

Second Sunday After Christmas

Isaiah 61:10-62:3

“I will rejoice...My soul will exult...I will not keep silent.”

Isaiah’s obvious enthusiasm seems almost surreal. It is as though he were high on something, and he was! He was high on the joy of knowing that God had “clothed me with garments of salvation” and “wrapped me with a robe of righteousness.”

Isaiah did not know who the Messiah would be. He didn’t even know exactly what the Messiah would do. But he knew by the gift of God that the Messiah would not only fit the descriptions that the prophet felt compelled to write down, but that the joy expressed could be his own also.

Now that the busiest part of the Christmas season is over and we are beginning a new year of anticipation, perhaps we have the time to sit and really contemplate what this means to us some twenty-seven hundred years after Isaiah’s experience. We have a tremendous advantage over the prophet. We have the cross. We know how the story turned out, yet our joy sometimes seems subdued compared to the man who only knew a shadow of the reality. Why?

Could it be that we are so used to God’s grace in our lives that we tend to forget that His grace came to us at a tremendous cost? At Christmas we celebrate the coming of the Babe, the peaceful night on the hillside broken by the celebration of angels and the joy of shepherds. We celebrate the manger scene and the lowing cattle and we leave thoughts of the cross for a different day. But the cross was always part of the plan, even as the Babe lay in His mother’s arms on the first Christmas night.

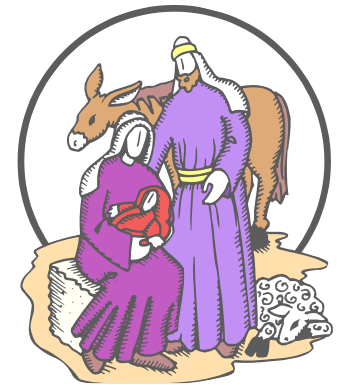
Jesus chose to show us God from within our midst. He chose to love the very unlovable (us) and to endure hatred and death so that we who chose to rebel against Him could spend eternity at His side. What a Christmas gift we have received! What other God would do such a thing for us? In this time between the ending of one year and the beginning of the next, let’s stop and join the prophet Isaiah in joy-filled thoughts and voices, sharing the miracle of God’s love for us with one another and with our neighborhood and world.



Second Sunday After Christmas

Isaiah 61:10-62:3

1. Isaiah begins “I will delight greatly . . .” (61:10) What is Isaiah’s delight? Why is Jesus your delight?
2. The prophet paints pictures of God’s workings in His people. What picture do we have in verse 10?
3. What picture do we have in verse 11? How does this picture complement our District’s “Harvest of Joy” theme?
4. Isaiah states “I will not keep silent.” (62:1) What couldn’t he keep quiet about? Why couldn’t he keep quiet?
5. Are you so inspired about the Good News of Jesus’ birth that you can’t keep quiet? Who can you tell about your joy?
6. Another Christmas season is concluding. Have you in faith seen the Source of joy? In what ways will that joy “shine” (62:1) through you in your family, church, and community?



Discover more of God’s Word in a Bible study this week!

A message from your Iowa District West Education Committee

Second Sunday After Christmas

Matthew 2:1-2

The Magi had an unparalleled curiosity about many things. Non-Jews, they still traveled a great distance to see a new king. According to historian Paul L. Maier, they were probably among the Persian “priest-sages” who were known to study astrology, medicine, astronomy, and magic, as well as religion. What drew these men to Jesus? Their knowledge of both astronomy and Jewish writings alerted them to the historic birth of a new king of the Jews. To them the event was worth a long journey and carrying expensive gifts to the child. What really drew them? Was it their curiosity or was it our God who used the heavens to reach out to those who knew nothing of a Savior and draw them into His presence?

According to Matthew, Joseph, Mary, and Jesus were already living in a “house” when the magi arrived in Bethlehem, but the news of a new King had still apparently only reached a few local shepherds. King Herod didn’t suspect a thing until alerted by these traveling foreigners. It appears that the unbelievers knew more about the birth of the Savior than did almost anyone else. When he did hear of the birth of a possible interloper, Herod did not come to worship, but began his plot to kill the babe.

Isn’t it curious how some people see the birth of the Savior as a monumental event, while others ignore it, or even attack it? To some, even Christians, the most important part of Christmas is “Black Friday.” Falling right after Thanksgiving, it portends whether they will make a profit this year. Unbelievers are sometimes so offended by the birth that they demand the removal of all mention of the Reason for the “holiday” season.

And then there are those who know the hopelessness of relying on the world and themselves for peace and eternal life. These are the people who seek to know more about the baby born in Bethlehem. They are the ones who, upon hearing the truth of God’s gift of salvation, rejoice with the shepherds and magi.

What do you think happened to the magi? Did they return to Persia and continue life as usual or did they discover a life-changing Person when they visited Joseph, Mary, and their Child? What did you do after Christmas Day? Is life still the same ol’ same ol’?

Have you begun a new visit to the Bible this month?

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

Second Sunday After Christmas

Matthew 2:1-2

1. What physical phenomenon got the attention of the Magi? Was the star “accidental”?
2. What prophetic Word directed the Magi on their journey? When and where was that Word first given?
3. What was the response of the Magi to Jesus? What was the response of King Herod? Why was Jesus’ threatening to the king?

For Family Reflection

4. Sometimes the Magi are placed in our “manger scenes.” Did they visit Jesus in the stable immediately after His birth?
5. What is the response of the world to Jesus? What is the response of your family?
6. The Christmas “season” is a long season in the “world” with Christmas sales and displays coming already in early November. It is a short twelve day season in the church. How do you keep the joy of Christmas alive in your family and in your church? What resolutions will you make to grow as a child of God this year?

Second Sunday After Christmas

Luke 2:40-52

Have you ever been so distressed at having a "missing" child that when you finally do find him or her unharmed, you instantly become angry and blame them for the fact that you couldn't find them? I had that happen one time. While spending a week with my grandparents, I decided to go upstairs for a nap. Of course I didn't tell anyone. Upon waking I discovered that my grandmother and aunt had been scouring the neighborhood for me. I'm still not sure why that was my fault.

When we deliberately cause our parents worry and frustration, that is a sin. Jesus' sitting with the teachers at the temple was not a deliberate defiance of His parents, nor was it a sin.

Passover was a huge annual celebration of the Jew's rescue from Egypt, remembering the last plague (the death of the firstborn) which resulted in freedom. Of the feasts that required the attendance of Jewish males, Passover was the one that almost everyone attended, even if they lived many miles from Jerusalem. You can imagine the hubbub and confusion as tens of thousands headed home after the celebration ended. In the mass family exit, Jesus had been overlooked. He was twelve years old, so Mary and Joseph probably assumed that He was with the other boys of the family.

From His conversation in the temple, it is pretty obvious that Jesus knew His mission even before His teenage years. His answers and His questions amazed the adults present. His depth of wisdom indicates that even at twelve Jesus was beyond those who would teach Him the Jewish faith.

There is something in the last verses of this passage that we can learn from as parents, sons and daughters. Even though Jesus was the Son of God and knew Himself to be wiser than His teachers or parents, "He continued in subjection to them." No matter what our age, or our I.Q., or our wisdom, we are never too advanced to listen; to obey those God has put in authority in our lives; to place God's will above our own.

Paul (Eph. 5:21-6:9) gives us guidelines in respecting and loving one another. His words are especially meaningful when we realize that even the Son of God lived by the same standard.

Have you begun a new visit to the Bible this month?

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

Second Sunday After Christmas

Luke 2:40-52

1. The Gospel writer Luke quickly jumps from Jesus' infancy (Luke 2:1-39) to Jesus as a 12 year-old boy. What other events in Jesus' childhood does Scripture record? (Matthew chapter 2) Why is there so little information on Jesus' childhood?
2. What took Jesus' family to Jerusalem every year? Using the study Bible or other reference find out why this ritual was important to the family? What other rituals were important to Jewish families?
3. How could Jesus have been separated from His parents? Were they negligent in their care of Him? How does Jesus explain His separation? (vs. 49)
4. How does verse 52 explain the maturity of Jesus? For what was the Father preparing His Son?

For Family Reflection

5. What rituals are important to your family? Is going to God's house a priority for your family? How are your family members increasing "in favor with God and man." (vs. 52)
6. What do you suppose Jesus' life was like as a teenager and young adult? How was His life similar to those of children today? How was His life different?