

*First Sunday After Christmas*  
*December 31, 2023*  
*Sinners Need a Savior*  
*Luke 2:22-40*

As much as I would like to say it to you, it is not New Year's today, or tomorrow for that matter. That was a month ago, when we began the New Church Year with Advent. That's right my dear members of Faith, we are following the church calendar in our spiritual lives.

While I am at it, I am sure those of you that put your Christmas tree up right after Thanksgiving have already taken down your tree and put away your crèche. But, we're only day 7 in the 12 days of Christmas. If you want to follow the actual church calendar, you might want to at least keep your crèche up until the Magi arrive to honor the baby Jesus with gold, frankincense, and myrrh, which is Epiphany!!! Ok, enough about that, I can get down off my soap box now that I've gotten that off my chest.

So, as I alluded to the 12 days of Christmas and the reality that we are clearly still in the Christmas season, LET'S GO, cuz as far as I am concerned, I am *just getting started*. Today in our Gospel lesson, Mary and Joseph were *just getting started* as well, with one of the most unbelievable parenting experiences ever in the history of all humankind. They were raising God in the flesh.

Can you just imagine raising the perfect kid?

Now, what most of us experience are kids that think they're perfect and we're just the dumb parents! Like Mark Twain once famously said, "When I was a boy of 14, my father was so ignorant I could hardly stand to have the old man around. But when I got to be 21, I was astonished at how much the old man had learned in seven years." Every parent here has been down that path.

No, I mean a child that is honest to God perfect, because *He is God*. He knows more, He sees more, He acts correctly every time, and given the right set of circumstances knows everything about you including all your hidden sins.

Oh, many a theologian could not wrap their heads around that. So, they took painstaking time to knit a theology that demonstrated how Jesus was limited regarding His divine power. While that's most likely the case, it was not so He could behave like an inappropriate child or even show the capacity to sin. No, it was just to help explain why Jesus did not use His divine power when He most certainly could have. The early false gospels could not accept the infallible adolescent child and even suggested, in writing, that He did channel His divine nature to smite His peers when they bested Him.

So much about those early false gospels was so untrue, the early church knew they were not inspired by the almighty God. Rather, they were inspirations of Satan to dissuade God's people from following the truth, which is exactly why they are not in the Bible to this day.

We also have modern examples of this done humorously that try to humanize Jesus. For example, some years ago the kids at the school had found some YouTube videos called "Jesus just poaned you!" They were kind of funny and innocent enough, but showed Jesus physically besting His peers in feats of strength with classic boy machismo and bravado. It was over the top, not inappropriate but dancing on that line, and undeniably NOT what Jesus would ever do.

We also have much more destructive NEW false gospels that draw on the OLD false Gospels that were considered anathemas thousands of years ago, having been refuted with Creeds that we confess to this day. They make Jesus so human He is no longer God at all.

I still remember a secretary of mine I had temporarily in Middleburg Florida, telling me how she liked to see Jesus humanized, liked the idea that He was with a woman and had children. Never mind this heresy was easily refuted 2,000 years ago, but I was speechless none the less that anyone would want that at all.

Jesus never fathered His own family! And that is because, just like His disciples, we are His family. We are born of the blood shed on the cross for our sins that made our names baptized into His name a daily reminder of who we are!

So, we are careful with this talk about Jesus and what He MAY have been like as an adolescent because of how it can dangerously misrepresent Him and marginalize the Messiah He was and still is. And, I do not think it's a good idea to get into the minutia of how adolescent Jesus behaved and what challenges that might have posed to Joseph and Mary. Those are all arguments from silence, because we have everything we need to know about Jesus from His birth right up to His first appearance as a man with His cousin John the Baptist.

First, we have the God man who fulfilled God the Father's Law perfectly. Joseph and Mary are doing just that today in our lesson. Luke and Matthew. both giving clear eyewitness accounts to this very important rite in the life of the adolescent Jewish boy.

Later, they would also take him to the temple where He sat at the feet of the rabbis, not necessarily because the God-Man needed to learn, but because this was the law to observe the Passover Feast...a very important observance that would one day point to this God-Man as the Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the World. In fact, those are the very words John the Baptist will use when Jesus arrives to be baptized by His cousin, again fulfilling the will of His Heavenly Father!

You know, the reason the World struggles with who Jesus is, is because it struggles with who they are, and Jesus stands in stark contrast to them. The world wants to believe that they are good people, that at their core will do the right thing given the opportunity. In other words, they deny that they are sinful and unclean from conception. You can see this in the movies and novels written with happy endings, and stories of communities coming together and redeeming poverty and chaos, because ultimately that's what everyone wants. And I agree, that is what everyone says they want. At least says, until someone else gets a little more than they do and then they want their fair share, too.

Or, says this is what they want until they get bored with the peace and orderliness and then decide they want to buck the system, be a rebel, and defy social convention. And especially with 50 percent of kids saying they want to be social influencers on YouTube or TikTok when they grow up. They almost immediately discover that while they may have gone into it thinking they could educate and influence people for good, they realize that doesn't get a whole lot of views. They almost immediately resort to pranks, shenanigans, and sometimes even down right disgusting behavior, to the delight of the trolls who weigh in like the crowds at the Roman Arenas for the abominable events that distracted them from their miserable daily lives.

This is who we are at our basest level, as Jesus stands on the floor of the arena, the only innocent man who ever did everything right. We watch our sins destroy Him like wild animals devouring their prey.

It's simply not a good look for us. And it shouldn't be. It should be a constant reminder that He took the pain we deserved. That makes anyone who didn't know why, uncomfortable and maybe even hateful toward Him.

But for those of us who know the purpose of the sacrificial system since the beginning of all time, we see Him just how we need to see Him.

Those of us that know that altars were erected all over the ancient world to sacrifice animals to cleanse them of their sin, we know our sin!

And those of us that know what the real meaning of Passover is, that began with the LORD that came to smite the first-born sons of Egypt, so that God's people would be free from their Egyptian slave masters.

We know that the blood of an unblemished lamb had to be sacrificed in a meal. A specific meal, done a specific way, to recognize God was with them. And when the meal was finished, the blood of that perfect lamb was to be smeared on the entryway of their homes. The Lord would pass over their home when He saw they observed His meal and obeyed His directives, so their first born would be saved.

When Jesus was recognized as the Lamb of God who takes away the sins of the world, He was this Passover lamb. When the first born had to die to free God's people, Jesus, the first born of God the Holy Spirit, had to die to save us from our sins and free us to live life eternal with Him. This was to fulfill the Law that there must be punishment for sin. Our perfect Savior Jesus was the sacrifice. Then He rose from the dead to prove He took it for everyone and now has the power to raise us and take us to Him.

All of this we remember in our sacramental meal of Holy Communion to this day, for Jesus said, "Do this in remembrance of me for the forgiveness of all your sins"

This is why church is such a great place for those who are broken and defeated by failure and destructive forces, self-imposed or otherwise.

This is why church appeals to those who cannot find acceptance anywhere else.

This is why church is a fellowship of sinners, who commune in and with Christ. Because we know what we are and we believe in Him for what He is: our father and mother, our Father Confessor and Forgiver, our Judge at the end of days. But He is not one that judges us worthless, we already know that. Rather, He justifies us, just as if we had no sin.

This Jesus is the Christmas Jesus, the Advent and Lent Jesus, the only Redeemer we will ever need, because sometimes sinners just need a Savior and nothing else. AMEN

Rev. Marc A. Kappel, M.Div.  
Senior Pastor  
Faith Lutheran Church, Eustis, Florida