

First Sunday after Christmas (C) 2006  
Evangelical Lutheran Church of Saint James the Apostle / Brogue, Pennsylvania  
Holy Eucharist, *Lutheran Book of Worship* Setting 2  
1 Samuel 2:18-20, 26; Psalm 148; Colossians 3:12-17; Luke 2:41-52

J. J.!

Grace to you and peace from Him Who is and Who  
was and Who is to come.

When his parents saw him they were astonished, and his mother said to him, "Child, why have you treated us like this? Look, your father and I have been searching for you in great anxiety."

He said to them, "Why were you searching for me? Did you not know that I must be in my Father's house?"

But they did not understand what he said to them.

Then he went down with them and came to Nazareth, and was obedient to them. His mother treasured all these things in her heart.

And Jesus increased in wisdom and in years, and in divine and human favor.

-- Luke 2:48-52

*~~~~~ Sermon presentation begins with page 8. ~~~~~*

[One of the important issues faced and dealt with by  
the Early Church was what is called the 'Doctrine of

the Incarnation,' that is, the belief and teaching that Jesus the Christ is both human and divine, both authentic God and authentic human being, God and human in the fullest sense of both words in one person, the Second Person of the Holy Trinity. Where does this doctrine come from, what does this doctrine state and what does it imply? Why is it essential for the Church's teaching if the Church will truly be the 'Bride of Christ,' ever faithful to her Lord and to His proclamation of the Kingdom of God? How does the Doctrine of the Incarnation open up the meaning of today's Gospel text for us?

In the opening verses of John's Gospel, Jesus is identified with that eternal 'Word' that 'was in the beginning with God,' the Word that 'was God,'

the Word of God that 'became flesh,' i.e., became human. After the New Testament, we find the earliest development of this central Christian doctrine in what is called the 'First Ecumenical Creed,' the Apostles' Creed where Jesus is identified as the 'only Son' of God the Father and as 'born of the Virgin Mary.' In the Second Ecumenical Creed, the Nicene Creed, and in its second edition issued by the Council of Constantinople, the one we recite in the Sacred Liturgy, the teaching of the Apostles' Creed is reiterated in as many words and Our Lord is identified as 'true God' and 'true Light,' as 'God from God' and 'Light from Light,' but also as 'true human being.' In the Third Ecumenical Creed, the Athanasian Creed, seldom recited by Lutherans but authoritative and

formative for authentic Lutheran doctrine, all of the above is restated. In addition, the Athanasian Creed affirms that Jesus is both divine and human in His mind as well as in His body. The Doctrine of the Incarnation thus implies everything that belongs genuinely to the living God and everything that belongs genuinely to men and women is true also of the one person, Jesus the Christ. *How* this can be, as Mary asked the Angel Gabriel, the Church does not claim to know or understand, except that, alongside the act of Creation, the Incarnation is God's greatest act of love. Some theologians would hasten to point out that the Creation and the Incarnation are in fact one and the same act of God's love, that the Incarnation completes what God began with the Creation in stating

so clearly God the Father's decision to be with His Creation and His human creature and to redeem that very Creation and that creature created in God's own image from being lost to the tyranny of sin and death.

Our Evangelical Lutheran Church has, during all of her history, upheld this great doctrine. Our commitment to the Incarnation is that which unites us with the great Catholic Tradition of both East and West. It has also caused tension between us and other Christian groups that developed later in the Reformation and Post-Reformation era. Reformed Christian theologians and churchmen such as Huldrych Zwingli and John Calvin took issue with this Catholic teaching, especially as it was upheld by the Lutherans. How could God be *totally* incarnate, become *totally*

human in Jesus Christ? And in the Sacrament of Christ's real presence, in Holy Communion, how, the Reformed asked, could the Incarnate God be really and truly, equally and simultaneously present on every altar in every church throughout the world? And so, some Reformed theologians put forth the false because inadequate doctrine that God became human almost all the way in Jesus Christ, but not completely so. There is, they taught, just a little bit of the Divine Word of God, just the tiniest part of the Second Person of the Holy Trinity that remains simply God in addition to God the Father. The Lutherans replied, over and over again, that, if the Reformed would ask God their grossly materialistic question they might receive the Holy Spirit's answer with the gift of faith, faith in

God's sovereign decision to become a human being, to become human and to be human forever, 'for our sake and for our salvation' as the true Church of Jesus Christ still believes, teaches and confesses, and to be able to receive the Body and Blood of Christ in Holy Communion with a simple faith in the great divine mystery proclaimed in the simple words of distribution, 'The Body of Christ, given for you . . . The Blood of Christ, shed for you.'

This is all pretty heady stuff, I know, but it has the practical effect of opening up a text like today's Gospel and an event like the birth and growth of the Christ-child for our understanding by faith.]

**T**he teaching that God becomes a *real* human being—totally human while remaining totally God—is possible for some people to swallow only if they conceive of Jesus, the Son of Mary, as a ‘perfect’ human being, ‘perfect’ being defined as a human being stripped of everything of which we might disapprove or find irritating or even painful were we to know that Person as Mary, Joseph, His first Disciples, the people He helped and the people He spoke against came to know Him. But, in today’s Gospel, Luke paints us a different picture of what it means to be human, and what it means for God to become and to be human.

In the finding of the Child Jesus in the Temple, Jesus at age about the age of His *Bar Mitzva* is turning into a real teenager. According to Jewish Law He has become a young man, a Son of the Covenant, through the reading of the Torah and the ability to answer and ask questions intelligently about the Commandments and will of God. But, until he is married, the Jewish adolescent remains with his parents, living under their roof and according to their rules. Parents do not have to be Jewish to experience the tension and sometimes the heartbreak of these years. When found in the Temple by Mary and Joseph, almost out of their minds with worry about Him, when He is found there continuing to ask and answer questions with the great Biblical and legal scholars, thus

showing the expression of His divine nature appropriate to His age, He also gives expression to His complete humanity as a real, live teenager exploring the boundaries of his obedience to parents and home. In a very Jewish way, Jesus answers Mary's and Joseph's accusing question with a question of His own.

Saint Luke has spared us the details of what followed in the ensuing scene, except to say that "But they did not understand what He said to them. Then He went down with them and came to Nazareth, and was obedient to them." His Blessed Mother ". . . treasured these things in her heart," indeed! Many of our mothers, and fathers, have such imponderables to treasure up where we are concerned,

just as the doings and sayings of our own children may never make sense to us.

Was this experience unpleasant and painful for Mary and Joseph? Indeed it was, but such are the growing pains of a real child, pains felt by parents as much as by children, and this was and is a real Child. What hurt her more, her Son missing from the travel caravan returning to Nazareth or the fresh answer He gave her when she found Him in the Temple. We do not know, nor do we need to. She 'treasured these things in her heart' along with so much else by then, things of wonderment, things of pain and fear, things of deep joy. No, Mary and Joseph did not know that His obedience to His Heavenly Father would or could mean anything other than His obedience and respect

toward them, but it did, and it certainly would in the years to come.

Perhaps we can bear this in mind tonight and tomorrow as we look back on the year now nearly past, on the years we will never have again, on the memory of our own growing up and that of our children and our children's children. It was with such a humanity, with a humanity such as theirs, such as ours, with a humanity changing and changing until it dies, until it changes forever, that God, eternally His own living Word, chose to unite forever out of sheer love. Let us treasure up in our hearts that most Christian of thoughts, that doctrine on which all Christian teaching is based. For He did not become human to save angels, but to save *us*. ✠ Amen.

**Gloria in Excelsis Deo!**

