

Surprise in the Temple

Westminster Presbyterian Church

Luke 2:41-52

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1 Samuel 2:18-20, 26

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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.

1 Samuel 2:18-20, 26

Samuel was ministering before the Lord, a boy wearing a linen ephod. His mother used to make for him a little robe and take it to him each year, when she went up with her husband to offer the yearly sacrifice. Then Eli would bless Elkanah and his wife, and say, "May the Lord repay you with children by this woman for the gift that she made to the Lord"; and then they would return to their home. Now the boy Samuel continued to grow both in stature and in favor with the Lord and with the people.

Merry Christmas!

We are in the Twelve Days of Christmas right now. Through Epiphany, this coming Wednesday, we are still singing Christmas songs, still celebrating the birth of Jesus. At the same time, we're starting to progress in the story of Jesus' ministry on Earth, also known as the Gospel.

The baby Jesus is wonderful, but Jesus didn't stay a baby. He didn't stay in the manger. If he had, then Christmas wouldn't be such a big deal.

Let me put the Gospel story for this morning into some context for you. Luke says at the beginning of Chapter One that he is writing "an orderly account" of what happened with Jesus. Luke tells us from his birth exactly who Jesus is, but people around Jesus do not get it immediately. They figure it out gradually, as it is gradually revealed, piece by piece.

We really ought to cut these folks some slack. God is doing something utterly new here, that God has never done before. We twenty-first-century Christians have had all our lives to get used to the idea. They ... haven't. This winter, we will be looking at some of these stories of people figuring out who Jesus is.

Jesus' parents, Mary and Joseph, are good Jews. They go up to Jerusalem for Passover every year. They go as part of a big group. Most of the people in their small town are going to Jerusalem all together. If this were happening today, there would be a couple of tour buses. Instead, it's a huge mob of people walking, basically together.

The year when Jesus is twelve, he stays behind. Mary and Joseph don't notice at first – they figure he must be with some of the other boys his own age, kind of loosely supervised by the other adults, and they don't worry about it. When they stop for the night and can't find him, though, there's a problem.

They spend three days looking for him all over Jerusalem, and then they finally find him in the Temple, talking with the expert Teachers of the Law.

When Jesus' parents get his attention, he asks them, "Why were you looking for me? Didn't you know that I'd be in my Father's house, dealing with his business?"

They don't understand, but this is apparently the first time that Jesus himself has shown any hints of not being an ordinary little boy. I mean, sure, there was all that stuff going on around his birth, the angels and shepherds, and all, but it's been twelve relatively normal years since then.

Twelve years of wondering, "Did we really understand what was going on?"

Twelve years of wondering, "Did our imaginations run away with us?"

Twelve years of wondering, "Did we miss something?"

Then, after confounding the wise teachers of the Law, and producing perhaps the most backhanded delivery ever of the classic stepchild lament, "You're not my Dad!", he goes back with his parents to Nazareth and is an obedient good kid again.

So Mary and Joseph might be excused for not immediately grasping ALL the implications of what was happening here. Thinking that it's weird, sure, but not grasping all the implications.

But Mary treasures all these things in her heart.

Just like what the angel Gabriel said to her thirteen years earlier, she treasures it in her heart.

Just like what the old prophet Simeon told her at the Temple when Jesus was a baby, she treasures it in her heart.

Mary may not completely understand who Jesus is and what his being here means, but she is a step ahead of everyone else. She knows, better than anyone else, that Jesus is the Son of God.

She knows that Jesus has a loving Father in Heaven.

We, too, have a loving Father in Heaven. Treasure that in your heart.

She knows that Jesus needs to be about his Father's business.

If we're following Jesus, we, too, need to be about our Father's business.

Our Father's business happens in the Temple, yes, and in our building on Schoolhouse Lane. But Our Father's business happens elsewhere, too. It happens more often out there, everywhere there are people.

Our Father's business is changing the world. Making it better – kinder, more gracious, more loving. Every day. Everywhere. For everyone. Bringing the Kingdom of Heaven that much closer, not somewhere far away, but right here, right now.

In this New Year, we will have new opportunities to be about Our Father's business. Let's look for them, and let's take them. Here's a New Years Resolution

for you – when you have an opportunity to do the kind thing, to do the gracious thing, to do the loving thing, take it!¹

I know you all, I know that you're good people. You help people when you see the chance. But look for those opportunities!

If you can help a hundred people, do it. If you can help one person, do it.

Some of you may remember the story of Rabbi Hillel on the beach. The beach was covered with thousands of starfish that had washed up at high tide, and that were going to dry out and die before high tide came back. The Rabbi picked up a starfish and tossed it out into the water. His companion asked him, "Rabbi, why did you bother? You can't possibly save enough starfish for it to even make a difference in the number that are going to die here." Rabbi Hillel nodded in agreement, but he said, "It mattered to that one."

It doesn't matter whether you are able to help a hundred people, or one. Carpe that diem, seize the day.

THAT is how we can grow in favor with the LORD and the people around us, and grow in wisdom, too.

Amen.

¹ Romans 12:10.