Last Sunday the ushers passed around the offering plates not to receive your offering but to give you something...a star

–written on that star was a word – each one different from the other.

I asked you to keep that star and contemplate its meaning throughout the year–

 I asked that you might consider how it applies to your life ‘right now’ and how this word *could* play a part in the lives of others.

A year may seem long but if you do it for even a few weeks it may be so engrained in your mind that it turn into a habit

and this specific word will stay in your heart as you journey through 2020.

I believe that each of you received a word relevant to you at this time in your life.

God works that way, through the power of the Holy Spirit making sure we each have what we need when we need it.

Having spoken to a few of you this week I am convinced the Spirit has only just begun.

For when we take time to ponder...just as Mary did... we will come to better understand God’s will for us.

I am confident all of us will learn the significance of our word as we hone in on it –

 Let it encourage, motivate and even perplex you as God continues to shape and mold you.

We can’t just take the word at face value -- we have to dig deeper, looks at its synonyms, and see if there perspectives we may not have considered.

It will even change in its meaning -from time to time- depending on what is going on in your life.

There are extra stars in a glass jar -sitting on the table in the Narthex- - for those who didn’t get...keep the star where you can see it

... at home, at work or in the car... put it on your bathroom mirror or on the refrigerator... by the back door...where you and others can see it as you come and go...put it on the front dash of your car or beside your computer.

This little routine and its affects -turn out to be the perfect prelude to the gospel reading; though it was not the reading assigned today.

The text assigned for today was Jesus with John the Baptist at the Jordan River where He is baptized – and where God’s voice can be heard saying “This is my Son, the Beloved, with whom I am well pleased.”

the text I chose today is the one where Jesus is still a baby...

where He is only **8 days** old

where Mary and Joseph travel to Jerusalem’s temple to have Him dedicated to God...

where they encounter Simeon and Anna.

I chose this text, for a couple of reasons: One, because it is not in the lectionary cycle so we don’t hear it on a Sunday morning;

and also because in this setting Jesus is still an infant.

Jesus was baptized as an adult at the age of 30, and I wanted to keep him a baby just a little longer so I went with Luke’s testimony of two holy people who have a close connection to God.

Where *The VOICE of the LORD...had been actively pursuing these two witnesses.*

I wanted to treasure this time and ponder it in *my* heart...a little longer. Jesus can be 30 years old next week...for now He’s an 8 day old newborn.

It is a Lutheran tradition to baptize infants. In fact it used to be the one most important and prominent thing a parent could do for their child.

 There is something special about the intimacy of God coming close and touching us through the sprinkling of water, alongside words Holy Scripture.

The breath and Spirit of God.... and a voice that says you are my child, with whom I am well pleased.

The Psalmist; if you noticed

repeatedly sang

*The VOICE of the LORD.*

*Isaiah tells us today “God the Lord created the heavens... gives breath to the people upon it and spirit to those who walk in it.*

*says “I have taken you by ...the hand... and kept you;”*

Through the power of the Holy Spirit God comes down and wraps us with His forgiveness...reminding us that He is always near.

*“Everyone who believes in the resurrection of Jesus receives forgiveness through His name”*  so Luke tells us in Acts

God speaks but He also listens to everything.... and so We might begin to understand just how important *every* word can be...like that one word I asked you to hold close to your heart.

We see, in today’s gospel, the impact the voice of the Lord had on Simeon and Anna... over the years.

The conversation though, this inspiration did not happen overnight or even over a period of one year. It took many years...even decades.

The old widow Anna... dedicated her life to God.

Not just one hour a week, not just one year but her entire adult life.

The voice of the Lord speaks to us just as well... through various means.

 God speaks to us through the written word, the Word of God

God speaks to us through each other, our words and actions

...through words of everyday language.

When we are willing vessels, when we are open to God’s activity in our lives good things happen.

God pours His love and healing through the cracks and crevices of our brokenness and makes us whole again. ... through Baptism we are made new .

God will sometimes catch our attention when we need of Him most through difficult times.

Surely Mary, Joseph, Simeon and Anna had challenging lives.

In the movie we watched Friday night, **Overcomer** one character was blind. He wasn’t angry ...., he was happy and seemed to be at peace with God.

He told his story and helped others find theirs. ...through his words.

*“God promised to be a light to the nations and open the eyes of the blind...the prisoners of darkness.”...so says Isaiah*

*B*en Witherington III (December 15, 2019) writes, [Mary](https://www.biblicalarchaeology.org/daily/biblical-sites-places/biblical-archaeology-sites/earliest-image-of-the-virgin-mary-dura-europos-church/) may have been the first to have heard the good news ... she didn’t quite understand.

The first woman in the New Testament to **understand fully and proclaim** the good news was Anna.

So We need not worry about how long it takes for us to understand or if we ever truly do.

God speaks to us through events – both good and bad.

Like Mary we ought to “treasure the words” that God gives us.

...though we may be puzzled or “perplexed” we need to “ponder” its meaning.

Blue Letter Bible writes,

 “Living continually

face to face with God,

drinking in perpetually

the thoughts which He will impart to us,

losing the narrowness of self‐interest

so that we might be absorbed

 in The voice of the Lord

...” is a A LIFE OF PRAYER....a life of awareness.

We *will* never completely understand *all the ways* God speaks to us, but when we strive to be closer to Him through baptism, conversation and continual prayer ...God will make Himself known.

**W**e don’t have to fear the unknown or feel helpless in the face of danger but we can ponder in our hearts the things we do know and remember God’s promises.

**I a minute or so we will song *“Good Christians***

***We are sinners ...so***

***Let us hear the silent Word***

***God is pleading... so***

***Let all loving hearts enthrone Him.”***

***Amen***