December 26,1982

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I prepared for this porning earlier thes week. I read through the lessons, but with the first lesson I could not stop, I could not leave Goseph hanging but needed to stay with him to the end of the story. O, I knew the story before. I remember my mother feading to us every morning before school as we awaited the shoool bus. She read from a devotional book entitled at Jesus Feet. The book told the stories of Abraham and Isaac and Jacob, of Moses and Johua and David and Solomon, of Jesus and Peter and Faul. But most of all the book told the story of Joseph. Day after day after day we would follow Joseph from the gift of the coat of many colors, to dreams af his authority over his father and brothers, through the trechery of his brothers and his being sold into slavery, through the time in potiphars house, and the evil of potiphars wife, to the time in prison and the interpetation of dreams and on through the rest of the story. I loved the story of Jospeph, the story of the one who no matter what held to his love for his God and his Though mistreated Joseph"s heart remained pure and forgiving. This family. last week as I was again caught up in thes story I knew I still loved this story, it is a part of me.

Growing up, I knew the story of Josephiwas my story. I was Joseph. Two weeks ago a heard another pastor talk about Joseph as the ideal Hebrew, as the man every Hebrew boy was trained to be. So I was trained, this story was sunk deep into my being through its being told me over and over.

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But it is the Christmas season, the time to center our thoughts not an Joseph, but on Jesus. Today our gospel tells of the twleve year old Jesus, going to Jerusalem with his parents to clelbrate the passover. As I have read through this text, I have realized how deeply engrained this story is within me also. In Sunday School, in sermons, in devotions this story of

Jesus remaining behind became my story. But as well as I know it and feel it, it was not until this last week that I realized one thing that could be true. Jesus might have been discussing the story of Joseph. Who knows? Jesus, God's own son may have been filling his heart with the same story that filled my heart. Surely he was taught of Moses and Jacob and Elijah and Daniel. He grew up on the same stoires that I grew up on. These storess of God and man shaped and molded him just as they shaped and molded me.

I am alwasy amazed that everyone doesn't share these stories. Some of you have grown up without Joseph and David and Peter in your hearts. Some of you have grown up without the nurture and instuction of the parables and of Jesus, and stories like this one of the visit to the temple. If you are one who is without these stories in your heart I don't know what to say to you but read and read and read these stories until you know them better than you know your own stories. They will make you into the one God wills you to be.

We worry about nuclear war, and unemployment and the prices of crops.

Me give little thought to who tells stories to our children and grandchildren.

Today the TV tells the stories that shape our children. Big Bird is substituted for Joseph, Armold for the 12 year old Jesus. We watch Dallas instead of hearing about David and Bathsheba. It is not that the stoies of the television are less wholesome than the stories of the Bible, surely they are not. Ween we strated to read from Cennsis, one church member stopped me with the question, why are we reading that smut in church. No the Bibleical accounts are not more pure thanwhat we see on TV, but the one important difference is that God is absent. The people are the same, but TV and movies gives us a world in which God is not. That makes believing harder for us and for our children.

God's own son, Jesus, sat as a student, he asked questions, he learned.

You and I need to take time to do the same. God's own son took time to
go to the temple, to attend synagogue. We each of us need to do the same.

Jesus was subject to human institutions and customs, he kived did not reject

what God had provided for him.

One other thing that has impressed me this week has been him even for Jesus there was a time to be born. I think of our paptisms with the clelbratic and happiness, like the shepherds coming to the stable. And for Jesus a time to learn, not just as a twelve year old but all the way up to the age of thirty a time to grow in wisdom and stature and in favor with God and man, and then a time to serve. So I am sure God intends these three things for us, times to celebrate just being his, and times to learn and grow in understanding, and then times of serving, of giving ourselves to him and his work. All three are important.

I think when any of the three is blighted then sickness developes in the church. When there is not celebration, only learning and duty, then love grows cold and God is not served. Where there is only celebration and learning but no service then the church begins to die, for life that is lived only for self somehow feeds on itself and destroys itself. And when there is comehow feeds and no learning then we find ourselves going off in all sorts off wrong directions.

What does all of this have to do with us. We Lutherans sometimes forget to celebrate, sometimes we forget to learn, but most often we forget that we have a mission. Especially in country churched the danger is that you will exist for yourselves, that you will plan your life around survival of your congregation rather and service. Only if you have a vision and direction and purpose that is larger than your survival and your own needs, only as you give your life for others with your life be saved.

As your pastor, I want the chimn of Bethlehem and his body, the church to be a more vital part of your life. Learning and serving and celebrating are so very important to you. And to all of us. We give so much that and effort to what is empty and unimportant. Devote yourselves more and more to what God wants to do in you and through you. Amen.