

Why Were You Searching For Me?

Luke 2:41-52

Now every year his parents went to Jerusalem
for the festival of the Passover.

And when he was twelve years old,
they went up as usual for the festival.

When the festival was ended and they started to return,
the boy Jesus stayed behind in Jerusalem,
but his parents did not know it.

Assuming that he was in the group of travelers,
they went a day's journey.

Then they started to look for him among their relatives and
friends.

When they did not find him,
they returned to Jerusalem to search for him.

After three days they found him 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.

When his parents saw him they were astonished;
and his mother said to him,
“Child, why have you treated us like this?
Look, your father and I
have been searching for you in great anxiety.”

He said to them, “Why were you searching for me?
Did you not know that I must be in my Father's house?”
But they did not understand what he said to them.

Then he went down with them and came to Nazareth,
and was obedient to them.

His mother treasured all these things in her heart.

And Jesus increased in wisdom and in years,
and in divine and human favor.

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December 29, 2024

Rev. Michael Catanzaro

I.

I don't know about all of you, but it seems like a pretty quick turn around being here in church this morning so soon after Christmas. It feels like only moments ago we were singing "*Jesus, Lord at they birth*" while blowing out our candles. Moreover, in the short span of only a couple of days we have moved, in terms of the scriptural narrative, from Jesus the cuddly new-born to Jesus the smart alecky tweener. This is bit of a strange story we have before us this morning with Jesus getting left behind in Jerusalem, only to be found days later teaching in the temple. Really, though, if you think about it the whole *thing* is kind of weird.

II.

Here we have the savior of the world, and the only information we have about him for the first 20 some years of his life is that he is born, then eight days later he receives the name Jesus, is circumcised (there's a hot sermon topic for you) is presented at the Temple, meets some strange folks, and then we get today's story which would, these days, would more often than not end up with a call to Child Protective Services. The next thing we read in Luke's Gospel is about John the Baptist arriving on the scene.

I'm mean, that's it? Really? Where's all the *fun* stuff? Every parent knows there is an awful lot that goes in those years: first steps, first words, potty training, favorite toys, first day of school, acne, rebellious teenager, you name it. Savior of the world, and no one thinks to go back and do a little digging about his formative years?

III.

Christologically, the Bible is big on explaining the *nature* of Jesus but not the *nurture*. How, exactly, does one “grow up” to be the Christ, anyway? If Jesus was born in our day, the press would dig up every odd detail, every cute story, every bit of gossip and innuendo. There would be home movies, yearbook photos, Youtube videos and reflections from childhood friends, teachers and neighbors posted all over the internet. Of course, the reason we have this big, black hole which is the first 27 years of Jesus life is that it *doesn't matter*; not to the people of his day anyway. Though such entertaining and enlightening information might have mattered very much to subsequent generations, particularly our own, the simple fact is, that ship has *sailed*. We've only got what we've got and we aren't getting anymore.

IV.

So, what, exactly, *do* we have in the first two chapters of Luke? Well, there is the incarnation and the fulfillment of prophecy; not exactly Jesus' prom pictures, but not insignificant either. For thousands of years, the people who understood themselves to be the chosen ones of God had been awaiting the arrival of a Messiah foretold of long ago in the sacred scriptures. Now, it certainly didn't play out in the way people had imagined. I mean, I'd be hard pressed to sit down to *dinner* in a stable let alone have my child born in one, but the Messiah? Really? This is the best God could do? But, ok, it is what it is; he's *here*. That's the take-away, it has *happened*; cattle low-ing, strange shepherds staring, and that darn straw getting everywhere notwithstanding, the moment is upon us, the universe has shifted, the way has been made known. Check.

V.

Beyond the value of the happening, is the *who* the “he” happens to be: Emmanuel, God who is now with us. More often than not, when we celebrate Christmas we forget that it is first and foremost a celebration of *incarnation*, of God becoming flesh. With the advent of Jesus’ birth, God ceases to be an abstract concept. Not just a disembodied spirit at the creation sweeping over the waters of chaos, not just a voice speaking from a burning bush which, though on fire, is not consumed, and not just an old dude with a long white beard sitting on a throne in clouds directing the world from on high. Again, not what anyone expected, a child lying in a manger, but still God’s booties are now on the ground. Check.

VI.

The next thing we get is the naming and the claiming. As if to remind us that here is no ordinary child, at the occasion of his circumcision (on the proscribed 8th day) Jesus is named, well, Jesus. Which was what the Angel had told Mary to call her child prior to her miraculous conception. By recounting this event, the writer of Luke affirms the identity of Jesus as both *the* son of God and *the* child of Abraham; there is to be no confusion or illusion as to *who* he is or *what* he is. Check.

VII.

Luke then relates the story of Jesus’ dedication at the temple, called Pidyon Haben (pittyin heben) or the redemption of the first-born, which is kind of an interesting Jewish ritual in keeping with the ancient proscription of rendering the first-born to God. In actual practice, the first born son, if he lived 30 days, would either be offered to serve, eventually, as a priest in the temple, or would be redeemed from such service by the parents offering, instead, an alternative sacrifice. In the case of Mary and Joseph, a pair of turtledoves & two young pigeons.

Having provided such a suitable substitute, Jesus is released from service to the Temple and returned to his life and family leading him, eventually, to his baptism, ministry of healing and teaching, atonement on the cross for the sins of the world and, finally, through his resurrection, the freedom from death for all of creation. Not a bad return on the investment of a few measly birds. So, even here at an early age, we see that Jesus will clearly be working *outside* the system. Check.

VIII.

If we had any doubt remaining regarding Jesus, the author of Luke randomly inserts two final witnesses who testify as to who this Jesus really is. The first is Simeon, a righteous and devout man, whom the spirit had promised would not die until he sees the Messiah. He is guided by the spirit to the Temple that day, and sweeping the child up into his arms, praises God by saying, “*Master, now you are dismissing your servant in peace; according to your word; for my eyes have seen your salvation, which you have prepared in the presence of all peoples, a light for revelation to the Gentiles and for glory to your people Israel.*” Second, as if that wasn’t amazing enough, Anna, an old widow and prophet who lived at the Temple day and night fasting and praying, saw Jesus and began praising God and speaking about the child to all who were there seeking the redemption of Israel. Double check.

IX.

Now, I know it would not have surprised you to come to church today and find that I have some fluff sermon on Christmas, or a light-hearted homily having to do with new year’s resolutions. Have no doubt about my appreciation for your graciousness had I done so. However, I was really struck by the similarities between your presence here today just a few days after Christmas, and Jesus portrayed in today’s sermon text.

Like Mary, Joseph and all the rest who so quickly start back to their lives after the holiday, be it Passover or Christmas, all of you seem to be following the example of Jesus by returning to church (in-person, via the stream, or by reading this sermon) as Jesus remained in the temple. Up until this story, everything in Luke's Gospel, the birth, the angel, the naming, the claiming, the circumcision, the devout Simeon and the prophet Anna either points at, or points to, the Messiah; here, though, in today's sermon text Jesus begins to point to *himself*.

X.

Clearly, this passage is illustrative of Jesus' coming of age, and is symbolic of those changes in him as he starts to seek his *own* answers and embark on his *own* journey. This is not unlike all of you, as your presence here today is symbolic of the changes taking place in *your* life, as *you* seek your *own* answers, with earnestness and intention, and make your *own* way along the path of your spiritual journey, with discipline and commitment.

Rhetorically, Jesus asks his mother why she was seeking for him? Surely Jesus knew, that deep down Mary knew where she would find him: in the place he had always been. And you, too, on this day, are found in that very same place: with Christ. Because, now, even with Christmas come and gone, we will treasure in our hearts the truth of the incarnation, and increase in wisdom about it all through the year as we abide here in this church and in God's favor. Amen.