

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

⁴⁹ "Why were you searching for me?" he asked. "Didn't you know I had to be in my Father's house?"⁵⁰ But they did not understand what he was saying to them.

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

What will this Child Be?

What do you want to be when you grow up? A couple of years ago at the preschool graduation, our preschool teacher read what each of the children said they wanted to be when they grew up. It was cute and, at times, pretty funny. Once your children reach the upper grades in high school, however, the question of a career path becomes much more real. But what you do for a living is only part of what your future will bring. There is so much more to life than that. Last Sunday, we had our children's Christmas service. What will those children who gathered up here to share the gospel with us become? How many will be parents? How many will have happy and fulfilling marriages? How many will stay here in the Detroit area and which ones will find homes in other parts of the country or the world? How many lives will they touch before their time on earth is done? Only God knows.

Yet, sometimes there are hints at what's coming as our children grow up. We've been blessed here at Peace to have children in our church and school who are very musical and I think some congregation is going to get a couple of organists and a few other musicians out of our current crop. I hope that all of our children remain faithful in coming to church and there are kids who take their faith very seriously. I hope that's a hint of what's coming. Some of the older kids show real kindness toward the younger kids and I suspect that means they will want to be good parents some day. It's fun to identify those traits and to watch those children grow up to see what we were right about. This morning in our gospel lesson, we have an example of a child who gave strong hints of what was coming. I imagine that the people who stood around him in the temple as he asked and answered questions must have wondered who he was and what he was going to be. In truth, God wanted that to happen. 18 years before his ministry began, Jesus made people ask, **"What will this child be?"**

Luke tells us that every year, Joseph and Mary would go to Jerusalem for the Passover. Under Old Testament law, three times a year, every Jewish male was supposed to appear at God's sanctuary for a festival. Passover was one of those "pilgrim feasts." Women were not specifically commanded to attend, but they weren't forbidden either, so Mary probably wasn't the only woman there. The trip was not just an overnight thing. The whole week after the Passover was celebrated, so it's entirely possible that Joseph's whole family went every year. This particular trip took place when Jesus was twelve. When the week was over, they headed back home. Luke tells us, **"The boy Jesus stayed behind in Jerusalem, but [his parents] were unaware of it."** So they traveled for a whole day without noticing he wasn't there.

How could that have happened? Mary and Joseph were traveling with friends and relatives. History tells us that travel was very dangerous during the Roman era. Roving bands of bandits robbed people and kidnapped them to sell them into slavery. So whenever possible, people traveled in large groups for protection. So Joseph's family was probably traveling with friends and neighbors that Jesus had known most of his life, and his parents probably figured he was walking with one of them. Joseph and Mary may have had smaller children with them that needed more care and attention. Finally, Jesus was sinless. He was the perfect older child. If he had been doing this every year since he was little, they probably trusted him to be part of the caravan.

But when evening came, Joseph and Mary started looking for him to bed down with them. That's when they realized he wasn't there. They raced back to Jerusalem to look for him. Luke tells that they looked for three days. Then they went to the temple. Maybe they thought Jesus might have gone there looking for help. Or maybe they just went there to pray because they were downright frightened. That's where they found Jesus. What was he doing? He wasn't hiding in a corner, frightened because his parents had forgotten him. He was seated with "the teachers" – the professional Bible scholars that were such a huge part of Jewish culture. And they were talking about God's Word! Luke says, **"Everyone who heard him was amazed at his understanding and his answers."**

In Jewish society, being a Bible scholar was a big deal. So a twelve-year-old who could run with the professionals would've been noticed. How did Jesus gain such knowledge? Of course, you and I know the answer. Jesus was more than just a human being. He was the Son of God. That comes out in his conversation with his parents. Mary said, **"Son, why have you treated us like this? Your father and I have been anxiously searching for you."** I think we can understand what she said. But Jesus answered, **"Why were you searching for me? Didn't you know I had to be in my Father's house?"** His point seems to have been that they should have checked the temple three days ago. They should've known that's where he'd be. They could've spared themselves three days of worry.

Now, I don't know about you, but if I had disappeared for three days when I was twelve and then gave my parents an answer like that, it would not have ended well for me. How could Jesus say this to his parents? Well, you have to remember that Jesus had no sin. Luke does not record this incident to show us Jesus being lippy when he was twelve. He records this so that we can see that even at age twelve, Jesus had a greater purpose in life than we do. He knew who he was and what he came here to do. For two thousand years, the Christian church has wrestled with what it means that Jesus was both God and man. At times, I've wondered what it was like to be a human being with all the limitations that even a perfect human being would have, and also to be God who knows all and can do all. In the end, we'll never understand how that worked. But Jesus' choice to stay in the temple and his words to his mother reflect who and what he was. In truth, Jesus did this deliberately. This was not a case of teenager who didn't think through the consequences of his actions. This was the Son of God standing in his Father's house and being about his Father's business.

Mary and Joseph needed to see who their son was. Now, they should've known. God had sent angels and shepherds and wise men to tell them years before. But for twelve years, Jesus had lived with his mother and father and little brothers and sisters. He had worshipped at the synagogue and probably worked in his father's shop. He did all the normal things that a Jewish boy would've done at that time and place and the Bible does not record one, single miracle during all their time in Nazareth. It would've been easy for Mary and Joseph to start to think this was normal. So God reminded them – and us – that this boy was more than just a boy. He was the Son of God come to save the world.

Yet, he was also still a real, human boy. The account ends by emphasizing that for us. Luke says, **"Then he went down to Nazareth with them and was obedient to them."** Think about that. The Son of God was obedient to human parents – parents who had just demonstrated that they didn't have nearly as clear an idea of why he was there as Jesus himself did. Parents who rebuked him for doing what God wanted him to do at that moment. Joseph and Mary were believers and we will see them in heaven. But like most of us, they weren't perfect parents. It's entirely possible that they made rules in their house that didn't really make sense, that they made promises that they couldn't keep, that they disciplined their children when they didn't deserve it or in a way that didn't really help. Most of us parents are guilty of those things, right? As a truly sinless person, Jesus could've said, "You don't deserve to have me live in your house." As the Son of God, Jesus could've punished them for all their failures. But instead, he was obedient to them.

That obedience shows us more than just an example – so stop nudging your teenagers. That obedience shows us how far God was willing to go to save us. How many times in your life have you had to take orders from someone you didn't respect? How gracious were you in doing that? Have you ever let a supervisor know that you didn't think very highly of them? Have you ever done what you were told to do because you had to, but you made sure that everyone knew just how little you thought of whoever was making you do those things? How many of us have disrespected our parents or others in authority?

Jesus did none of those things. He regarded his parents as God's representatives and he honored and obeyed them even though he knew better than they did how they should manage their household. Jesus humbled

himself. The Bible says he made himself nothing so that he could lift us up to heaven. You see, God designed us to be his servants. Now, there's nothing wrong with that. The angels are also God's servants and I think we recognize that they're pretty happy with their lot in life. God designed us to live in perfect love and service toward him and toward each other. But ego gets in the way. We resent our parents when they discipline us, even when we have it coming. We can hate them for doing that, even when we're in the wrong. We hate having people tell us what to do. We rebel and resist. We even do that to God – that's how stubborn our sinful hearts are.

All that sin deserves God's punishment in hell forever. But Jesus made himself a servant in our place. He submitted to sinful human parents – and all Gods' representative – for us. He obeyed all God's laws so that God can count us as perfect. Then Jesus died and paid for all our sins. He suffered hell itself because our sinful egos don't like anybody telling us what to do. Then he rose and forgave us. Every sinful word and action is gone from God's record. Every sinful thought and feeling and desire is erased. God calls us holy because Jesus did all those things.

To do them, he had to become a real human being, even while he was God. You see the God part in his insight and understanding. Who knows the word of God better than God himself? Jesus could stun men who had dedicated their entire lives to studying the Scriptures already when he was twelve years old. But did you see the contrast at the end? Luke wrote, **“Jesus grew in wisdom and stature, and in favor with God and men.”** This child who could amaze the teachers grew in wisdom and stature and in favor with God and men. He learned! That's the human reality of Christ. This account speaks to the hardest part to understand about Jesus – the union of God and man. In the ancient church, people tried to do math and add the human nature and the divine nature together. That added up to two natures. But there is only one Jesus, so one way people tried to make that work was to say that the “God part” replaced some “human part” – the God part took the place of his soul or his spirit or his mind or his reason. People argued back and forth about those things. A man named Gregory of Nanzianzus ended the argument by pointing out that if Jesus didn't have some part of us, he didn't pay for that part of us. If he didn't have a human soul, he didn't pay for our soul. If he didn't have a human mind, he didn't pay for our mind. But Jesus did pay for us. He was all that we are, except that he had no sin. So even while the Son of God knew all things and could stump the greatest teachers of his day, the Son of Mary grew and learned. And that Son of God and that Son of Mary add up to one Jesus, one person who is both God and man.

I have no idea how that really worked in Jesus' head. But we don't have to know that. All we have to understand is what it means: we have the Savior we need. And in many ways this moment in the temple was preview of what was coming 18 years later. Again and again, Jesus' enemies would try to stump him. Why? Because his teaching amazed and delighted the people of Israel and they were jealous. But they could not outwit him because they weren't arguing with another human teacher. They were arguing with the Son of God made man. That means they were arguing with the Savior God had been promising since the Garden of Eden. Jesus was the teacher, the Messiah, the Savior we need. That is what this child would become. Amen.