



THE COMPASS

RED HILL LUTHERAN CHURCH

The Compass:
Encounter-Examine-Explore-Embrace God's Word
on
Your Discipleship Path

Sermon Series: "Matthew's Messiah." The Gospel of Matthew.
(Christmas/Epiphany, 2026)
"Whose Son is He?"

Day #1—Monday, January 5th. Read: Luke 2:1-14. —Encounter: God's Word and your life—What do you Hear and/or See?

Today, I encourage you to linger one more day on the Christmas story. On Christmas, we remember and celebrate that God sent His Son, born like any other human being, into the world for one purpose: that the world would be saved, healed, and given eternal life! The Christmas carols that you have sung are songs of praise to our God who loves you, me, and this entire world so much, that we no longer need fear death or life!

Because of Christmas, no person is beyond the reach of God's love. What are some of the gifts that God has given you this Christmas? No condemnation. Eternal life. Love, joy, hope, and peace. Merry Christmas!

Joseph and Mary travel from Nazareth to Bethlehem, where Jesus is born in humble circumstances. The birth of a child always comes with great hardship (Gn 3:16). The birth of this Child comes with great blessings for sinners. As you reflect on the wonder of Jesus' birth, pray also for a humble and pure heart. The mighty Lord will have mercy on you and exalt you by grace alone (Lk 1:49-52).¹

Consider/Reflect: "Angels reveal to shepherds the Good News of the Savior's birth. The shepherds in turn announce the Good News to others. As you celebrate the glory of Christmas, be sure to announce Jesus' saving work to others also. The Savior is your peace and joy this day and always!"²

Pray: "Father, as the old familiar carol says, "Joy to the World, the Lord has come. Let earth receive her King!" Jesus, you have come into this world so that I can truly live. Be my King today. Rule my heart and life that I may live the life that you have created me to live. Thank you Jesus for being born for me. In your name I pray. Amen."

Day #2—Tuesday, January 6th. Read: Luke 1:8-17. —Examine: The Text and its Context.

Today is the day of Epiphany. The word "Epiphany" comes from the Greek word *ἐπιφάνεια* (*epiphania*) which means "appearance" or "manifestation." In early church history, the feast of Epiphany originally celebrated the birth of Jesus. However, as the church established December 25th as the day to celebrate Jesus' birth, Epiphany was designated as the celebration of the *manifestation* of Jesus as the Son of God, the Savior of the world. In Eastern Christianity, Epiphany was appointed as the day to celebrate the baptism of Jesus. In the West, Epiphany became the day to celebrate the manifestation of Jesus through three significant events in the life of Jesus: The visit of the Magi, the baptism of Jesus, and His first miracle at the marriage feast in Cana.

The day of Epiphany is always January 6th (For Lutherans, the Sunday following Epiphany is celebrated as the "Baptism of our Lord" and the "First Sunday after the Epiphany"). The season of Epiphany brings us to the end of the Advent and Christmas cycles in our Church Year, completing their rhythms of expectation and fulfillment. During Epiphany, our focus turns toward the purpose and reason for the birth of this child: Jesus has come to be the Savior for all people! Again, this central truth, that

¹ *The Lutheran Study Bible* (Saint Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 2009).

² *Ibid.*

Jesus has been *manifested to all and for all* people, is the theme of Epiphany *and* the Gospel of Luke! It is during the Epiphany season that we are to...

...celebrate the revelation of Christ to the Gentiles—that is, to all nations. Some Christian traditions celebrate three great epiphanies on this day: the magi’s adoration of the Christ child, Jesus’ baptism in the Jordan River, and his first miracle, in which he changes water into wine. The Word and Sacraments are for us the great epiphany of God’s grace and mercy. We go forth to witness to the light that shines brightly in our midst.³

As was mentioned above, in the history of the Western Church, one of the primary stories during the Epiphany season is the visit of the Magi to the Christ child. As scholar and Christian theologian, Robert Webber notes:

In the Western church...the day of Epiphany...is always a celebration of the coming of the wise men who brought gold, frankincense, and myrrh to Jesus...Even as our Christmas spirituality was shaped by the dominant theme of the incarnation, so now our Epiphany spirituality will be shaped by the overriding theme of Christ’s manifestation as Savior of the world.⁴

Consider/Reflect: As disciples, we must be constantly equipped with Word and Sacrament so that we can follow faithfully and *manifest* the love of Jesus in and through our lives. In the words of the classic hymn, Epiphany is the annual reminder that... “*As with gladness men of old did the guiding star behold; As with joy they hailed its light, leading onward, beaming bright; So, most gracious Lord, may we ever more be led by thee.*”⁵

Day #3—Wednesday, January 7th. **Read:** Luke 2:39-40. **—Explore:** The background to this text(s).

These verses recapitulate and conclude the birth narrative in Luke’s gospel. Verse 40 is a transition between the birth narrative and what will follow in Luke. The terms “wisdom” and “grace” are significant in Luke. R. Allan Culpepper notes that these two terms “appear more frequently in Luke...Wisdom is used in both vv. 40 and 52 to describe Jesus’ growth. Later, Luke records that Jesus spoke the ‘wisdom of God’ (11:49; cf. Matthew 23:34).”⁶

At Nazareth, Jesus spoke “gracious words” (4:22). Similarly, the grace of God and the favor of the people would characterize the early church (Acts 2:47; 4:33; 6:8; 7:10, 46). Just as Luke’s account of the annunciation, birth, and presentation of Jesus serve to proclaim his identity, so also the conclusion to the birth narrative prepares the reader for Jesus’ ministry.⁷

Jesus matures as a normal child and also has the blessings of God’s wisdom and favor. Today, pray for the children in your family or neighborhood, that they would grow in the knowledge of their Savior and receive His favor. He who has blessed and kept you in faith will likewise hear and bless them too.⁸

Consider/Reflect: Pray and Meditate: “Thank you Lord...:

For Your sovereign control over our circumstances
...for Your holy character in spite of our sinfulness
...for Your commitment to us even when we wander astray
...for Your Word that gives us direction
...for Your love that holds us close
...for Your gentle compassion in our sorrows
...for Your understanding when we are confused
...for Your Spirit that enlightens our eyes
...for Your grace that removes our guilt...” (Charles Swindoll. *The Finishing Touch*).

³ *Sundays and Seasons*, Minneapolis: Augsburg Fortress, 2012.

⁴ Robert E. Webber. *Ancient-Future Time: Forming Spirituality through the Christian Year*, (Grand Rapids, Michigan: Baker Books, 2004).

⁵ “As With Gladness Men of Old.” *Lutheran Book of Worship*: #82.

⁶ R. Allan Culpepper. *The New Interpreter’s Bible: Luke* (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1995).

⁷ *Ibid.*

⁸ *The Lutheran Study Bible*.

Day #4--Thursday, January 8^h. Read: Luke 2.41-45.—Explore: The background to this text(s).

If you were a Jewish parent, you would insure that your child began life according to God's ways and will. One thing this meant was that the Jewish family would spend time, thought, and focus through participation in ritual and ceremony. Jewish families went through several ceremonies soon after a baby's birth. For male babies, circumcision is the first ceremony. Every Jewish boy was circumcised and named on the eighth day after birth (See *Leviticus 12.3* and *Luke 1.59-60*). Circumcision symbolized the Jews' separation from Gentiles and their unique relationship with God (*Genesis 17.9-14*) "...After eight days had passed, Mary and Joseph took the child to be circumcised. They named him Jesus, the name given by the angel before he was conceived in the womb."

It is interesting to see the continual faithfulness of Mary and Joseph who fulfilled all that God has asked and commanded. In addition, according to Jewish law, the woman was deemed "unclean" after childbirth. After Jesus' circumcision, Mary would still be considered unclean for the next 33 days, after which she would present a burnt offering and a sin offering for her cleansing. The "turtledoves" (*Luke 2.24*) demonstrates the poverty of Mary and Joseph as they could not afford a lamb.

It seems likely that by the time of Jesus' 12th birthday, He understood His mission on earth. (At least in some particular way) Again, we see the faithfulness of Mary and Joseph in observing the regular Jewish feasts and practices by going to Jerusalem for the Passover. At Jesus' age of 12, every Jewish boy was considered "a son of the law," being put under a course of instruction and trained through fasting and attendance in public worship. In addition, the young man would be expected to learn a trade. In fact, once a boy reached 13 years of age, he was essentially considered an adult.

Every Jewish man (and often, his whole family) was expected to appear at the three major Jewish festivals in Jerusalem: the Passover, Pentecost, and Tabernacles (*Exodus 23.14-17*; *34.23*; *Deuteronomy 16.16*). But the Diaspora (the wide dispersion of the Jewish nation) rendered this usually impossible. However, pious Palestinian Jews made a point of going at least to the Passover. The one-day Passover was followed by the seven-day Feast of Unleavened Bread (See *Exodus 23.15*; *Leviticus 23.4-8*; *Deuteronomy 16.1-8*). The entire eight-day festival was often referred to in its entirety as, "The Passover." (*Luke 22.1, 7*; *John 19.14*; *Acts 12.3-4*)

Consider/Reflection: "Where possible, ancient biographers would tell significant anecdotes about their subjects' youth, sometimes about spectacular child prodigies (e.g., Cyrus, Josephus). In 2:21-40, Jesus intrigued prophets; in 2:41-52, he intrigues teachers of the law. The law required an annual pilgrimage to Jerusalem at Passover (Deut 16:6), although most Jewish people living far away could not come annually... "Twelve years old" would have been one year before Jesus officially became an adult Israelite and accepted responsibility for fulfilling the law. (Although the official Jewish *bar mitzvah* ceremony may not have existed in Jesus' day, its analogy to Roman coming-of-age rituals supports other evidence for an official entrance to adulthood around this age.)⁹

Day #5—Friday, January 9th. Read Again: Luke 2.41-45.—Explore: The background to this text(s).

People travelled in large groups and caravans for companionship and security along the way, and so it is not surprising that Mary and Joseph did not worry unduly about Jesus on the first day's journey home. Often, the women and children would lead the way and set the pace, and the men and young men following behind. Relatives and whole villages often traveled together and kept an eye on each other's children. At the age of twelve, Jesus could easily have gone from one group to another and not been missed. Perhaps Joseph would think Jesus was with Mary and the other children, while Mary would suppose He was with Joseph and the other men, or perhaps with one of their relatives. Either way, this story reveals again, how Jesus grew up in very ordinary ways and was shaped by the festivals and celebrations of Israel. As theologian, R.C. Sproul suggests, "Jesus went to Jerusalem at twelve, perhaps for his initial orientation of the structures and customs of the temple."¹⁰

We can imagine that the child Jesus, though he was a child, and not a superman, was the example of the new humanity. He was a child who was growing up uniquely in at least one sense: he grew without the handicap of the power of original sin. He was the second Adam, who was like us in every respect except one: he was sinless. And that sinlessness not only means that Jesus never actively disobeyed the law of God, but also that he was born without the curse of Adam's seed, born without a corrupt human nature. And so he grew without the physical, mental and spiritual impediments of sin. And so it is natural to expect that he would be extraordinary as a human being even in his youth. It is not surprising, therefore, that Luke describes him as 'increasing in wisdom' for 'the grace of God was upon him'.¹¹

9 C.S. Keener. *The IVP Bible Background Commentary: New Testament* (InterVarsity Press, 1993).

10 R.C. Sproul. *A Walk With God: An Exposition of Luke* (Christian Focus Publications, 1999).

11 Ibid.

Consider/Reflect: For Christians, the “feasts” of Christmas and Epiphany reminds us to celebrate that God sent His son, born like any other human being, into the world for one purpose: that the world would be saved, healed, and given eternal life! The Christmas carols that you have sung are songs of praise to our God who loves you, me, and this entire world so much, that we no longer need fear death *or* life. Because of Christmas, no person is beyond the reach of God’s love!

Day #6-Saturday, January 10th. Read: Luke 2:44-52.—Embrace: God and His guiding you through His Word.

After a 3-day search, Mary and Joseph found Jesus in the temple courts. The “three days” refer to the time since they had left the city. The family caravan had likely traveled one day’s journey away from the city (See *Luke 2:44*); it took them a second day to get back; and then the next day they found Him in the Temple. In the Temple, there were a series of courtyards and buildings used not only for offering sacrifices but also for religious teaching and discussions (See *Acts 5:25*). Perhaps it was in one of those places that Jesus was found, interacting with the teachers of the Law.

The teachers of the law here were likely our version of seminary or university professors. Jesus was listening and asking questions. Whether Jesus had spent the entire time in the temple, we don’t know. It certainly would have been a safe place to be, particularly at a festival time such as Passover. We do know that when Joseph and Mary found Him, He was in the midst of the teachers, asking them questions and listening to their answers; and the teachers were amazed at both His questions and His answers! This method of question and answer was the customary form of rabbinical teaching. In this passage, we can see in advance the wisdom that Jesus would later demonstrate.

Luke tells us that “*all who heard Him were amazed at His understanding and His answers.*” The Greek word for “amazed” is the word, ἐξιστάνω (*existano*), which translates, “beside themselves in amazement.” When Mary and Joseph saw Him, they were “astonished;” the Greek word here is ἐκπλήσσομαι (*ekplēssomai*) meaning, “struck out of their senses,” perhaps with joy? (See *Luke 4:32; 9:43*). When Jesus would begin His public ministry, this sense of wonder and amazement would often be experienced by the crowds and His disciples! Some would be *amazed* at His miracles; some would be *amazed* at His words, particularly His speaking with authority. Mary and Joseph, perhaps in their anxiety and fear after a three-day search, ask Jesus why He has done this? According to Lucan scholar Joel Green, in this text, Jesus’ special relationship with His Heavenly Father is...

...brought to the fore at the end of the birth narrative, in 2:40-52, and especially in 2:48-49. In this account of Jesus’ having been left behind in the Temple by his parents, Luke has staged the interchange between Jesus and his mother so as to pinpoint the primary issue, who is Jesus’ father? To whom does he owe primary allegiance...The point is that he must align himself with God’s purpose, even if this appears to compromise his relationship with Mary and Joseph.¹²

Green also cites that in the Roman world the issue of “household” was not only a designation of place but also of authority. Jesus is in the Temple, the locus of God’s presence and authority. Jesus is there because of divine insistence: Jesus MUST be in His Father’s household, just as later He will insist that He MUST die for the sins of the world!

Consider/Reflect: “Luke’s account of Jesus’ birth and childhood repeatedly sets the ordinary beside the miraculous (e.g., a youth from the hinterland stuns the Jerusalem rabbis with His wisdom). Given the mysterious and often apparently ordinary ways God chooses to reveal Himself and His salvation—in the flesh of His Son, in words, in water, in bread and wine—we easily underestimate their power. Thankfully, the very common aspects of God’s gifts mean that they are never far from us. [Pray]: Lord Jesus, open my eyes to Your life-giving presence. Through Your Word, Sacraments, and Spirit, bless my life, so that things that seem mundane become a foretaste of blessedness in Your eternal presence. Amen.”¹³

12 Joel Green. *The Theology of the Gospel of Luke*. New York: Cambridge University Press, 2007.
13 *The Lutheran Study Bible*.