

010222 First Sunday after Christmas
Luke 2:41-52

Four boys (my three brothers and I), sitting in a parked car, in a parking lot outside a Lutheran church. When I was a kid, every Sunday after church, we would wait impatiently for our Mom and Dad to finish visiting, talking, conversing with their church friends. We had our friends, too, in the younger generation; but we would have our quick conversations, and then head out to the car, hoping to get home before half the day was over. Invariably, we'd wait, annoyed, irritated, never really understanding why Mom and Dad took so long to get out of church. Maybe some of you have similar memories from your childhood church days.

I share that memory with you today because it's pretty much the exact opposite of what happened in our Bible story. The Holy Gospel, from Luke chapter 2, tells us about a mother and father leaving church, traveling home, without realizing that they had left their son behind. He was still in church! The kid was still there talking and conversing.

The boy, of course, was Jesus. We just celebrated his birth last weekend; but the Gospel stories of Jesus' life move very quickly. St. Luke shares the narrative of how, when Jesus was twelve years old, his parents traveled with him to Jerusalem for the springtime Passover festival. This was their annual family road trip, and many relatives and friends joined in on the excursion. When the Passover feast was ended, they all started heading back home to Nazareth.

Mary and Joseph, Jesus' earthly parents, were a full day's journey from Jerusalem when they realized that Jesus wasn't in their group. They checked with all their relatives and acquaintances, but no one knew where Jesus was. Their son was missing.

Now, Jesus was probably a very unusual son. As a human child, he went through all of the developmental stages that every human child goes through. But Jesus was, at the same time the true Son of God, and he was fully divine in every way, even as a child. The Bible doesn't give us much information about what it was like for Mary and Joseph to parent a divine/human child. Did he eat his vegetables willingly? Did he argue about bedtime? Did Jesus roll his eyes when asked to do chores? Did he do any juvenile miracles, or reveal his divine glory once in a while? We don't really know anything about his childhood, or what his parents witnessed or experienced.

But we do know that, in today's story, Mary and Joseph reacted just like a normal mom and dad would react today. Their son was missing. They panicked. They freaked out. They rushed back to Jerusalem, and searched the inns, the lodging places, the markets, the homes of every possible person Jesus might have known. For three days, these frightened parents scoured the city, without success.

And then they found him. Where? At the church. In the temple. There he was, "sitting among the teachers, listening to them and asking them questions. And all who heard him were amazed at his understanding and his answers." Even at this very young age,

Jesus was able to interact with the sharpest religious officials of his day. He was already a top-notch theologian, and a brilliant thinker.

But Jesus was also a twelve-year old kid, in deep trouble with his parents. “Son, why have you treated us so?” Mary scolded him. “Your father and I have been searching for you in great distress!” This wasn’t just a kid keeping his parents waiting out in the church parking lot. This was a kid who was MIA for four days, whose parents must have absolutely sick with worry

But then Jesus responds. And here we get a glimpse of the divine in this man-child, Jesus. He says, “Why were you looking for me? Did you not know that I must be in my Father’s house?” He wasn’t being fresh, or disrespectful. But the young Jesus clearly recognized that he was not just a normal child, living a totally ordinary human life. He loved his earthly parents, and he would continue to honor and obey them. But Jesus also knew his heavenly Father, and he realized the responsibilities that he had toward him, too. The Temple was God’s house. And, as God’s Son, Jesus felt very much at home there. He had come to earth to carry out a divine mission of redemption and rescue. Jesus would eventually sacrifice his life, in that very city of Jerusalem, in order to save God’s people from their sins. It wasn’t his time yet. Twenty more years would pass before Jesus completed his mission. But twelve-year old Jesus was already aware, already preparing, already humble and submissive before his heavenly Father’s plan. “Did you not know that I must be in my Father’s house?” he asked his frantic parents. Mom and Dad didn’t know, but they learned, as the days and years went on in Jesus’ life.

In your life, and in mine,

For the kids and youth who are here today, please don’t try to act out this Bible story with your parents.