

Grace to you and peace from God our Father and our Lord and Savior Jesus the Christ. Amen.

The birth of Jesus Christ is something to be absolutely delighted about. Those of you who are parents know what a thrill it is when each of your children is born. I do not know how anyone can witness a birth of a child and not believe in God. New life is there, and that life is a gift from God. God is the originator of life. Life comes from Jesus. The most important birth ever was the birth of Jesus Christ. Jesus could not speak when he was born but if he could have, I believe he would have said something like this. "I came to save you from your sins." "I have come to fill you in on who God the Father truly is." "This was a planned long before the world even existed." "Thank you Mom for bearing me."

Since the birth of Jesus, all of God's plans are working toward the moment when Jesus will come again. We are living in the last days and those last days began when Jesus ascended into heaven. We are living in that in between time, between Jesus' first coming and his second coming. God's kingdom has come. God's kingdom is already here. The fullness of God's kingdom is not yet here and will not be until the last trumpet sounds and we hear the commanding shout of the archangel announcing the coming of Jesus. Then we will be like Jesus for we shall see him as he is. Until then we need never lose hope because Jesus is alive, Alleluia. Nothing in this world is out of control. Yes it is out of our control. God sees all that is happening and one day God will bring a complete end to all sin and evil. For that to happen there has to be a brand-new earth, and yes even a brand-new heaven with room for all who believe in and receive the Lord Jesus Christ.

You may tire of me mentioning the pandemic, but you will not be hearing from me for an entire month. For this next month you will be hearing some of the best sermons you have ever heard. I have a few things to say before I take the vacation granted by the church council.

I take my calling into the ministry of Word and Sacrament as seriously as I possibly can. I don't want to mess up my calling with sinful behavior, selfishness, anger, or a lack of patience

and self-control. I want the power of God to win the battle with my dirty rotten sinful human nature.

An important part of my calling is to persuade all of us to be in the Word of God, yes to live in the Word of God so the Word of God can live in you. I do not know what type of blood you have but for the believer who is in the word consistently, your blood can be type Bible or bibline. I am excited for how many of you will be participating in the One Year Bible reading spiritual discipline. In my hand I have this little book that is free for the taking. It is called, "Know Your Bible" – All 66 books explained and Applied. It is much easier to read all 66 books in the Bible when you have a brief explanation of what each book is saying and a personal application for each book. Please pick one of these up. It is my offering to you.

I have spent these last couple of weeks in what the Bible calls the minor prophets in the Old Testament and I have finished reading the book of Revelation in the new Testament. The minor prophet's books are much shorter than the major prophet's books and that is why that last 12 books in the Old Testament are called the minor prophets. The prophetic literature is some of the hardest for us to read and properly interpret.

In my farming years I did a lot of plowing. Some fields were much more difficult to plow than others. It was thrilling to plow the easier fields. You see the soil being turned over and freshly plowed ground has a look and a smell that thrills the farmer. I also plowed fields that were next to impossible to plow. In the difficult fields with the hard soil, the front end of the tractor would rise at least a foot off the ground. This would scare the bejeebers out of me. I would lean forward as if my little 120 pounds would amount to anything to bring the front end down. With the front tires in the air, I had no steering. This is where experience helps. All tractors have two brakes, one for the right rear tires and one for the left wheel tires. Experience teaches you how to steer a tractor perfectly straight using the right or left brake. You do not

ever want to skip over ground because it is difficult to plow. All the ground deserves to be plowed.

The One Year Bible takes you through readings that can easily be understood. There are portions of the Bible that any person who can read, young or old alike, can plow through, can read through with great understanding. Since 1970 I have been an avid student of the Scriptures and there are still readings to this day where I don't have a clue, but you keep plowing through those difficult sections because it is God's Word and all of it deserves to be read. This is why I want everyone to pick up one of these little books because a brief explanation of every book in the Bible makes the ground a little easier to plow.

For all who are in their Bibles on a consistent basis, God's word will become much more a part of who you are. Your soul is fed with what it is crying for, God's truth that sets you free. God's Holy Spirit inspired every word written. Yes, it takes the work of the Helper, it takes the work of the Holy Spirit to help you properly interpret and apply God's truth to your life. I for one think study Bibles and life application Bibles are a total God send. It's like having a person like Bob Yarbrough or your favorite Bible teacher sitting next to you explaining the Word of God to you.

In your readings there will be days when what you read will not make any sense to you at all. Please do not grow discouraged and leave the field unplowed, the book unread. I will guarantee that you will discover treasures in the Word of God that will thrill you in a way you have never been thrilled before. I have found when the Bible makes sense, life makes sense. God's Word will speak to the deepest parts of who you are, penetrating to the depths of your soul. As you plow (read) through a book what gets turned up is something only God can give you. In the minor prophet book, Habakkuk, we read, "The just shall live by faith" (Habakkuk 2:4). That is one of the most important verses that sparked Martin Luther and the entire

reformation. Yes, the good news (the Gospel) can also be found in the Old Testament as it is plowed up. You never know when you read what may be a life changing moment.

Finishing the book of Revelation, I kept thinking, What are people going to think, especially those who have never read the book? Will they grow discouraged and quit? I certainly hope not. This is what I read in Revelation a few days ago. "This means that God's holy people must endure persecution and remain faithful" (Rev 13:10b). **Revelation 14:12(NLT)** "12This means that God's holy people must endure persecution patiently, obeying his commands and maintaining their faith in Jesus." The Apostle John is telling us: Christians difficult times are coming, including persecution. You must ready yourselves for it. God will send judgement after judgement so the world will repent of its sinful ways and be ready for the 2nd coming of Jesus. The judgments keep getting worse. I can hear John saying, "All of these things must take place and then the end will come." "It is going to be tough." "So ground yourself in the Word of God and be ready for tough times." "Remain faithful to God no matter what the cost." The book of Revelation is the only book that promises a blessing as you hear it read. The end is in sight and we must be ready for the end in order to remain faithful to God and overcome all that will happen. Now is the time to get prepared and only the Word can prepare you.

As your pastor I am always open for discussion, especially over coffee. Feel free to phone after my vacation or stop in the office to discuss a particular passage. I so look forward to those discussions. Some of you who do not wish to purchase a one-year Bible, we have printed off one-year Bible reading plans for you to take home with you. This will save you money and you can use your own Bible for this spiritual discipline I am asking us to participate in.

God is presently purifying his church. God is purging us of our sinful attitudes and actions. God is performing much needed surgery on us getting rid of our deadly sins. The

process can be quite painful but is always necessary. The word may cut you in order that it might heal you. Whatever work God does, it is always good. I know what it is like to be convicted of sin and to feel that heavy weight until I repent. God's forgiveness comes and yes we receive newness of life. God is purifying his church to ready us for that great day to come.

A Word about the Gospel reading for today and then the sermon will come to an end.

Simeon was an elderly man who had walked faithfully with God for years. Simeon knew the Old Testament well. The Holy Spirit let Simeon know that he would see God's promise fulfilled before he breathed his last. From Genesis 3:15 where the Messiah was first foretold, to Genesis 12:1-3 where the lineage of the Messiah was foretold, to Deuteronomy 18:15 where the prophet to come was foretold by Moses, and of course throughout the entire book of Isaiah the coming Messiah is predicted. Simeon had plowed through these readings, read through these readings and knew the time had come for the Messiah to be born. God's Word prepared him for this very moment, the highlight of this old man's entire life. It is the Word of God that most importantly reveals God to us and there is no greater knowledge than knowledge of God. Simeon literally saw the Word, Jesus. Simeon saw God when we looked at this little baby. Simeon saw God's word perfectly fulfilled with one look at this newborn babe. God's Word prepared him to see the actual Word, Jesus.

Today, God's word has the same work. God's word prepares you for the day that you will see Jesus face to face. Keep reading. Keep plowing through the Word. God is taking you somewhere and is it ever good. Amen and Amen