

In His Father's House
Luke 2:40-52
Trinity Lutheran Church
January 3, 2021 – Second Sunday After Christmas



In the name of the Father, and of the † Son, and of the Holy Spirit. Amen. Of all the things recorded in Holy Scripture about our Lord's life, one of the most frustrating has to be the almost total absence of any material concerning His boyhood. Personally, I'd like to know more about Jesus' childhood and His early years in Galilee. As a parent, wouldn't you like to know what it was like for Joseph and Mary to raise the perfect, sinless Child whose twos and threes weren't terrible, who threw no temper tantrums, didn't talk back, refuse to go to bed, or fight with His siblings? But the reality is that, aside from the details surrounding His birth and dedication at the Temple, the only knowledge God has given us about the three decades of Christ's life before His public ministry are right here in this morning's Gospel. At the age of twelve Jesus was in the Temple with the teachers of the Law, who were listening attentively, asking questions, and being amazed at the depth of His wisdom and understanding.

If there was anything more you needed to know, you can be sure St. Luke would have told us about it. His silence, therefore, is a clear indication that Jesus probably grew up exactly like any other boy in Nazareth – playing with the children in the neighborhood, helping out at home, and learning carpentry from his father – but all without sin. Luke simply summarizes the silent years of Jesus' life by saying: "He increased in wisdom and stature, and in favor with God and man." He was the carpenter's Son – Mary and Joseph's Boy – "a good Kid," the neighbors probably would have said. "He never *seemed* to get into trouble – that is, except *for that one time* when his parents couldn't find him for three days."

St. Paul writes in his Epistle to the Philippians that having taken on our humanity, our Lord Christ became "obedient unto death, even death on a cross." Hence, even here, at the age of twelve, He was the obedient Son of both His heavenly Father and His earthly parents. And that obedience took him to death on a cross to save *us* from the punishment for *our* disobedience. As He grew up in the home of His faithful, pious parents, Jesus' stepfather would no doubt have fulfilled his duties as head of the family by keeping the requirement that every male appear at the Temple in Jerusalem for the Passover. Mary undoubtedly would have gone with them, even though it wasn't required. So, in Joseph and Mary we find two examples of true fatherhood and motherhood – a husband and wife helping one another to remain faithful – raising their Child together in the knowledge and love of the

Lord. And when Jesus was twelve years old they brought Him along with them to the Temple, even though it wasn't required, for thirteen was the age at which a boy was to take his place among the men of Israel.

Mary and Joseph traveled the ninety miles to Jerusalem in a caravan of friends and relatives because there was greater safety in numbers. Due to the fact that the life expectancy in those days was quite short – an average of 33 years – children became independent at a much younger age than today. So it's not surprising that no one even noticed that this Twelve-Year-Old was missing when the group headed for home. Everyone assumed Jesus was with someone else, and it wasn't until they had traveled a full day that anyone realized He was gone.

Only those parents who have suffered the trauma of a child gone missing know the frantic feeling Mary and Joseph must have felt that day. Panic, dread, and fear probably filled their hearts as they wondered if their Son was safe. They wanted to know where He was – maybe they imagined the worst. Where could He have gone? Guilt and shame overshadowed them for they knew they should have watched Him more closely. Why hadn't they taken a head count? Why hadn't they been more careful? Then multiply those feelings a thousand-fold in consideration of the fact that this was the Messiah, the very Son of God. Think of the responsibility that rested on Mary and Joseph's shoulders. They had lost God's Son, the Christ, the Light of the Gentiles, the Glory of God's people, Israel! Now what?

Mary and Joseph turned around and headed back toward Jerusalem. For two frantic days they searched up and down the streets of the city, calling out their Son's name, asking everyone if they had seen Him. Then, on the third day they found Him safe and sound in the Temple courtyard, sitting with the teachers of the Law, listening attentively, and asking the kinds of questions one wouldn't expect from so young a Boy. The first thing Mary did was chastise her wayward Son. "How could You do this?" she asked, "Your father and I've been looking all over for You!" It was a typical panicked parent's reaction. Yet Jesus was gentle and respectful, and replied: "Why were you searching for Me? Didn't you know I had to be in My Father's house?"

The dozen years of relative normality since the wondrous events surrounding Jesus' conception and birth had taken their toll. Mary and Joseph had forgotten who this

Boy really was. Jesus was to be obedient *first of all* to His real Father. His work was to do the will of the One who sent Him. He *had* to be about His Father's business – and that business involved teaching people the Word of God. So, no one should be surprised to learn that even before He reached the age when He would have been acknowledged by the rabbis, Jesus would be with the teachers in the Temple, amazing them with the depth of His wisdom and understanding. The Student, teaching the teachers; the Child, instructing His elders. Do you suppose any of them realized they had been taught by God Himself in the unlikely form of this twelve year old Boy?

In her motherly panic, even Mary forgot who Jesus was. And forgetting that, she looked for Him in all the wrong places. If only she had recalled the words of the angel at His conception – the shepherds on the night of his birth – the magi who had come to worship Him – and Simeon and Anna's proclamation of Him as Messiah in that very same temple. If only Mary had recalled all those words which been spoken to her, maybe she would have first looked for Him where He was supposed to be – in His Father's house.

But, you know, if this happened so easily then, how much more easily does it happen to us today? Because we forget, or take for granted, that this Baby born in a stable is the Son of God, we might also neglect to look for Him here, in His Father's house. You and I need to remember that here in *this* house of God is where – like Mary and Joseph – we are to find Him – teaching us through His Word, washing away our sins in Holy Baptism, announcing His forgiveness in Absolution, and nourishing us in Holy Communion. Like Mary and Joseph, we often frantically search everywhere else, when Jesus been waiting for us all along – *right here*.

Some years back 20/20 did a show on a "new" type of counseling called "forgiveness therapy." Allegedly it was the hottest new thing in psychology. Couples were taught to confess their sins and absolve one another – while parents and children were taught that true healing can only come about through forgiveness. When I heard this, I thought: "Isn't that what the Church has been saying all along?" Yet because that teaching comes from Scripture, and some guy wearing a funny collar and a medieval robe pronounces forgiveness in Christ's name, people think of it as nothing. But let some Dr. so-n-so with a Ph.D. in psychology say that forgiveness heals relationships, and his book sells a million copies! The only thing missing from

this version of forgiveness, of course, is the name of Jesus – the only true Source of all forgiveness.

To the world, Jesus always appears to be nothing more than a twelve year old Boy sitting among the great and the wise – the experts with the PhDs. He has no credentials, holds no advanced degrees, and has no teaching position at a leading university. But the words which come from His mouth utterly amaze the experts, because *this* twelve year old Boy is God Almighty. Don't be fooled by the humility of His words, the simplicity of the Scriptures, of His preaching, Baptism, or the Lord's Supper – for that's exactly where God wants to be found – and in fact, *must* be found. There is no need to look for Him anywhere else.

When Mary found Jesus He said to her: "Why were you searching for Me? Did you not know that I had to be in My Father's house?" And "then He went down to Nazareth with them and was obedient to them." Jesus' submission to His mother and earthly stepfather was part of His work of living a perfect life. Though Lord of heaven and earth, He didn't consider it too low a thing to be obedient to His parents. When they asked Him to wash the dishes, sweep up the wood shavings in Joseph's shop, take out the garbage, help with dinner, or wash the floor, all these things He did joyfully, lovingly, and perfectly – reminding us of the length and the depth to which God has gone to reach down and save us poor sinners. The Word became Flesh – God became a specific Adolescent – for you, for me, and for all the people of this fallen world.

"He was obedient unto death, even death on a cross." And that perfect obedience is Good News for you. *He* became obedient to make up for *your* disobedience. It was *for you* that He was the perfect Child of His mother and earthly stepfather – and the obedient Son of His Father in heaven. Now He gives to you His own perfect obedience as a gift. Through faith in Him, God reckons you to be His child, holy and sinless in His sight. And so on this Second Sunday after Christmas we once again remember our Lord – twelve years old in the temple – obedient to His Father, obedient to His mother, and obedient to His earthly stepfather, "obedient unto death, even death on a cross." And all of it *for you*! Amen.

And now that peace of God, which passes all understanding, will keep your hearts and minds in that one true faith in Christ Jesus, unto life everlasting. Amen.