



## First Sunday after Christmas

Jeremiah 31:10-17

Jeremiah penned these words as an encouragement to a nation that had undergone God's punishment for rebellion. The nation of Israel had fallen into such wickedness that God had called her a "harlot" (or prostitute) for running from Him into the arms of other gods. Now Jeremiah speaks God's words of comfort and restoration. The harlot nation has even become a "virgin" (NASB) again. She is cleansed by God and rejoicing in His comforting presence. But what of the weeping in Ramah? Who is Rachel and why is she crying?

In Jeremiah's time people knew Rachel as the mother of Joseph and Benjamin. In the prophet's poetic language, according to many commentators, Rachel represents the grief of Israel; the loss of so many people into exile. Jeremiah says that she need no longer weep because God's restoration is at hand. Israel will return.



As the history of God's people and the entire world unfolded after the time of the prophets, another meaning within these words became clear. In the New Testament they are quoted in relation to the murder of the infant boys of Bethlehem at the order of Herod the Great. He hoped to kill the "new king" that had been born there and whom Herod feared would end his own reign.

In Matthew only the grief of Bethlehem is cited, but the rest of the message of the prophet may have eventually comforted those who lost their sons in Herod's murderous raid. Jeremiah said that the weeping in his time could end because the restoration was coming. The families who lost so much in Bethlehem could be comforted because the world had gained Jesus. Because of His birth all the weeping at loss throughout time could be comforted. Because He gave the gift of eternal life to us, no separation is forever, but only for a little time. Without Him there would truly be weeping that could never be comforted.

*Try a family Bible study!*

*A message from your District Education Committee*

## First Sunday after Christmas

Jeremiah 31:10-17



1. We gather in joy at the new of our Savior's birth. What reason for joy is described in vs. 12?
2. How does the good news of Jesus' birth fulfill the words of vs.13? What special joys are yours today?
3. What news of vs. 15 quickly tempers the joy of the previous verses? Who is Rachel (Gen. 29:14ff.)? Why is she weeping?
4. What future event is Jeremiah prophesying (Matthew 2:13-18)?
5. Vs.17 declares "there is hope for your future." How are those words affirming for you especially as a new year is about to begin?
6. Today is also observed as the day of "The Holy Innocents, Martyrs." Where in our world are Christians giving their lives for the sake of the Gospel? Pray for those who are called to give a bold and sometimes life-threatening witness.

## First Sunday after Christmas

Matthew 2:13-23

The wise men (the magi) along with the shepherds and angels assemble around the manger where the baby Jesus lies. Mary and Joseph stand there too, along with the animals of the stable. That's the way we usually picture the visit of the wise men in our crèche scenes around Christmas. But, the Bible says that the wise men visited the holy family at their "house" and Herod the Great murdered all the boys in the village of Bethlehem who were "two years old and under." The magi probably arrived in Bethlehem some time after Jesus' birth. While it doesn't matter when the wise men visited, these verses do let us know that Mary and Joseph's experiences with their new son (the Son of God) were not limited to a single night in the stable. Wouldn't it be marvelous if someone discovered Mary's "journal" of Jesus' early months?

When the magi had come to find the new King, they had stopped in Jerusalem to question the current king, Herod. Did they assume that the new King would be one of his sons? Did they assume that since Herod claimed to be a Jew himself, that he would be "current" with the situation? Did they assume that he would be as excited as they over the now-fulfilled prophecy? Who knows what they thought? But we do know what Herod the Great thought—that his rule was threatened by a potential usurper.

Did Herod really kill the baby boys of Bethlehem? It fits his character and his insanity. He was such a threat to the lives of his own sons that once Caesar Augustus said that he would rather be Herod's pig than his son (because pigs were unclean and therefore less apt to be killed by Herod than were his sons).

The news of the slaughter wasn't known worldwide for the simple reason that in the small village of Bethlehem there were not all that many infant boys and in that age of violence against innumerable innocents, only their mothers would feel the infinite grief of losing a son only because the king desired it.

Jesus' life, and that of his parents, wasn't ever easy. When we go through troubled times, we can be sure that the One to whom we pray for help and strength really does understand.

Learn more about God's plans for you in a Bible study this week.  
*A message from your Iowa District West Christian Education Committee*

## First Sunday after Christmas

Matthew 2:13-23

1. Why did Joseph, Mary, and Jesus have to travel to Egypt? How was this trip divinely planned (vs. 15)?
2. What kind of person was Herod? Why would he take such violent action?
3. Where did Jesus grow up (vs.23)? A few more details are given in Luke 2:51-52. What do you think His boyhood was like?

### For Family Reflection

4. What other events had taken place in Egypt (Genesis 37:28; Genesis 42:1-1-2; Exodus 1:8-14)?
5. The plan for a safe and comfortable life in Bethlehem quickly changed when Joseph, Mary and Jesus had to flee to Egypt. When have your plans been quickly changed by life's circumstances?
6. Today's text takes us quickly from the peace of Jesus' birth on Christmas to a hurried exit to Egypt. In what ways has the peace of Christmas transitioned to a hurried life for you and your family? How do we keep the meaning of Christmas a peaceful reality in our homes?

## First Sunday after Christmas

Luke 2:22-40

As Americans, we are an impatient group, especially when it comes to satisfying our own wants. We not only want to see the process of gaining our satisfaction begin, we want to see it fulfilled—now. With the financial challenges of today, some of us even find it hard to remember that God really is in control and has promised that our NEEDS will be met. Some of the heroes of the Bible are a little hard to understand from our “unique” perspective.

Today, we read of Simeon and Anna. These two devoted followers of God waited almost all of their lives to see the Savior come. It was their greatest desire. God granted them a special knowledge that the time was close. When they saw Jesus, the babe, they joyfully glorified God for allowing them to see the Messiah. They did not see salvation won on the cross, nor the resurrection, nor the beginning of the church, yet, they were confident, and at peace, even though these things were not yet complete.

The hardest part of trusting God is genuinely believing that what He promises will happen, whether we see it or not. Simeon and Anna did not question God’s faithfulness, love, or ability. Trusting God as their Advocate, rather than trusting themselves for the answers to all of life, meant that they could know peace – as we hear in worship, “May the peace of God, which surpasses all understanding, keep your hearts and minds...” That trusting peace meant that they did not have to say, “We’ll wait to see if this child turns out to be the Messiah.” They understood that they were not in control of the situation, and that this was appropriate, because God was in control.

God is still in control of the situation, no matter what it is. He is able to grant us the gift of peace, of knowing that He is better able than we to lead us through life. We can know the peace of Simeon and Anna, know that God is trustworthy, but it is not easy. It means leaning on God instead of ourselves. Through Christ, this trust can be a reality.

### Is reading the Bible a part of your Christmas celebration?

(A message from your Iowa District West Christian Education Committee)

## First Sunday after Christmas

Luke 2:22-40

1. We’re only a few days past Christmas. How many days past Jesus’ birthday did the story in our text take place? What significant Jewish rituals took place on this day? Why was it important for Jesus to participate in those rituals?
2. Who was Simeon? How did he respond to Jesus? What do we learn from Simeon’s response?
3. Who was Anna? How did she respond to Jesus? What do we learn from Anna’s response?
4. Luke’s Gospel goes from the Presentation to Jesus being twelve years old (vs. 42). What simple statement does Luke give on Jesus’ childhood? What significant event in Jesus’ childhood does Luke’s gospel leave out? (Matthew 2)

### For Family Reflection

5. What do you think Jesus’ childhood was like? How may His childhood been like ours? How may it have been different?
6. This story quickly takes us from the stable to another setting. How do we keep from so quickly forgetting about Jesus’ birth? How do we keep celebrating in our home and in our church?



## First Sunday After Christmas

Luke 2:22-40

As Americans, we are an impatient group, especially when it comes to satisfying our own wants. We not only want to see the process of gaining our satisfaction begin, we want to see it fulfilled—now. Some of the heroes of the Bible are a little hard to understand from our perspective.

Today, we read of Simeon and Anna. These two devoted followers of God waited almost all of their lives to see the Savior come. It was their greatest desire. God granted them a special knowledge that the time was close. When they saw Jesus, the Babe, they joyfully glorified God for allowing them to see the Messiah. They did not see salvation won on the cross, nor the resurrection, nor the beginning of the church, yet they were confident and at peace, even though these things were not yet complete.

The hardest part of trusting God is genuinely believing that what He promises will happen, whether we see it or not. Simeon and Anna did not question God's faithfulness, love, or ability. Trusting God as their Advocate, rather than trusting themselves for the answers to all of life's questions, meant that they could know peace. As we hear in worship, "May the peace of God, which surpasses all understanding, keep your hearts and minds..." That trusting peace meant that they did not have to say, "We'll wait to see if this child turns out to be the Messiah." They understood that they were not in control of the situation, and that this was appropriate because God was in control.

God is still in control of the situation, no matter what it is. Many of us today face financial trouble or even failure; we endure the cancer of a loved one; we look at our world and wonder how it could get worse. Through it all, God is able to grant us the peace of knowing that He is better able than we to rule in our lives.

We can know the peace of Simeon and Anna and know that God is trustworthy. It means leaning on God instead of ourselves. Through Christ it can be a reality. Seeking Him as He stands right beside us is the answer. It isn't a simplistic answer, as some claim, but it is simple. By the power of the Holy Spirit it is possible.

### *Is reading the Bible a part of your Christmas celebration?*

(A message from your Iowa District West Christian Education Committee)

## First Sunday After Christmas

Luke 2:22-40

1. Review Luke 2:1-21. What had happened in Bethlehem? How had the shepherds responded? How had Mary responded?
2. How long after Jesus' birth did the temple visit take place? Why did Mary and Joseph take Jesus to the temple?
3. Who was Simeon? How did he react to Jesus' arrival? Why would a Baby cause such a profound response? What can we learn from Simeon?
4. Who was Anna? How did she respond to Jesus' arrival? What can we learn from Anna?

### **For Family Reflection**

5. Where in our worship service do we sing Simeon's song? What do we call that song? Why is it an appropriate response for us?
6. Mary and Joseph establish a "routine" in Nazareth (vs. 39-40). We get back to routines after Christmas. Should our life ever be routine believing that Jesus was born for us?