

Sermon on Luke 2:41-52  
First Sunday of Christmas, December 27, 2015  
Lutheran Church of the Redeemer  
By James Erlandson

Well, THAT was quick! I mean, just two days ago we celebrated the birth of Jesus on Christmas Day, and now, according to the gospel just read, Jesus is twelve years old! My, the kid grows fast! And this is not taking into account that the Three Magi haven't even made their visit to the Holy Family bearing gifts! (That won't come in our lectionary for another week, even as we transfer the Feast of the Epiphany from January 6<sup>th</sup> to Sunday, the 3<sup>rd</sup>!) Has Joseph even had a chance to change diapers, yet? From Thursday night when we sang *Silent Night* to a sleeping baby, fast forward twelve years to Jesus in the Temple of Jerusalem.

Okay, so the lectionary isn't so concerned about staying on track with Jesus chronologically! You know that the gospels aren't biographies, right? Mark and John are not a bit concerned about Jesus until he is all grown up. Only Matthew and Luke give us the two birth narratives, the story of King Herod killing the children of Bethlehem and the Holy Family's flight as refugees to Egypt, as well as Jesus' genealogy from Joseph all the way back to Abraham, through King David's line. But for all four gospels, the real story of Jesus begins with John the Baptist's preaching in the wilderness, and Jesus' baptism by John in the Jordan River – when Jesus was about 30 years old. Because the gospels are not biographies! They are telling the story of what God did in sending Jesus, who Jesus is, and what Jesus did that is so important for us, and our salvation! So that's what they wrote about – so that believing in Jesus as Savior, we will have abundant and eternal life!

The gospel of Luke tells us precious little about Jesus growing up – about all we know is included in our hymn of the day. We know that Jesus' parents were devout Jews. Luke says that after the shepherds had left Bethlehem, glorifying and praising God for what they had seen and heard, about eight days later, they had the child circumcised – and gave him the name “Jesus” – meaning “Savior”. On the 40<sup>th</sup> day his parents took Jesus to the Temple of Jerusalem for the rite of purification, according to the Law of Moses. This included the sacrifice of “two turtledoves” – made famous in that song most of us have sung from memory, *The Twelve Days of Christmas*. When they went to the Temple, Jesus was noticed by two older saints – one Simeon, and one Anna, who praised God and blessed Jesus' parents, for the privilege of seeing for themselves the child who would be the Messiah sent by God. Now he could die in peace, Simeon said, as he sang the song “Lord, Now you let your servant depart in peace” – which we often sing in our liturgy. Luke summarized Jesus' childhood by saying, “*The child grew and became strong, filled with wisdom, and the favor of God was upon him.*”

Then Luke tells the story read today in the gospel lesson, which is about all he tells us about Jesus' childhood. It seems that every year Mary and Joseph went to Jerusalem for the Passover festival, and brought Jesus and the whole family. When Jesus was twelve, they went as usual to Jerusalem. But when they returned, the boy Jesus had remained in the Temple – unknown to his parents. They assumed he was with someone else that they knew, and walked a whole day before they realized they had left Jesus behind. (I can just hear each of Jesus' parents saying to the other, "I thought you had him!") Now, before you get too critical of Joseph and Mary for "bad parenting" – think about all the times when parents today lose sight of their children at the mall, or leave a baby asleep in their car seat when they go shopping, or when we drive home, leaving the kids at the relatives' house and don't remember until we are two hours on the road, and almost home – then have to turn around and go back. Who hasn't done this?

Well, Luke's point isn't about the parenting. The point of the story is what Jesus was doing there. When Mary and Joseph realized Jesus was not with them in their group, they immediately returned to Jerusalem. It took three days of searching before they found him (how's THAT for symbolism?! Jesus was "lost" to his parents for three days – they couldn't find him at any of the logical places they looked for him (the hotel, homes of friends, marketplaces and bazaars, the video arcade or the great Mall of Jerusalem). Jesus was nowhere to be found. And then, on the third day, they found him in the Temple, of all places for a twelve year old on his own, sitting with the teachers, listening to them and asking them questions. (So how else do you think Jesus grew to know so much about the holy scriptures – the Torah?! Luke says that *all who heard him were amazed at his understanding and his answers!*

At first, Jesus' mother tried the usual "guilt trip" on Jesus when they found him, saying, "Child, why have you treated us like this? Look, your father and I have been searching for you in great anxiety!" (Isn't this just what you or I would say? I would! And I would add, "don't ever let this happen again, young man!") But Jesus came right back with "Why were you searching for me? Did you not know that I must be in my Father's house?" But Mary and Joseph did not understand what he said. (Just like the disciples later on – who so seldom understood what Jesus was saying, or doing.) *Then Jesus 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.*

This is all we get about Jesus' early years. The very next passage starts with a new chapter in Luke, with the ministry of John the Baptist in the wilderness across the Jordan, in the fifteenth year of the Emperor Tiberius, when Pontius Pilate was governor of Judea, and a new Herod was ruler of Galilee (a phony king,

place there by the Romans). But I already preached about this three Sundays ago, on December 6<sup>th</sup>, the Second Sunday in Advent. And the next chapter in Jesus' ministry, his baptism by John, we will deal with on January 10<sup>th</sup>. I told you that we are really skipping around here! You need to be here every Sunday for this, or you will be very confused! Or check my weekly emails, for the sermon online!

So why do we even bother with this story on the first Sunday after Christmas? Well, there are a couple of reasons. With our three-year lectionary, we deal with two other important stories from Jesus' infancy the other two years – the slaughter of the children of Bethlehem (from Matthew), and the Presentation of Jesus in the Temple – and the witness of Anna and Simeon- in the other. The Season of Christmas is very short – only Twelve Days, with two Sundays included – an interlude before the season of the Epiphany, which focuses on the revealing of Jesus' identity as the “Light to the Nations”.

So why did Luke choose to tell the story of the pre-teen Jesus in the Temple in his gospel? He wanted to emphasize Jesus' roots as a Jew, that he was used to an annual pilgrimage to Jerusalem on Passover, and spent time asking questions with the teachers of the Torah, discussing the meaning of the holy scriptures. This becomes very important later when we read the stories about Jesus' ministry as an adult – that Jesus challenged the teachers of the Law *as an insider* from the faith. His approach to outsiders, and to welcome Gentiles, always came as a faithful Jew, who had studied the scriptures, and lived out all the teachings and traditions of Judaism. It is important to remember that Jesus considered the Temple of Jerusalem “his Father's house” – and it gave him no joy to challenge the priests and the scribes, or to envision the Temple's ultimate destruction by the Romans. Jesus always spoke as a Jew. And he always spoke about the Temple, and with other Jews, out of love – even when he disagreed with them.

This gives you and me something to think about when we challenge one another as Christians about the meaning of scripture, or the living out of our faith. We should always speak out of love for one another, out of a desire to discover the truth of God, just as Jesus did. Too often we become angry and bitter when others don't see things according to our point of view, or we separate ourselves from one another. We should remember that we are all children of God, seeking God's truth, and none of us has the corner on truth! So we should always give one another space to disagree. I try to remember this myself, but sometimes I fall short.

So I close by repeating the words of Paul in his letter to the Colossians, who spoke to other Christians in the early Church, who often disagreed with each other about where God was leading them – just like we do today. He spoke in the spirit of Christ, who even in anger, always spoke out of love for his adversaries, and for

us. Today, during the feast of Christmas, after all this time together and with relatives, it is helpful to remember these words of grace:

*As God's chosen ones, holy and beloved, clothe yourselves with compassion, kindness, humility, meekness, and patience. Bear with one another and, if anyone has a complaint against another, forgive each other; just as the Lord has forgiven you, so you also must forgive. Above all, clothe yourselves with love, which binds everything together in perfect harmony. And let the peace of Christ rule in your hearts, to which indeed you were called in the one body. And be thankful. Let the word of Christ dwell in you richly; teach and admonish one another in all wisdom; and with gratitude in your hearts sing psalms, hymns, and spiritual songs to God. And whatever you do, in word or deed, do everything in the name of the Lord Jesus, giving thanks to God the Father through him. (Col 3:12-17) Amen.*