

**Jan. 3, 2021 -- (Christmas 2, Boy in the Temple)**

**Sermon Text – Luke 2:41-52**

- 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. -

**How quickly the years go by when the children are growing up! One day they are infants; the next day they are almost adults. It seems we just get finished celebrating the birth of the Christ child in the Bethlehem stable, and a little over a week later here we are watching him at twelve years old, going with his parents to visit the temple in Jerusalem at Passover. The only thing that surprises me more than that is that somehow I already have 7 grandchildren, who have exceeded the age of Jesus in our reading for today. Where did all those years go?**

**Of course, the thing about Jesus' childhood is that we really don't have many stories to go on. He is born. On the eighth day, he is circumcised. After thirty-three days, he is presented in the temple, where he is blessed by the elderly Simeon and Anna. He is visited by wise men from the east; and sometime later, his parents take him and flee to Egypt in fear for his life because of King Herod's plot to kill all the male children less than two years of age. When Herod dies and it is safe to go home, they return to Nazareth, their hometown, and Jesus grows in years. The next thing we know, he is 12 and going with his parents to Jerusalem for the celebration of the Passover. If we were to add in some information from the apocryphal gospel of Thomas, we could tell a few more stories of Jesus' childhood, how he liked to make birds out of clay and bring them to life, and how he once raised one of his playmates from the dead. But those stories seem rather fanciful and not at all well-grounded in the authority of eyewitness accounts.**

**So our reading tells us that Mary and Joseph were in the habit of going up to Jerusalem every year for the celebration of Passover. And "when [Jesus] was twelve years old, they went up as usual...When the festival was ended and they started to**

return, Jesus stayed behind in Jerusalem, but his parents did not know it.” Through the years, the confirmation students and I have an ongoing argument about whether or not Jesus was truly without sin. They contend that sinlessness is not possible, not for anyone, not even for Jesus. It seems that they are convinced that wrongdoing and disobedience are a fundamental part of being human. This story is the one where I come closest to giving in to their logic. Of course, Jesus has a larger agenda; but, worrying your parents by intentionally separating yourself from the rest of the group and staying behind in the big city of Jerusalem just seems wrong to me. I know what it’s like to take children, even teenagers, into the dangers of the big city and have them disappear. It’s frightening. And I know what it’s like to go shopping with grandchildren and have them play “Hide and Seek” in the clothing racks. Very funny! It only takes a few seconds and they can vanish, and you begin that frantic search for them, all the while thinking “How can I go home to their parents and tell them, ‘I only looked away for a moment, and just like that they were snatched by kidnappers. I’ll do anything you ask, mortgage the house, cash in my pension funds, sell my soul to the devil, whatever it takes to raise the money for the ransom.’ Please God, send them back.” And much of the time, the young folks seem pretty savvy about the ways of the world, but a grandfather worries. And so do parents. And I suspect that it was doubly hard for a couple from a small town in Galilee who were only used to watching out for themselves on their annual pilgrimage to the big city.

Biblical scholars point out that it would not have been unusual for Mary and Joseph to have left Jerusalem without Jesus in tow. Religious pilgrimages were family affairs, extended family affairs. For safety reasons, people travelled in large groups. There would have been plenty of Aunts and Uncles, Grandmas and Grandpas, neighbors and friends who would look after him. If he was off sharing the experience with his cousins, he’d be fine. Someone in the group would certainly be looking out for him. But he is nowhere to be found. Mary and Joseph decide to go back to Jerusalem. I imagine that they look for him everywhere: the bazaar – they certainly know how much he loved the fruits and the candies; the military fortress – how intrigued he had been by the Roman soldiers; the grounds of Herod’s palace – how interesting to visit the home of the man who once tried to kill you. I don’t know; but I think that the last place I would have looked for a young boy in the big city of Jerusalem would be the temple. But there at last they find him. He is sitting among the rabbis, “listening to them and asking them questions,” amazing everyone with his grasp of religious teaching.

The exchange that then ensues between Jesus and his mother is telling. In my paraphrase it goes like this, “Son, why have you treated us like this? Your father and I

have been worried sick!” And his answer, “What do you mean, Mom? Didn’t you think that I’d have to be about my Father’s business?” But, of course, she didn’t. It’s not that his parents didn’t know who he was. Angels had told both of them before he was born. Mary had been “pondering all these things in her heart.” She was, no doubt, wondering what would happen next. I think what caught Joseph and her off guard was that Jesus knew who he was. He was the Son of God. His place was in the temple. He needed to be about his Father’s business, and he didn’t mean carpentry (no disrespect to Joseph). His absence and his parents’ subsequent worry are simply the natural outcome of who Jesus is. He’s not a bad boy. He’s keeping the 4<sup>th</sup> Commandment. And because he is so good, he returns with them to Nazareth and “was obedient to them,...increas[ing] in wisdom and in years, and growing in divine and human favor,” and giving his mother many more things to treasure in her heart. In the end, all we can do is join her. How quickly they all do grow. How fast it seems the children go from innocent childhood to become wise and mature almost adults. And how swiftly he moves from the stable to the temple and on to his career as a preacher, teacher and healer. Next week, we begin with his baptism. Another 18 years will have passed. Then things will really begin to happen. We also move from the season of Christmas to that of Epiphany. It is the time for the revealing of who Jesus is. That process is already started. We already know he is God’s Son.

Amen.