

*Every year his parents went to Jerusalem for the Feast of the Passover. <sup>42</sup> When he was twelve years old, they went up to the Feast, according to the custom. <sup>43</sup> After the Feast was over, while his parents were returning home, the boy Jesus stayed behind in Jerusalem, but they were unaware of it. <sup>44</sup> Thinking he was in their company, they traveled on for a day. Then they began looking for him among their relatives and friends. <sup>45</sup> When they did not find him, they went back to Jerusalem to look for him. <sup>46</sup> After three days they found him in the temple courts, sitting among the teachers, listening to them and asking them questions. <sup>47</sup> Everyone who heard him was amazed at his understanding and his answers. <sup>48</sup> 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.”*

*<sup>49</sup> “Why were you searching for me?” he asked. “Didn’t you know I had to be in my Father’s house?” <sup>50</sup> But they did not understand what he was saying to them.*

*<sup>51</sup> Then he went down to Nazareth with them and was obedient to them. But his mother treasured all these things in her heart. <sup>52</sup> And Jesus grew in wisdom and stature, and in favor with God and men. (Luke 2:41-52)*

### **What an Extraordinary Child!**

Someone accused me of being “a proud papa” the other day. It was true. I was kind of bragging about one of my kids. And I’m not alone in doing that. On Christmas Day, I saw people here oohing and aahing over a baby and her mother had that smile parents get when people complement our children. Young people from our congregation played various instruments for our Christmas services, and a number of people told their parents about how wonderful that was. I know those parents were pleased. We all want our children to be beautiful and talented and we beam when it works out that way. But you know what? As special as we feel our children are, most them know that they’re not as smart or talented or gifted as people make them sound when they gush over them. How many of us know a child who is truly exceptional? By definition, those children are rare. Today, in our gospel lesson, we see the rarest child of all time: Jesus. **What an extraordinary child!**

#### **I.**

In these verses we have the only incident recorded for us in scripture between the time when Jesus was a baby and when he was an adult. But in this incident we see how special he really was. **What an extraordinary child! No other child lived like he did.**

Now, because Jesus was a real, human being, there were many things about his life that were normal – he grew and ate and slept. And he did many of things that people in that place and time did. The annual trip to Jerusalem was a normal part of life for the Jewish people. God had commanded that every year, every Jewish male was to appear at the temple in Jerusalem to celebrate the Passover. Once Jesus turned twelve, he had to go. It wasn’t unusual. Nor was the manner of travel. Nazareth was a long way away in a world without cars or trains. It was natural for friends and relatives to travel together, for safety and company and help if someone got in trouble. Even the fact that Joseph and Mary assumed that Jesus was somewhere in the caravan on the way back probably reflects the normal hustle and bustle of travel under those circumstances. Getting separated from parents wasn’t unheard of, then or now.

None of those things really sets Jesus apart in this reading. So what does? What he was doing for three days while his parents searched for him. Luke says, **“After three days 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.”** If Jesus had gone to the temple because he was lost or scared, that wouldn’t have been surprising, since his parents would’ve taken them there to celebrate the Passover. But that’s not why Jesus went there. He went there to learn – ask questions and answer them. Now, of course, that was part of the temple’s function. But Luke says: “Everyone who heard him was amazed at his understanding and his answers.” A twelve year old boy engaged the leading Bible scholars of his day in three days of discussion, maybe even debate, about the meaning and teachings of the Word of God. Everyone there was amazed that a child could have such insight into the scriptures.

Of course, that’s what we’d expect of Jesus, right? He was the Son of God. He was the author of the Scriptures. Of course, we’d expect him to know them better than anybody else. But don’t make that jump quite

so fast. Luke does not present Jesus giving a lecture here. At the end of the reading, he says, “**Jesus grew in wisdom and stature, and in favor with God and men.**” Jesus grew in wisdom and in God’s favor – and here again, the Greek word is actually grace. Jesus grew in God’s grace. How is it possible for the Son of God to grow in knowledge or wisdom? How could the Son of God grow in his Father’s grace or favor? What we see here in this child listening and asking and answering questions is not the revelation of his Godhood. We see instead his perfection as a human being.

Jesus shows us here what we all could have been if we weren’t born sinners. He shows us a perfect human being with a perfect understanding of God and of life. We’re just not like that right now, are we? On Christmas Eve before the service started, I was looking through the readings and carols in the bulletin and I noticed that there was a problem in the order. I had looked at that bulletin a dozen times and I hadn’t seen that issue. But you know what? Even at that moment, I failed to see what the problem really was. The sermon hymn was just listed in the wrong place. All I had to do was move it. But instead I moved the offering and told the organist and the deacon and the ushers to disregard what was written and do something else. I even announced it at the beginning of the service. Then after the service started, I realized how simple the solution should have been. But it was too late to do anything about it.

Have you ever kicked yourself because you did something that dumb? Why do we do those things? Because we’re sinners. Sin broke us. We no longer have the judgment and the wisdom God designed us to have. And sometimes the results of the stupid things we do are tragic. Houses burn down. People get fired. Relationships get ruined. And sad to say, we all do more than just make stupid mistakes. All too often, we deliberately sin. By birth, every fiber of our existence is corrupted by sin. So day after day, we do and say things that hurt us and the people around us. Just in the last two weeks, almost thirty people are dead in Connecticut and New York because of two other people’s sin. We may never do something so obviously horrific. But every day we do sin. We do hurt the people around us, sometimes very seriously. Because we put ourselves ahead of those people we hurt, because we sin, we deserve to die and spend eternity in hell.

None of that was true about Jesus. He had no sin, so when he sat down to talk with the leading Bible scholars of his day, he knew more than they did. His heart and his mind were attuned to God. When we see him sitting in the temple amazing people with his knowledge of God and his Word, we see the people God intended us to be. More than that, we see Jesus standing in for us. God doesn’t see us being dumb anymore. God doesn’t see us ruining our lives and the lives of the people around us with our sinful stupidity anymore. God doesn’t see our sin at all. He sees Jesus being perfect in our place, soaking up every word of the Scripture and living it perfectly, day after day.

## II.

Jesus was the only sinless person to walk this earth since the time of Adam and Eve. But he was more than just a human being. We do see the Son of God there in the temple that day – not in the questions and answers of the child who amazed the teachers of the law, but in his answer to his mother’s question. There we see how truly unique this child really was, because we see why he came. **What an extraordinary child! No other child had his mission.**

Mary and Joseph were on the way home. At nightfall, they realized that Jesus wasn’t in the caravan of friends and neighbors and they raced back to Jerusalem. They spent three days retracing their steps and searching all the places they had been. Finally, they discovered him, not frightened or hungry or alone or in danger, but sitting in the temple talking – safe and perhaps even enjoying the experience.

Mary asked, “**Son, why have you treated us like this? Your father and I have been anxiously searching for you.**” Jesus said, “**Why were you searching for me? Didn’t you know I had to be in my Father’s house?**” As a parent, it’s hard for me to hear that response without thinking that he’s either smarting off or trying to shift the blame. But I don’t think Jesus asked this question in a disrespectful way. I think he asked it in total seriousness. He was reminding them of what they should have known all along. Before Jesus was born, the angel Gabriel had told them that he was the Son of God. Elizabeth had called Mary “the mother of my Lord.” When Jesus was forty days old, they took him to the temple and two different prophets told them who he was and what he had come to do. Then the Wise Men came and worshipped him. Then an angel told them to flee to Egypt to escape from Herod and later directed them to settle in Nazareth. God had told them again and again that this was his Son sent here on his mission. And Jesus was telling them that even at age twelve they should’ve expected him to put that mission first.

Mary said that she and Jesus' father had been searching for him. Jesus answered that he had to be in his Father's house. At twelve years old, Jesus knew who he was and how and why he had come here. He knew that he was the Son of God. People who don't believe the Bible don't believe that. Some people who don't believe the Bible are pastors and professors in seminaries. And they wrestle with the person of Christ. A number of them have debated in what sense Jesus was the Son of God or the Christ. Some of them say that Jesus was the child of Joseph and Mary, but when he was baptized, the Son of God came on him. In effect, the man Jesus was possessed by the Son of God and when that happened, he became the Christ. People like that wonder when did Jesus realize his mission? Did he know before he was baptized how God was going to use him? Unfortunately, variations of that kind of thinking infect even churches that try to follow God's Word.

It's all nonsense. Jesus was true man, to be sure. He was the son of Mary, although not the physical son of Joseph. But from the moment he was conceived, he was the Son of God. And as God, he never stopped knowing who he was. Now, there is some very deep theology here, and we have to be careful because we sinners can never fully understand the psychology of being God and man at the same time. But when Jesus came into this world, he hid his power and glory as God. You couldn't see it except when he did miracles. The Bible teaches that Jesus laid aside the full and constant use of his power and glory as God. He always had it, but he didn't always use it. Once, he even said that he didn't know when the end of the world will come, because he chose while he was here to lay aside that knowledge. Because of all that, he could grow and learn in his human nature. But Jesus always knew who he was: the only begotten Son of God.

And he always knew why he came: to save us. That included preaching and teaching. If Jesus had died and risen and nobody ever knew, none of us would ever get to heaven. So already at this moment, we see him preparing for the day when he would preach and teach and identify himself as the promised Savior. But the heart of his mission was taking our sins away. To do that, he had to live that perfect life and then die on the cross to pay for all of our sin and stupidity and selfishness. Then he had to rise to wipe all that guilt away and give us life. To do all that for us, he did have to be a real human being, because God demands all that from human beings. But for it to count for everyone, he had to be the Son of God. That's what we see this morning. The Son of God knew why he was here. Already at this moment, the Son of God was beginning the journey that would end at the cross and the empty tomb. He reminded his parents of why he came. Then, he completed the mission. Luke says that he went back to Nazareth and was obedient to them. The Son of God, the creator of the universe, let two sinful parents tell him what to do, because we all have to be obedient to our parents. Jesus lived and died and rose in our place and now we are free.

That was truly extraordinary. It couldn't have been easy for Mary and Joseph to raise Jesus. Luke says that Mary treasured all these things in her heart. It must have been confusing and she must have wrestled at times with what it all meant for her and her son. That's before we even think about what it must have been like for his brothers and sisters to have a perfect older brother. But Jesus had to be this extraordinary child. He had to be God made man because that's what we needed to reach heaven. In love, God gave us exactly what we needed. Amen.