

FIRST LESSON: Nehemiah 8:1-3, 5-6, 8-10
SECOND LESSON: 1 Corinthians 12:12-31a
THE GOSPEL: Luke 4:14-21

Third Sunday after the Epiphany
January 27, 2019

“The Inauguration of The Christ”
Sermon Preached by Pastor Charles T. Paulson
American Lutheran Church of Sun City

Let the words of my mouth and the meditation of our hearts be acceptable in your sight, O Lord, our strength and our redeemer. Amen.

Well, it's the third weekend of Epiphany. Notice anything different about this weekend? Well, it's a lot different than it has been for the last several months. It's unique. Something is missing on this Sunday. There is no NFL team playing. We just have the Super Bowl to look forward to. Nobody is running down to the sports bar to watch a game, I don't think, but during the course of the season so many people, when it was not on live TV, would go down to sports bars. Sometimes people would want to get down there early and Sunday worshipers would go to church on Saturday so they could get down to the sports bar and get a good seat to watch the game. Pastor Nelson said a lot of us are not very interested in what is going on because the whole mid America is left out of the Super Bowl this year, coast to coast, no Vikings, no Packers, no Bears, no Broncos, not even Seahawks.

January is often a very special time. A couple of years ago in January 2017, there was a big thing that took place, the inauguration of a new president. It will be a couple years before we have another one of those. An inauguration is basically the beginning of taking responsibility. Today is the inauguration of 20 new people at American Lutheran Church, the beginning of being part of our family here. Next week, Super Bowl; today, worship. Today, we focus on The Christ, and it is a good thing to do. The Holy Spirit has really been the focus for the last couple of weeks. We have just come from the Christmas binge and now we go to this. Last Sunday was about the gift of the Spirit, spirituality, preached by Pastor Nelson.

Like I said, we just came from Christmas. I'll say some things today that you probably will not agree with, and I wouldn't be me if I did not do that (laughter). For me, there is too much emphasis on Christmas, on the birth of Jesus. For me, Pentecost is the most important festival that we have in the church. Yet, so many people have no idea what Pentecost is all about, or when Pentecost is. I always made sure, when I was the senior pastor in California for 30 years, that I preached on Pentecost. One year, because so many people have no idea what Pentecost is all about, I decided all those people that come only on the Christmas and Easter should hear about Pentecost, so on Easter Sunday I preached a Pentecost sermon,

which did not go over too well with some people (laughter). I will be retired before this next Pentecost.

Pentecost, the coming of the Holy Spirit, the birthday of the church. We talk about Emmanuel as we go through Christmas and Advent season and we think of Emmanuel as God With Us. We usually make reference to Jesus as Emmanuel, but Jesus was here such a short time. The Holy Spirit is with us always. The Holy Spirit is Emmanuel, God With Us. Like I said, I think there is too much emphasis on Christmas, the birth of Jesus, which I'm sure will continue. We have captured those romantic concepts of the trek from Nazareth to Bethlehem, no room in the stable, baby laid in the manger there, the shepherds coming. We get our nativity scene from the Gospel of Luke. What we have even done is incorporate the Wisemen into the nativity scene, and they were never there. They never came to the stable. If you read Matthew, they went to the house where Jesus was. There are four gospels. Only two of the four gospels mention Christmas, and those two are not the same. No way are they the same, but we like to follow the Luke account, and we read it over and over again. Matthew has Joseph and Mary already living in Bethlehem when Jesus was born. They did not go to Nazareth until after Herod had threatened to kill all the boys, and they fled to Egypt. When it was time to leave Egypt, they did not go back to Bethlehem because they were afraid, so they moved to Nazareth.

I believe the baptism of Jesus is more important than the birth of Jesus. Why? All four gospels mention his baptism. All four gospels see this as a significant milestone in his life, and they say the same thing. Two weeks ago was the Sunday of the Baptism of our Lord. Pastor Nelson preached here that Sunday. I was out at Sunflower resort area. I titled my sermon The Coming of The Christ. That congregation out at Sunflower is from so many different denominations, I did not try to talk about the theology of our baptism because they vary so much between us. I said some things there that some people did not agree with. Like I said, that is typical of my ministry.

I have a little book that I shared with Pastor Nelson. In that book is this statement: I would rather have a mind that wonders than a mind closed by belief. I think that is important for me. I like to make people think. Anybody who attended my "What do you believe?" classes in the last few years know exactly that. At a pastor's text study this past Tuesday, when we talked about the gospel, I said to them, "I may be a rebel," and one of the pastors said, "or maybe a heretic." Luther was considered a heretic, so I would be in good company, if that were the case. What others do not believe, I do. I believe that Jesus was a regular human like you and me. He did not grow up saying, "Well, I'm the messiah, I better get going." He had a regular boyhood, like I did, I believe. He probably was not perfect; people do not like to think about that, that may Jesus as a boy was not perfect. If he was perfect, he probably had no friends. If all he got was compliments on how wonderful he was, who would want to hang around with him? I wouldn't. He probably got bawled out sometimes for things that he did or did not do, like the time he was in the temple at age 12. His parents finally found him

after three days of searching and they bawled him out, “Why have you done this to us?” Then, of course, we have misinterpreted his response. He said, “Did you not know I must be about my father’s business?” What he was actually saying to his parents after they bawled him out was, “How come you spent three days looking for me? I’ve been here all the time. I waited so you could come and find me.”

I related a couple of weeks ago that Jesus went to be baptized by John. John’s baptism was a baptism of repentance and forgiveness. People could be baptized by John over and over again if they felt they needed to have repentance and forgiveness. So why did Jesus go to be baptized if he did not think he needed it?

I think differently than others. Luke’s Christmas story tells us of the traditions of naming him, of him going through the tradition of circumcision and then when he was 12 years old to do his bar mitzvah, going to the temple in Jerusalem. Then there is nothing mentioned about Jesus for 18 years. If Jesus saw himself as the messiah during those 18 years, he was probably very frustrated that he had to be hanging around doing carpenter’s work when he could be out doing messiah work. I believe that Jesus became the Christ at his baptism. That is why I believe that his baptism is more significant than Christmas. Like I said, all four gospels talk about his baptism and they all use the same words: The heavens were opened and a dove descended. The descending dove. Now you saw on the screen a little while ago a dove; it was not going down, it was kind of half way going up. The symbol of the Holy Spirit is the dove going down, descending. When the heavens were open and the dove descended, the words came, “You are my son, the beloved; with you I am well pleased.” The dove, the Holy Spirit. If Jesus were already the messiah, why did he need the Holy Spirit? If he was already God, why did he need the Holy Spirit? John the Baptist says these words, “I was told when you see the Holy Spirit descend and remain on him, he is the one.” And Holy Spirit remained on Jesus; he became who he was meant to be.

Luke, who gives us our Christmas story, also wrote the book of Acts. In the book of Acts chapter 10, the words are, “God appointed Jesus with the Holy Spirit and with power.” Today, we are in the fourth chapter of Luke. The birth is recorded in chapter 2, baptism in chapter 3. Luke tells us that Jesus was 30 years old when he began his ministry. Then in the reading today are these words, “Then Jesus, filled with Holy Spirit and with power, returned to Galilee where he grew up.” He went to the synagogue on the Sabbath, something he probably did regularly when he was growing up. He probably studied very, very hard. He had just been appointed as the messiah. Now it was time for his inauguration. At the text study on Tuesday, one pastor said that this passage was Jesus’ inauguration address; I had already focused on that. Thus, the title for my sermon, “The Inauguration of The Christ.” You know the meaning of inaugural as I made reference to it earlier, making the beginning of a new adventure. Inaugurate, to make a formal beginning. We know inauguration day is an official day when the new President of the United States takes his office, January 20th

usually the date. Like I said, two years ago we had an inauguration and we will again two years from now. There is already a lot of talk about that. Probably most of you have witnessed an inauguration. Some of you have witnessed lots of them. At dinner the other night, I was talking to a man who said that he had watched so many inaugurations, he even voted for Franklyn Delano Roosevelt; he had been around that long.

When they have an inauguration, you know what they do? They bring out a Bible. And then what do they do? They read you a Bible story! No they don't (laughter)! They just ask them to put their hand on the Bible. They do not open it, and I think that is kind of superstitious or just symbolic. Compare that to the inauguration of Jesus as the Christ. In Luke, as I said, he went back to Galilee to the synagogue on the Sabbath right after he became the Christ and right after he had gone through temptations; Jesus was actually tempted. They did not ask him to place his hand on the scriptures. They handed him a scroll, a scroll of the prophet Isaiah. He opened the scroll and he read: "The spirit of the Lord is upon me because he has anointed me to bring good news to the poor. He has sent me to proclaim release to the captives and recovery of sight to the blind and to let the oppressed go free, to proclaim the year of the Lord's favor."

After he had read that, he gave them back the scroll and said these words, "Today this scripture has been fulfilled in your hearing." "I was anointed, that's me," is what Jesus was saying to them in the synagogue.

When he accepted the position as the messiah, Jesus had probably never been in any real trouble during his first 30 years of life. But it is not easy to be the messiah. In that same chapter, they took him out to a cliff and they were going to throw him off the cliff to get rid of him, but it was not time. It took three years before they put him on the cross. To be the Christ was not easy. It was easier being a carpenter. Jesus was the anointed one, but not everyone chose to regard him as such. That was the reason he was put to death by people. Today still, not everyone looks to him for hope. In our democratic society, election comes before inauguration. But for us, Jesus has already been inaugurated. Jesus became the Christ and Lord, but it is still up to us whether or not we elect him personally to be that for us.