

The Second Sunday of Christmas
Saint Dunstan's Episcopal Church, Houston, Texas
4 January 2026

Luke 2:41-52

I just returned from a few days away, which were much needed after the busy Christmas season. Time away gives a priest the distance necessary to rest and to look back and take stock of life, ministry, and relationships. Endings, as in the ending of the year 2025, give us the precious ability to assess what lies in the recent past and to dream new dreams for the future. As my wife beat me at round after round of Mahjong, I took the time to breathe and to ask important questions about what we have accomplished together, and what lies ahead for us.

In a way, the Gospel of Luke also takes a much-needed break between the events of the birth of Christ and the events that took place when the religious family attended the festival of the Passover in Jerusalem when the boy was 12 years old. I often wonder what happened during these twelve years. How old was the boy Jesus when he took his first steps? Was teething painful and what did Mary do to soothe his pain? Did he help Joseph to the shop or was he relegated to sheep-tending as other boys were? Did he have any childhood friends? What were his favorite foods? There are so many questions that will remain unanswered forever.

In fact, after this event, which is only narrated by Luke, we will enter another episode of absolute silence that will last 18 years. We will know nothing about this Jesus until he is 30. But, I have a theory about the silence between ages 12 and 30, and I will give you that theory in a few minutes. For now, let us set up the context for this passage. The last verse in Luke before this 12-year silence, read like this, “When Joseph and Mary had done everything required by the Law of the Lord, they returned to Galilee to their own town of Nazareth. And the child grew and became strong; he was filled with wisdom, and the grace of God was on him.” (Luke 2:39-40). The baby Jesus has been presented in the Temple, the family performed all the rights required by religious law, and they have now returned to Galilee to raise the boy and to grow the family.

Now, Luke tells us that this was not the family’s last visit to Jerusalem until the boy was 12. In fact, “the parents of Jesus went to Jerusalem every year for the festival of the Passover.” This was a religious family who made an annual pilgrimage to Jerusalem to pay the temple tax, offer sacrifices, and learn from the teachers and priests. Jesus and his family have been steeped in Judaism from day one. “Five times in our text we are told that they observed the Law (vv. 22, 23, 24, 27, 39). Just before our text, Jesus has been circumcised. Following our text, we

are told that Jesus' parents went to Jerusalem for the festival of the Passover -- that it was their 'habit'" (www.crossmarks.com/brian/luke2x22.htm). In fact, this close connection to the temple in Jerusalem acts as a bookmark for the whole Gospel of Luke. The Gospel begins in the temple, when the Angel of the Lord appears to the priest Zechariah and announces that he is to be the father of John the Baptist (Luke 1:8-20). Jesus' own life also begins in the temple, fulfilling all the rites that were required at the birth of a first-born son. The Gospel ends in the temple, as the disciples returned to Jerusalem after Jesus' ascension and were continually in the temple blessing and praising God (Luke 24:53).

It is important for Luke to emphasize Jesus' Jewishness. He grew up in a devoted Jewish family. He never intended to create a new movement outside of Judaism. In fact, he was taught to obey the law of Moses since he took his first breath on this earth. The passage today, therefore, acts almost as an illustration of Jesus' Jewishness. The passage tells us that, "When Jesus was twelve years old, they went to Jerusalem as usual for the festival." This would have been a busy time for the family and for those who came with them in the caravan. The roads are dangerous and families travel in groups to better protect each other. There would have been lots of children running around, taking turns sleeping in the fields or tents, perhaps even helping with the various chores needed by the caravan. So, we are not to blame the family for not noticing that Jesus had stayed behind. By the time they noticed he was not with the group, however, a day's journey had gone by, and it took them three days to find him.

The passage tells us that they found the boy in the temple, sitting among the teachers, listening to them and asking them questions. "And all who heard him were amazed at his understanding and his answers." Mary is quite surprised and even upset. She yells at him, "Child, why have you treated us like this? Look, your father and I have been searching for you in great anxiety." They had been beside themselves with worry. Yet, I have a theory that how Jesus responds to their anxiety contributes to the fact that we know nothing about him from age 12 to 30. He says, "Why were you searching for me? Did you not know that I must be in my Father's house?" He doesn't apologize for worrying them, doesn't show any remorse, and doesn't show any empathy for their distress. Which might explain why we know nothing about him after this. He was grounded until he was 30! I know that's what I would have done. "No parties, no prom, no sleepovers, nothing! You are grounded until you are 30, mister!"

Of course, I am joking here. But Luke seems to be asking a question today. Whose son is this boy? The answer is that he is God's son and must take care of his Father's business. But, of course, in a very real way, he is also Joseph's son.

Remember that Luke emphasizes Mary more than Joseph in his narrative. The angel appears to Mary, whereas in Matthew the angel appears to Joseph. Mary names the child “Jesus” whereas in Matthew it is Jospeh that gives the child the name. Luke gives us the genealogy of Mary, whereas Mathew gives us the genealogy of Joseph, etc. In a real way, Luke wants to answer the question, “When did Jesus of Nazareth become the Messiah?” Remember that for Paul, Jesus becomes Messiah at resurrection (Romans 8:1ff.) For Mark, Jesus becomes Messiah through baptism. For the Gospel of John, Jesus has been Messiah from the beginning of life itself (the Word who was with God and was God.) And for Matthew, it is the descendants from the adoptive father, Joseph, that counts, leading all the way back to David. Luke wants to emphasize that Jesus is God’s own son, who became Messiah at conception, and who was aware of this divine sonship even as a child.

If this boy’s importance lies in the fact that his adoptive father is a descendant of David, some could say that he is just “The Jewish Messiah” and use this argument to shut the door to the Gentiles. But if above and beyond his Jewishness, this boy is truly God’s son, then he is a Messiah for everyone, both Jew and Gentile alike. On the one hand, Luke emphasizes Jesus’ obedience to the Jewish law, perhaps as a way of reducing anti-Jewish sentiment in the year 80, when his Gospel was written. On the other hand, however, he presents Jesus as the universal Messiah. Today, we are reminded that this boy Jesus is much more than just another human child. He is God’s son, sent on a particular mission to do the Father’s business, which in Luke it is to find the lost. Jesus’s business is his Father’s business and that is to find us, to save us, to rescue us, to bring us home.

We have been in Jesus’ mind since he was a boy. A one-word description for the Father’s business is GRACE. This interaction at the Temple points directly to the cross, the place in which Jesus will complete his mission for the world. He must take care of his father’s business and he will accomplish just that at the mount of crucifixion. He will be the suffering servant who will gather the dispersed children of God into a new universal family.

We, who are not ethnic Jews, must never forget Jesus’ Jewish roots and his obedience to the traditions of the elders and Torah. But we also must be very grateful that as the Son of God this Jesus is a Messiah for all. For this, we must be exceedingly grateful.

May he continue to bless us, Amen!