

Luke 2:40-52 Christmas 2 The Things of the Father

The Word of the Lord from Luke 2: And [Jesus] said to them, "Why were you looking for Me? Did you not know that I must be in My Father's house?" This is the Word of the Lord.

Grace to you and peace from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ. Amen

If you want a glimpse of Jesus between His birth and the age of thirty, our Gospel lesson is what the Bible gives you. Here's a heads-up as we look at this text this morning: it isn't designed to give you a good description of Jesus as a pre-teen. Like all of Scripture, this is written that you might believe that Jesus is the Son of God; and that believing, you might have life in His name.

For behold the Son of God, concerned with the things of the Father.

The 12-Year-Old Jesus Jesus is twelve years old, and He goes with His parents on their annual pilgrimage to Jerusalem for the Passover. That's enough to get our attention. It's the Passover, the annual feast to remember how God delivered the people of Israel from the Egyptians and brought them to the Promised Land. Pharaoh wouldn't let the Israelites go, even after the Lord afflicted the land with nine different plagues to convince him, so the tenth plague was to be the death of every firstborn male in the land. However, the Israelites were to be spared: they were to take a spotless lamb, kill it, and put the blood on the lintel and doorposts of their dwellings; and when the Lord came through the land to kill the firstborn, He would spare the sons inside because of the blood of the Lamb. The meat of the lamb wasn't to go to waste, either: every last bit of it was to be eaten as part of the Passover meal.

Throughout the Old Testament, the annual Passover meal isn't just a remembrance, though: it points to Jesus—the Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world. He comes to shed His blood on the cross for the forgiveness of sins, so that the Lord will pass over those who believe in Him and not sentence them to eternal death. Furthermore, at His Last Supper—the Passover—with His disciples, the Lamb of God will also take the Passover to the next level: He'll institute the Lord's Supper, giving His body and blood to His people for the forgiveness of sins until the end of time. Like the Passover Lamb, He who is sacrificed on the cross for will be the meal for His people so that they might have eternal life.

Mary and Joseph go with Jesus to Jerusalem, and that's worthy of mention too. Of course, where else would they go? It's the big city of Judea, where the king's palace is. It's also the only destination for Passover pilgrims, because that's where the temple is. It's where Passover sacrifices are made to God. It's also, as Jesus will say with tears later on, where many prophets are killed by the Lord's people as they reject Him. For the most joyful and grievous reasons, Jerusalem is the location of salvation: it's where God is present in His temple, where sacrifices are made, where blood is shed and prophets are killed.

All of this is in the background for the twelve-year-old Jesus. The "Lamb of God who takes away the sins of the world" goes to the place where kings reign, prophets die and priests offer sacrifices to God. About 21 years later, He'll be the king with the crown of thorns, enthroned on the cross. He'll be the prophet who is put to death for speaking the Word of

God. He'll be the priest who offers the sacrifice for sin, and He'll be the Lamb who is sacrificed for sin. All of this history and liturgy of Jerusalem and Passover point to Jesus, swirl around Him, as He goes to Jerusalem as a twelve-year-old.

We hear nothing about the feast itself, just the return trip. Mary and Joseph travel a day's journey back home before they realize that Jesus isn't with them. Though it sounds like a terrible case of neglect, it's really not: like the covered wagon trains of American history, pilgrims found strength in numbers. They would travel in large caravans to assist one another in case of illness or attack from robbers. It wouldn't look like an organized unit marching in formation, but a mass of humanity shifting down the road. Men could walk with men, women with women and kids run circles around the rest. So it appears here, and it's only in the evening as the families regroup that Mary and Joseph discover Jesus isn't there. They hustle back to Jerusalem, and one wonders what they're thinking: even when the bloodthirsty Herod the Great was out to kill Jesus, the Lord used Mary and Joseph to keep Jesus safe. Now, on a benign pilgrimage to Jerusalem and back, they've lost the Son of God.

They won't find Jesus for three days. (Hmmm...Jesus goes to Jerusalem and is lost for three days.) They finally find Him where they should have looked in the first place: He's in the temple. He's not just in the temple, but He's sitting among the teachers. He's more than just an onlooker or a student. He's listening to them, asking them questions and giving them answers. The teachers at the temple are not going to be from the lower half of the graduating class—these will be among the most knowledgeable of the land. They listen to Jesus and they're amazed at His answers. The twelve-year-old Jesus is teaching them. What does He say? We don't have the transcript, but I'll offer this: there's no doubt at all that Jesus is rightly dividing the Word of truth, that He's properly distinguishing Law and Gospel. I'm willing to guess that the teachers at the temple are in full agreement with the Pharisees and chief priests, who teach that people earn their salvation by doing good works and living holy lives. Can you imagine their amazement as this twelve-year-old—from Nazareth, no less!—keeps refuting their theology and pointing them back to the Gospel with His questions?

That's where Mary and Joseph find Jesus. They're astonished, too—and doubtless both relieved and upset as parents will be when a lost child is found. Mary says, "Son, why have You treated us so? Behold, Your father and I have been searching for You in great distress." That, to me, seems a reasonable complaint from the lips of Mary. If that is the case for you, it only shows how much you and I need to pay attention to the Word of God, especially Jesus' answer here. He says to them: "Why were you looking for Me? Did you not know that I must be in My Father's house?"

We need to clarify a couple of things: Jesus isn't chiding them for looking for Him—He's not a petulant adolescent saying, "I can take care of Myself," even though that would never be more true than for Him. He's asking why did it take them three days of seeking Him where He wasn't, when they should have known where He was from the very start?

The other part to explore is the payoff pitch of this text, where Jesus says, "I must be in My Father's house." Some translations say, "I must be about My Father's business," which isn't that different since businesses were conducted out of homes. However, a more literal translation is, "I must be about the things of My Father." The "must" there is important: Jesus

is saying that it's divinely necessary for Him to be there, that He is doing God's will by this stay at the temple. It's part of God's plan for the salvation of the world.

So are Jesus' words, "My Father." Mary's just said, "Your father and I have been searching." When Jesus responds, He reminds us of the Incarnation, lest we forget the miracle of Christmas: He reminds us that, while Mary is His mother, Joseph is not His father. He is in His Father's house when He is in the temple of Yahweh, for He is the Son of God from eternity. As He speaks to teach the teachers, He is speaking to them the Word of God. He's speaking to them His own Holy Word. That's what He must do, because He has come to be about the things of His Father.

We see all this with blessed hindsight, enlightened by God-given faith. Mary and Joseph don't understand. But note that, even while Mary doesn't understand, she doesn't reject it either. She treasures up all these things in her heart. She doesn't make understanding a condition for faith: even though she doesn't understand what Jesus is up to, she still believes.

With that, the story of the boy Jesus in the temple comes to an end. He goes back to Nazareth, a perfect and submissive child to Mary and Joseph, increasing in wisdom and stature, in favor with God and man. We won't hear anything more in the Gospels until the 30-year-old Jesus arrives at the Jordan for His baptism...when John the Baptist points and declares, "Look! The Lamb of God who takes away the sins of the world!" Then, the things of His Father begin in earnest.

Lessons to Be Learned

As I mentioned before, this is not just a cute story of when Jesus was a boy. This is written so that you might believe in Him.

There is a mystery to be pondered here, just like at the manger in Bethlehem. This is the mystery of the Incarnation, where the all-knowing, all-powerful, eternal Son of God is become flesh—namely, a 12-year-old boy who's growing up, needs to learn everything and can't see into the future. So what does Jesus know, and when does He know it? When Jesus says it's necessary to be about His Father's things, does He know all about the cross already or does He just know He's en route to something? We don't know. We can't know, and so we don't try to answer. This is a mystery to be believed, not a puzzle to be solved. This collision of all-knowing God as a twelve-year-old is worthy of meditation, but not so that we can explain Jesus or—worse—explain Him away. Rather, we rejoice in Jesus and who He is, even though we do not understand Him. That is what faith does.

Our Gospel lesson begins a pattern that will follow Jesus throughout the Gospels: namely, His not being understood. His parents do not understand, and the teachers are simply amazed. Grown up, Jesus will go back to Nazareth and declare to them that the long-awaited Messiah has come, and that He is the One; but not understanding, they will try to throw Him off a cliff. He will speak in parables, in simple stories where we quickly nod our heads and add our amens, but His hearers will not understand. Again and again, His disciples will not understand what He is teaching, and He will have to explain it to them. In fact, fast-forward to the end of the Gospel of Luke, in chapter 24 where He joins the two disciples on the road to Emmaus. He has just been crucified and raised back to life—the victory is won and

salvation is completed!, but the two are downcast because they do not believe. He rebukes their slow hearts and teaches them from Scripture so that they might understand.

But Jesus doesn't forsake those who don't understand. He continues to teach them, to give them His gifts and blessings. It is only those who will not believe who do not enter the kingdom of God, not those who do not understand.

There are a couple of temptations here. One is that you'll be tempted to skip past whatever you can't understand in Scripture. Our society is into easy buttons and solving puzzles, which are two of the reasons why meditation is nearly a lost practice these days; you and I always feel better when we understand what we're talking about. Some of the greatest truths of Scripture are beyond our understanding, including the Trinity and the Incarnation, not to mention the Sacraments of Baptism and Communion. Because they're unsolvable mysteries, you'll be tempted to push past them to things more practical and easy to comprehend. Do not do so, for it's in the mysteries of the Trinity and the Incarnation that you learn of the person of God; and it is in the mystery of His Sacraments, along with His Word, that you receive the grace that He has won. Study what the Bible has to say about those things; and, as Mary did, treasure them in your heart. You may be surprised by how much comfort and blessing you find in mysteries beyond your understanding. After all, you don't really want a god so small that you can fully understand him...do you?

The other temptation is that you will be tempted to doubt when you find yourself in situations you do not understand. You'll be tempted to demand answers, explanations as to why things are happening that you do not want or do not comprehend. At that point, understanding becomes a false god that you want the Lord to bow to. You become a false god, too, in demanding that God submit His will to your understanding. Beware, for such temptations are designed to lead you away from faith and salvation. Confess such sins, and rejoice in this: such times are given to teach you the value of faith over understanding. The Lord may not provide explanations, but in His means of grace He promises to strengthen your faith so that, even if you do not understand, you might still believe in Him.

Most of all, rejoice in this: there is never a time when Jesus is not your Savior. As the twelve-year-old boy in the temple, He is the Son of God at work for your salvation. He is speaking His holy Word to the amazement of all. He is at the Passover as the Passover Lamb who will be sacrificed for the sins of the world. As plainly as He was found in His Father's house, He is findable for you in His means of grace, because it is necessary that He continue to be about the things of His Father—giving you forgiveness of sins, life and salvation. It can be no other way, because He is your Savior. Oh always treasure this in your heart: Christ is your Savior, and you are forgiven for all of your sins.

In the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Ghost. Amen