Children’s Sermon Matthew 2 & 1 Corinthians 15

The gifts of Christmas continue to be opened as we come together on the Sabbath day. The children are welcome to the front of the sanctuary that we may celebrate the new gifts God has granted to us. Morning everyone. Happy new year!

This is a picture of a Reid Steele Lester. He is 15 days old today.

This is his mom Stephanie and his big sister Adelaide.

This is a picture of his dad Josh and another picture of his big sister.

Reid and his family live in an enchanted faraway place called Charlotte in the mystical land of North Carolina.
Charlotte is about 480 miles from Harrisburg and if we left right now it would take us between eight and nine hours to make the trip.

So, would you like to take a road trip to go meet Reid? You would? Well, it might be a fun trip, but it certainly is a long, long way to go for someone you do not know.

In the Christmas season we celebrate a different kind of road trip.

The story is told to us in Matthew 2. After Jesus was born, a band of wise men from the east arrived in Jerusalem. They asked where is the NEW born King of the Jews? We saw the NEW star in the sky proclaiming the NEWS of his birth. We're here to worship and welcome him.

The Magi set off on a journey, following the star that appeared in the sky on the day Jesus was born. They didn't know everything that God was doing, and they understood the birth of the baby Jesus in a very particular way. But one thing was clear to them - God was doing something NEW and they wanted to see it.

For those of us who celebrate the birth of this new King more than 2000 years later, we understand Jesus’ birthday to mean one very special thing - when God became one of us, he claimed all of us.

For us, the birth of Jesus creates a new family made up of all of those who worship him and anyone who will welcome him into their hearts and lives.
Tomorrow is the day of Epiphany. Epiphany is a very old word from another language that means to see something new. In the celebration of the Christian year, Epiphany is the twelfth day of Christmas; the day when the wise men arrived in Bethlehem and saw the new king with their own eyes. There was an epiphany for the wise men because they saw something new about God in the gift of this child. In coming to worship him, they also saw something new in themselves. They realized that they were in the presence of a child who had come to reign over all. And in the journey home, they rejoiced in the experience they had shared with each other. In a sense, everything was new because of this New child.

The same thing is true for us. Paul shared that idea with his friends in Corinth. Once you worship and welcome the new born King, you are a new creation. You see everything and everyone with new eyes. The old way of being, thinking, and doing is left behind. A new life starts now! And it's all joy!

You and I might not want to drive 480 miles to see a new child. After all, it's a long way to go for one I do not know. But there are some people here this morning who are going to make the trip later this week. They are Reid’s grandparents, Mr. and Mrs. Reid. Yes, their last name is Reid’s first name. Reid is a NEW member of their family. But Reid is also a new member of our big church family. Remember: when God became one of us, he claimed all of us. He created a new family including all who worship him and all who welcome him and that new life starts now and it's all joy.
We share the joy of the Reid family because they are part of our family.

Up on the altar behind the manger which holds Jesus is something special. Do you know what it is? Yes, it's a rose with a blue ribbon. The rose and the ribbon symbolize a new birth in our congregation. When the Reids leave for Charlotte later this week, they’ll take the rose and the ribbon with them to give to their daughter Stephanie and her husband Josh and Reid and his big sister Adelaide. It's a symbol of the joy we share with them in welcoming a new child into their home and our church family.

Over the past week, there were many celebrations of joy as we welcomed in a NEW year.

Of all the party favors, however, that I saw people using to express their joy, the one that I liked the best is this one; the mustache whistle. Everybody grab one out of the basket and let's see if we can follow the Scripture’s proclamation, “Make a joyful noise to the Lord.” (The children grab whistles and turn to the congregation to share their joy.) Are you ready? One! Two! Three! (The sound of the whistles and laughter fills the sanctuary).

Well, that was pretty good. But I think we need a few more helpers to really convey our joy. (Turning to the congregation – all of whom had been discreetly given whistles by the ushers while the kids were occupied – Pastor Ron invites their participation.) Let's give them a hand. Ready? One! Two! Three! (The sound of the whistles is deafening –
laughter follows). Now that's some serious joy. In addition to the rose and the ribbon, I'm going to send four mustache whistles along with Mr. and Mrs. Reid to share with their daughter and her family and their brand-new grandson Reid. Even though they are 480 miles away, and you and I can't make the trip to visit them, we can still share their joy, because in the birth of Jesus God became one of us to claim all of us. And in the new life we receive, there is great joy. Thanks for sharing in our children's sermon this morning.

Message

Covenant Renewal Service

Video: Change the World

Every kid dreams about big adventures, but at some point the dream dies. We settle for less. Blend in and put up walls. “Welcome to the real world, kid.” But you were created for more. You are a child of God. You were created for an extraordinary life (a life like Jesus’). You were meant to change the world! You were created for an earth-shaking life full of compassion, overflowing with God’s love. God became man to live among us. He directly involved himself in the world’s brokenness and so must we. Jesus cared for the broken, the sick, the poor, and so can we. Jesus came to get messy, emotionally, physically, relationally, socially, and so should we. Are you willing to trust God? Are you willing to dream again? Are you willing to change the world?

No doubt over the past week or so, you've come across one or more lists containing the names and accomplishments of famous and influential individuals who passed away in 2013. Some of the names you recognized for their accomplishments in the arts. They may have been famous actors, singers, or authors. Some of the individuals mentioned made contributions to the human community through medicine and the sciences. Others, like Nelson Mandela, exercised leadership in the political realm to bring about substantial change in our global community.

In thinking about how these individuals became noteworthy enough to included on this list, I am struck by the fact that there is one name that will never appear on any of these lists; mine. Recognizing the relative insignificance of my life, I am also aware of how little responsibility I
take for changing the world in a redemptive way. For most of us, the realization that we may never do anything that brings us considerable fame and/or fortune is also the excuse that we employ to dismiss the possibility that God is using our lives, right here, right now, to accomplish great things in his name. And if God took the time to create us with all of the gifts and graces we possess, surely God has meaningful work for us to do and redemptive challenges that will alter his creation in ways which reflect his glory.

On the first Sunday of each new year, we join generations of United Methodists who participate in John Wesley's covenant renewal liturgy. We renew our faith in our Creator, our fellowship with our Redeemer, and the ties that bind us to one another as the body of Christ called the church. You are invited to turn to the bulletin insert for sharing in the renewal of the promises that make us the church called Calvary in this time and place.

A COVENANT RENEWAL
Throughout his ministry, John Wesley invited worshippers to examine their hearts and renew their commitment to Christ. In his later years, he incorporated an opportunity for personal and communal renewal into services conducted around the first Sunday of each year.

THE PROCLAMATION:
One: Brothers and sisters; when we give our lives to Christ, we become a new creation. Through baptism, no matter when it occurs in our lives, we leave behind the sins that estrange us from our Creator and each other. Through confirmation, we freely choose to walk with our Savior. In the Lord’s Supper, we claim him as the Good Shepherd who will lead us in paths of righteousness. Through our participation in the life of the church, we are challenged and comforted as we grow in grace and wisdom.
ALL: As we worship together on the first Sunday of 2014, we are privileged to gather as the congregation called Calvary. We are not here by accident. God’s invitation calls us together. God’s claim upon us binds us into a family of faith. Our ministry and mission grants us a shared identity and a common responsibility. We joyfully renew our commitment to our Lord. We humbly affirm our dedication to the work and witness we have accepted.

THE INVITATION:
One: We commit ourselves to Christ as his servants and disciples.
ALL: There are many ways to serve Christ. Some forms of service are easy and comfortable. Others are difficult and unpopular. Some are suitable to our inclinations and interests. Others are contrary to both. In some, we can please Christ while pleasing ourselves. In others, pleasing Christ means denying ourselves.
One: For each of us, the path of service will be as unique as our abilities to serve. What unites us is our desire to learn what following Jesus means in the unfolding of this new year. Let us pray:
ALL: God of the Way, help me to keep my feet upon the path you would have me to walk. God of the Truth, dispel my ignorance and teach me what I need to know. God of the Life, help me stay focused on that which is eternal. Inspire me by your sacrifice, so that I may stop living for myself. Let me live for you—in you.
One: No matter where we go or what we do, Jesus will be with us. Let us pray for the courage to trust in his care:
ALL: Master, I can’t make it on my own. I place my life in your hands. If there is work for me to do, help me accomplish great things. If there is suffering along the way, bless me with endurance and hope. If I become an obstacle to your will, move me out of the way. Fill me up. Pour me out. Give me all things. Give me nothing. Remove me from the center of my own life. Take your rightful place in my heart and soul. Whatever I have is yours. Give me the faith and courage to release it all to you.
THE CHALLENGE:
One: A disciple of Christ is one who chooses to follow him. Each day requires a new decision. Discipleship is not an accident; no one serves Christ unless they choose to. Discipleship is not an inheritance; the faith of those who went before us is their confession. When we proclaim “The Lord is my shepherd,” we speak only for ourselves. Once we decide to follow Jesus, we share his vision of who we are and whose we are. He will not accept anything except full consent to all he requires. Christ will be Lord of our lives or he will be nothing. The challenge before us in this new year is to commit to drawing closer to our Savior and to one another.

ALL: Grant us, O Lord, a willing spirit to place you at the center of our lives. Help us to treasure these affirmations and to regard them with seriousness in the days ahead:
One: I confess my need to spend time alone with God. In prayer and study, in working and worship, in contemplation and confrontation; come to me, O God. Grant me the gifts of your forgiveness, guidance, and inspiration.

ALL: Search me and know me, O Lord. I am not perfect. I know I have sinned. I might be able to fool those around me, but you see me as I am. Left to my own resources, there is no hope. But you are a God of mercy. Do not leave me as you find me this morning. Change my heart. Change my life.
One: Let us affirm the covenant that unites us as a community of faith. Together, we can accomplish more than we can through our singular witnesses. May we rejoice in the gift of this congregation and appreciate those who gather to share their faith.

ALL: We are one in the Spirit. We are one in our confession. Remove all prejudice from our souls as we commune with one another. Recreate us as we worship you. Reconcile us to those whom we have harmed. Repair the brokenness in our fellowship. Restore your divine image in us, that we may see you in each other. Make all things new in our hearts and minds.
One: Let us rejoice in our place in the Kingdom, on earth as it is in heaven, as we unite our hearts in the spirit of prayer:
THE CHOICE:

ALL: Lord God, see me as I bow before you. Forgive my unfaithfulness in not having done your will.
One: Help me set aside all idols and distractions.

ALL: I renounce them all. I repent of my sins. I confess that my love and devotion is divided between your will and the world in which I live. In your power, I will resist all temptations that will lead me away from you.
One: Through Christ, God has offered to be with us, if we will let him. It’s a choice we must make. No one can do it for us.

ALL: Before all heaven and earth, I acknowledge you as my Lord and God. I claim you, Father, Son and Holy Spirit, as the foundation of my existence. To you I offer myself, body and soul. Make me a living sacrifice in the presence of the “Word made flesh.”
One: God has given the Lord Jesus Christ as the only way and means of salvation. He is Emmanuel—God with us.

ALL: Jesus, I bow before you as my Savior. I come to you hungry, thirsty, broken, and empty. I bring no gift to lay beside the manger. I renounce my own wisdom, and take you for my guide. I renounce my own will and take your will as my law.
One: If we follow Christ, we will bear a cross.

ALL: I take up my cross. Grant me perseverance to carry it.
One: If we follow Christ, we will carry his yoke.

ALL: I put my neck under your yoke. Grant me strength to
make the burden light. Lead me. I will follow.
One: If we follow Christ, we are ambassadors of God’s love.
ALL: And if we love as he loved us, we become the Word made flesh; the body of the Living Lord—the Church.

THE CREED:
One: As a family drawn together by the love of Christ, let us confess our shared faith:
ALL: Glory to you, O God the Father, the Source of my life. Glory to you, O God the Son, who comes to me with gifts of love. Glory be to you, O God the Holy Spirit, who turns my heart from sin. Thank you, O God, for being my Covenant Companion. Be my hope in the uncertainty of this new year. Be my peace when I am torn with doubt and fear. Be my joy when despair and disappointment overwhelms me. Be the love that finds expression in all I say and do. My life is in your hands. Amen.

THE SACRAMENT OF HOLY COMMUNION