**Luke 2:41-52** December 30, 2018

Pastor P. Martin **Faith Lutheran Church, Radcliff, KY** Christmas 1

*Luke 2:41Every year [Jesus’] parents went to Jerusalem for the Feast of the Passover. 42When he was twelve years old, they went up to the Feast, according to the custom. 43After the Feast was over, while his parents were returning home, the boy Jesus stayed behind in Jerusalem, but they were unaware of it. 44Thinking he was in their company, they traveled on for a day. Then they began looking for him among their relatives and friends. 45When they did not find him, they went back to Jerusalem to look for him. 46After three days they found him in the temple courts, sitting among the teachers, listening to them and asking them questions. 47Everyone who heard him was amazed at his understanding and his answers. 48When his parents saw him, they were astonished. His mother said to him, “Son, why have you treated us like this? Your father and I have been anxiously searching for you.”*

*49“Why were you searching for me?” he asked. “Didn’t you know I had to be in my Father’s house?” 50But they did not understand what he was saying to them. 51Then he went down to Nazareth with them and was obedient to them. But his mother treasured all these things in her heart. 52And Jesus grew in wisdom and stature, and in favor with God and men.*

Dear Friends in Christ,

What’s your favorite Christmas hymn? Did you get to sing it this year? It’s one of those funny things: if we sing ten Christmas songs on Christmas Eve, but don’t sing someone’s favorite, the other ten don’t count. “Pastor, why didn’t we sing \_\_\_\_\_?” I understand. I feel the same way! Christmas without “Oh, Come, All Ye Faithful”? You’ve got to be kidding! Reformation without “A Mighty Fortress”? No way! That is one of the fringed benefits of being a pastor: my song is always in there somewhere.

Another Christmas song that I make sure gets sung every Christmas is “What Child Is This.” We sang it Christmas Eve. I love the melody. I love how inclusive the message is of the angels, shepherds, Magi, Jesus without being simplistic. I love how it connects Jesus’ birth with his work, and his death, and me. As long as I am a pastor Hymn 67 will be on the program.

The question “What Child Is This?” is not only appropriate at Jesus’ birth, but also with twelve-year-old Jesus. In fact, I think that his mother did ask that question when she found Jesus and ***“treasured all these things in her heart.”***

**What Child Is This?**

You see, Christmas Eve tells us the essentials. But twelve-year-old Jesus adds something. We see a growing child When a child is born, it is often said, “You can be anything you want. Even president of the United States!” But as the child grows, we learn the unique individual each child is. We realize that even if all 350,000,000 children could be president, not all of them would want to be. And so we stop telling them they could be president and we watch them and patiently wonder what they might become. If Mary hadn’t gotten to that point before, she certainly was by the last verse of our reading.

Well, what sort of child was Jesus? We really don’t know because the Bible doesn’t tell us. The only incident of Jesus’ first 30 years is this one incident. This is it. Now I know that you hear about other supposed gospels like the Gospel of Barnabbas, Thomas, Judas, etc. that have stories of young Jesus. Every couple years the popular secular press brings up these supposed lost gospels. “See,” they say, “the Church isn’t telling you the truth about Jesus” and they say that the Church has tried to hide these other Bible books all these years. Let me tell you, letting the popular press tell us what should be included in the Bible is like Satan telling Eve what fruit should be included in her diet.

Anyway, as I was saying, this is the only incident we have from the first 30 years of Jesus’ life. Sure, when the angels sang, the shepherds came, Simeon and Anna praised God, the wise men worshiped, Jesus was there. Joseph and Mary carried Jesus off to Egypt and back again. Jesus is in all those stories, but passively. Jesus at the temple is the only time in his first 30 years when Jesus speaks and does.

**I. A Child with a Religious Childhood**

In this sole incident of the first 9/10ths of his life, the first thing to think about is not what kind of child he was, but what kind of childhood he had.

Listen to the first words of our reading, ***“Every year his parents went to Jerusalem for the Feast of Passover.”*** What does that tell you about Jesus’ childhood? (Repeat.) Let me ask another question: Do you know how far it is from Nazareth to Jerusalem? Using the usual route around Samaria, it would have been 80 miles one way—like going to Lexington. Do you know how they traveled? By foot. *Every April* they *walked* to Lexington and back for the Feast of Passover. Joseph, and though the women were not required to Mary did too, made this trek every year. Eventually they took the kids. Now you tell me, you who sometimes skip Sunday church because stayed up late… You tell me, you who figure that you have better things to do with your time every other weekend than waste an hour over at church hearing things you already know… You tell me, you who want more convenience in your worship life than having to show up at a place someone else chose at the time they chose – “Let me just catch a sermon, a song on-line and I’ll be good…” You tell me what kind of house Jesus grew up in where every single year they walked to Lexington and back to get to church. (And lest you say, “But that was once a year” I have not begun to mention the practices of the local Nazareth synagogue.)

Of all the things that Jesus suffered and had to put up with in life— Jesus who was beaten, spit on and crucified; hated, cursed and reviled—God’s plan was not for Jesus to grow up in an unbelieving house. Jesus put up with just about every other awful thing in this world for you. But he would not put up with being a child in a house where God was shoved in a box, to be brought out with the Christmas tree at Christmas and maybe make a cameo appearance at Easter. Jesus was brought up in a God-fearing house where God’s gracious love for his people was daily portrayed, from his earliest memories to his adulthood. A house that walked for four days each way to get to a church service. That’s the house Jesus grew up in.

But we need consider more about boy Jesus in the temple and the question, “What Child Is This?”

**II. This Child’s Path Was a Chosen Path**

Jesus’ family did what many devout Jewish families did. They went to Jerusalem, worshiped and prayed, ate and celebrated, and then they went home. On the last morning, in the hubbub of thousands of people packing up their belongings, Mary and Joseph saw their boy Jesus doing what he always did and expected that he would find them around supper time.

Today’s parents have difficulty imagining what Mary was thinking. But those of us who grew up in the 80s or before can remember those days, when crime was less and the store was three blocks away and no one drove the kids to anything. When Mom told you you needed to get the stink blown off you and she chased you out the back door and you didn’t come back till supper.

But when Jesus didn’t show up at supper, Joseph and Mary asked friends and relatives. No one had seen Jesus. Panic stricken, they couldn’t travel the bandit infested roads at night. I doubt Mary slept. On day two they hurried back to the Holy City and had a few hours to look in all the obvious places. Nothing. The next morning, day three, they started looking in the not-so-obvious. Finally ***“they found him in the temple courts, sitting among the teachers, listening to them and asking them questions. Everyone who heard him was amazed at his understanding and his answers.”***

What a strange sight! Yet Jesus sitting in the middle of these teachers wasn’t as unnatural as it sounds. One Jewish commentator tells us that on feast days the religious teachers would come out to “the terrace of the Temple.” There they would publicly teach and people were free to ask questions, discuss, and even raise intelligent objections to what was being said.[[1]](#footnote-1) Jesus was just doing what all the other observant Jews were doing. Of course, he was younger and sharper than the rest, but doing what people did.

***“When his parents saw him, they were astonished. His mother said to him, ‘Son, why have you treated us like this? Your father and I have been anxiously searching for you.’ ‘Why were you searching for me?’ he asked. ‘Didn’t you know I had to be in my Father’s house?’”*** Jesus let his parents know, or better, he reminds them of what they should have remembered from Gabriel and the Wise Men and Simeon and Anna. He was no ordinary child. He was the Son of God. He had to do *“his Father’s will.”* As this Gospel of Luke would unfold, remember we are in chapter 2, its first hearers would bit-by-bit become aware of Jesus’ mission. He *“must suffer many things and be rejected… he must be killed and on the third day be raised to life”* (9:22)He *“came to seek and save what was lost.”* (19:10).

No twelve-year-old knows what life will bring. Even at 42 or 82 we really don’t know what the coming year will bring. But Jesus did. He knew. And as that promised Savior and Son of God, his responsibility was shifting to his mission of salvation. Joseph and Mary had the difficult job of balancing being his parents with letting him be the Son of God.

This Child knew he was the Savior he would become.

**III. This Child Is God’s Son, Yet Our Brother**

There is a third thing this lesson teaches us about Jesus. It portrays a mystery about our Savior that we cannot fathom: he is true God and true Human. While that sounds like a simple enough formula, it consumed most of the oxygen in the room for the first 300 years of the Christian Church. For three centuries, the big question was, “Who is Jesus?” While it seems simple to say, “True God and True Man,” what does that mean?

Is it like two boards slapped together and glued. Like there is a God part of Jesus and a human part? The human part did the human things and the God part did the god things? No.

When the second person of the Trinity entered the world was like a farmer who puts on his overalls? Is it like when you disguise yourself for Halloween? God with a human mask on? No.

Or is it more like dissolving sugar into water, that Christ’s human nature is absorbed into his divine nature? Or is it vice versa? No.

This sounds like confusing talk about things that nobody cares about except maybe pastors and religion professors. But there are things that the Bible tells you that make you wonder, and this is the answer. Like in this incident where it says, ***“Jesus grew in wisdom and stature…”*** Jesus is truly a boy, but he is also the Son of God. How can the Son of God grow? And not just in height, but also in wisdom. Can the Son of God get wiser? And how can Jesus say, *“The Father is greater than I”* yet elsewhere calls himself *“I Am”* and says, *“I and the Father are One.”* How can Jesus in one place be said to *“know all things,”* yet also *“No one knows the day or hour [of judgment], not even… the Son, but only the Father.”*

The Christian Church has answered this by saying that Jesus is fully true God and true Man, united in one person. God and Man participating in all his actions. Yet admitting that this is beyond human comprehension.

This is where Mary is such a model for us. She could not claim to understand her son. In fact, it expressly states, ***“[His parents] did not understand what he was saying to them.”*** But Mary had that humble faith that exemplifies her every appearance in the Holy Writ, ***“His mother treasured all these things in her heart.”*** She realized that she didn’t have all the answers. So she stood back and let her son do what he needed to do. Which is the Christian way to take all that Jesus says and does.

We ought never think that we have Jesus all figured out. We can never have the “Well, I think…” sort of religion—as if we walk all the way around God and describe him from every side. We need to go back to God’s word, the only place in the entire world where God has explained himself to humanity. The only place in the world where we can really know what sort of child Jesus is: Beautiful Savior, Son of God and Son of Man.

So may it be, that once in a while, when people walk around looking for you and can’t find you, that once in a while, your children, your parents, your friends find *you* in the temple courts, reading, listening to the word of God, and marveling over Jesus, reflecting to yourself, “What Child Is This!” Amen.

1. Edersheim, *Sketches of Jewish Social Life*, pp.113-114, abbrev. [↑](#footnote-ref-1)