To you, O Christ, Word of the Father,

we offer our lowly prayers and humble thanks;

for love of our human race

you most wonderfully chose to be born of Mary,

and to take our nature as nevermore to lay it by;

so that we might be born again by your Spirit

and restored in the image of God;

to whom, one blessed Trinity,

be given all honor, might, majesty and power,

now and forever.

Amen.

Merry Christmas and Happy New Year!

I hope your Christmastide has been going well, and I hope you have had a safe and happy new year's celebration. One of the things I love about observing the Church Year is that despite the fact that much of the world has pretty much moved on from Christmas already, we are still well in it. Our favorite shops have put away the red, whites, and greens of the season, but we have kept out our holiday best because, like Christians across the world, we believe that to celebrate the coming of the true King of the Universe takes longer than a day; so, we stretch it into twelve. After all, since we did spend a whole liturgical month preparing for the feast, why not enjoy that feast for as long as possible, right? The twelve days of Christmas, then, are an extension of our delight in the Incarnation of the Word of God in Jesus Christ. And perhaps, since we are so close to the beginning of the new calendar year, an invitation to delight in Jesus in new and deeper ways for the coming year.

Today's Gospel lesson provides just such an invitation. And before we begin, let's take a look at the third window on the Epistle side. For those watching at home, I'll make sure to get a picture of the window posted. Just for a moment, I want you to let the details of our window depicting Jesus' boyhood wash over you, even and perhaps especially the details that aren't especially clear to you. But as we consider our Gospel text this morning, it might help spur your imagination and augment some of the cool things that Luke was doing in the way he composed his reporting of Jesus' early life. Thus, take just a couple of seconds to enjoy our window and certainly whom it represents.

(Long Ten Count)

Ok let's bring it back over here now. So, if you recall back to Christmas Eve, we heard from the beginning of Luke's second chapter, about the census, about Jesus' humble birth in a manger, about the herald angels making an audience with the shepherds in the field, and that Mary treasures all of these things in her heart. In the space between the beginning of the chapter and the end, where we find ourselves today, we get to enjoy stories about Jesus' early life. He is taken to the Temple for his circumcision, where he receives his fated Holy Name, Jesus, or Yeshua, which translated means "Yahweh saves." He is offered to the temple authorities as part of the Jewish rite of purification, and during the journey his family comes across the holy man Simeon, who upon meeting the infant Messiah and filled with the Holy Ghost, sang the hymn that we call the *Nunc Dimittis*. Even as Jesus' family marveled at Simeon's message to them, they met another prophetic voice in Anna, a Holy widow who spent her days in prayer and worship at the temple. She would again confirm the Advent of the Messiah in her rejoicing at the salvation of Jerusalem. Then, the family returned to Nazareth and Luke tells us that Jesus grew up and became strong.

Now, these stories are unique to Luke's account, and are among the reasons why the historical teachers of the Church have thought that Luke had direct access to Mary's own account of the childhood of her son. There's a tenderness to this part of the narrative, perhaps owing to Mary's loving memory, and this tenderness is highlighted by rich yet subtle theological texturing. Especially in meeting these two holy people, Simeon and Anna, Jesus' own divine authority is being underlined even as there's a bit of a veiled swipe at the authorities that would come to be Jesus' opponents in the years to come. Notice, that it was the simple holy people, yes empowered by the Holy Spirit, that first attended to Jesus in Jerusalem. It's a repetition of the theme of the Magnificat, that the lowly will rise as they recognize the messiah. The simple shepherds got to hear from the angels, the prayerful and pious were given the blessing of meeting the infant. The lowly unknown Virgin held the word made flesh in her womb and in her arms. The priests, the pharisees, the sadducees, Herod, and Pontius Pilate, they haven't been privy to this great news yet. Luke was setting quite the scene!

So, by the time we see Jesus, as we did in today's lesson, even by his twelfth year, we know special things are going to happen. Jesus' family, convinced and pious Jews themselves, headed off to the observe the Passover in Jerusalem. But when they set off to return home, Jesus stuck around in the Temple surrounds. Now, to modern ears Jesus having done this seems like the unforgivable childhood sin. Mary definitely had words with him about not telling her what he was up to, but we as readers should already be keyed up to consider that Jesus' participation in family norms will be...well kind of secondary to his original mission. Mary found him teaching in the temple at twelve years old. As a twelve year old, he was barely a man according to Jewish custom, and shouldn't have carried much authority at all. Yet, he discussed and likely disputed with some of the finest scholars of the time. Luke tells us they were astonished, and I think as readers we are meant to be suitably impressed that Jesus was so able at so young an age. Jesus was, as he told his mother, in his Father's house. A bit of a double entendre as being in the temple was the inheritance of his forefather David's family. But we know that Jesus meant that he was about the business of his Divine Father, and on the way to helping people relate to Yahweh as such. Even here, Luke means to have us consider some deep theological and Biblical themes as Jesus was in the very heart of the Jewish world, in close proximity to the presence of God in the Temple, and indeed was bringing Yahweh's presence back into the temple and Jerusalem in a new way.

Luke tells us that Mary, for her part, treasured this in her heart just as she did when she brought Jesus to the temple in his infancy. Honestly, I think Luke wanted his audience to do the same. After this, we'll read about the adult Jesus' baptism by John in the river Jordan and Luke will then bracket out Jesus' origin story with his version of Jesus' genealogy. But in this second chapter of his account, I think we are meant to delight in the Son of God's early life, to see even his early life as part of his Messianic vocation, and even get a bit of training for how we can fully appreciate the rest of Luke's text. As I've told you, I think St. Luke is among the ancient world's best writers and the way the second chapter tees up the rest of Jesus' story is really neat.

But today, after a couple of minutes with a beautiful story, in appreciation of one of our beautiful windows, at the beginning of what I hope will be a better year for us and for the world, in the service and delight of the Word made Flesh, what can Jesus’s teaching in a temple have to do with us this morning? To me, it's a reminder that we are at our best when we fully consider that we, like Jesus, are truly meant to be found in the Father's house, to be found attending to the Father's business. Luke, in his second chapter, has let us know what this looks like, at least in in part: remember that it is the humble and prayerful that come to know the Messiah first. I pray that you will join with us this coming year in seeking after the example of the people around Jesus in his early life, and indeed in the great example of the Messiah Himself as we all seek greater union with him, with one another, for the life of the world. I pray that this year, we would seek after Jesus with joy and intention, such that we would embody the promise given to the prophet Jeremiah, that through us:

[the nations] shall come and sing aloud on the height of Zion,

and they shall be radiant over the goodness of the Lord,

and that we would delight in the fullness of God here with us in Christ, who

will turn [our] mourning into joy,

and will comfort [us] and give [us] gladness for sorrow.

To God be all glory. From age to age. Amen.