

“Preteen Jesus”
Christmas 2 Series c

Luke 2:41-52
January 3, 2010

I'm going to lead you through a word study of this gospel text. You can tell me what you think of this technique after the service. Watch the screen to see the highlighted words.

Jerusalem. Jesus went to Jerusalem, the capital city, the city of David, the Holy City set on a hill. Jerusalem was very important to the Jews just as it is today. It was the location of Temple. Ultimately Jesus would weep over the city of Jerusalem, knowing that God's people had continuously wandered from the worship of God and repeatedly rejected and even killed the prophets. It is the city in which Jesus himself would ultimately be executed.

Passover. It was time to celebrate the annual Jewish festival of Passover, a time when many observant Jews made pilgrimage to Jerusalem. Hundreds of thousands, maybe a million people, jammed into Jerusalem for eight holy days. Passover was the festival in which Israel remembered when they were slaves in Egypt and God sent a deliverer, Moses, to help them escape from the clutches of the evil Egyptian King Pharaoh. In the final plague meant to convince Pharaoh to let the Hebrew slaves go free, God sent an angel of death over Egypt, but the angel “passed over” the Hebrew homes marked with the blood of a lamb. Jews continue to commemorate these events every year with the sacred celebration of Passover.

Twelve. Jesus was twelve years old and no longer regarded as a child. It was the custom of Jews to celebrate this turning point with a rite of passage called bar mitzvah, just as in our church, we have confirmation. When he reached age thirteen, Jesus would actually be considered a young man. At twelve he is now at the age of discretion, a time in which he would take on greater responsibilities.

When the festival of Passover was ended and everyone started to return to their home towns, the boy Jesus stayed behind in Jerusalem, but his parents did not realize it.

Relatives and friends. His parents thought

he was with “relatives and friends.” I like the custom found in this verse about family and friends. Both family and friends are important to rearing a child. I could not have raised two such wonderful children as Rachel and Joel without the influence of family and friends, and especially this church family.

Initially, the parents were not worried about Jesus when he was missing because they believed he was in the safe care of others. But that was not the case. Jesus went AWOL, absent without letting his parents know where he was. You and I would consider that an infraction of family rules. But we discover in this story that the family of Jesus included an even higher authority than parents.

Three. Jesus was missing for three days. Not one, not two, not four, but three days. To three days ring a bell for you? Jesus was in the grave for three days. He prophesied that the temple would be destroyed and rebuilt in three days. Jonah was in the belly of the whale for three days. “Three days” are important to the story. But can you imagine your twelve year old son disappearing for three days? You'd be in a panic and so were Mary and Joseph. No doubt they frantically searched with the help of their family and friends.

Temple. Finally his parents found Jesus in the Temple. It's important to know that the Temple in Jerusalem would be very important in the future stories about Jesus. When Jesus comes back as an adult, he will cleanse the temple of the moneychangers, teach at length in the temple and will argue with the religious leaders in the temple.

Sitting, listening, questioning. Jesus was sitting among them, listening, and asking questions of religious teachers. His position is that of a humble pupil and not of a learned teacher. In many famous paintings of this scene, artists portray Jesus standing as an equal or even superior to the teachers in the Temple. Many of those paintings are titled “Christ Disputing with

the Doctors” as if he was arguing with them and teaching them right from wrong. That’s not true to the text of Luke’s gospel **This painting** from the early 14th century by GIOTTO di Bondone (1305) has it right. It portrays Jesus in the sitting position. The gospel of Luke tells us that Jesus was listening and asking questions, not teaching or arguing. He is in a posture of humility. A humble person listens and asks questions which is a primary source for growth in wisdom.

Amazed and astonished. Truly, the teachers in the Temple were “amazed and astonished” with Jesus and his answers. Throughout the whole gospel, people are constantly amazed and astonished at his words, amazed at his healing of the sick and disabled, astonished at his resurrection from the dead. Christ-followers today continue to be astonished and amazed at Jesus’ words and deeds.

Your father. His mother speaks to him first, “Your father and I have been looking for you.” This is a key line. YOUR FATHER and I have been looking for you. Mary seems to have forgotten, for the moment, the visit of the angel who thirteen years previously announced that the baby in her womb was to be conceived by the Holy Spirit. Mary and Joseph have gotten so used to daily life that Mary is the mother and Joseph is the father. Joseph had been raising Jesus as a father would raise any child. But the question remains, “Who’s child is he?”

Great anxiety/Anxious. His mother indicates to Jesus that she and Joseph have experienced “great anxiety” over his disappearance. The translation has been softened. Luke is the only gospel writer who uses this word and it needs to be translated “anguish”. Anguish has more pain than the word, anxious.

Mary and Joseph were deeply distressed and in pain that Jesus had treated them so carelessly. Jesus has not obeyed his parents and this would not only bring shame on Jesus but also on his parents. Chastising Jesus' in the presence of the others in the Temple made it plain to all that Jesus had acted without their permission. She makes it clear that she and Joseph were not

negligent parents but that they had gone to great pains to find him. She is further reasserting her authority and influence over Jesus. But Jesus-now-the-man-and-not-her-boy-anymore demonstrates his autonomy by responding to a hostile question with another question.

So now we hear Jesus speak for the first time in the gospels. “Why were you searching for me? Did you not know that I must be in my Father's house?”

Must. Jesus said, I MUST be in my Father’s house. The word, “must,” comes from the lips of Jesus multiple times throughout Luke’s gospel. “I must be in my father’s house.” “I must proclaim the good new.” “I must undergo great suffering, and be rejected by the elders, chief priests, and scribes, and be killed, and on the third day be raised.” It is his God’s given destiny. It is the divine plan. Jesus MUST be in his father’s house. Jesus, now twelve years old, declares that he lives under the authority, not of Mary and Joseph, but under the authority of his supernal parent.

My Father’s house. God is the Father of Jesus. The angel Gabriel told Mary that her child would be the Son of the Most High and the Son of God. This same truth would be declared by God himself when Jesus is baptized by John. “This is my beloved Son. Listen to him.” So this fundamental truth is proclaimed by Jesus at an early age. At the age of twelve Jesus knew that he had the gift of the God’s presence within him in a very special way. He exhibited an awareness of his identity as the Son of God. And this is why the Jewish leaders plotted to kill Jesus. Jesus had the audacity to teach that the Lord God was MY FATHER and this incensed the Jewish leaders.

Those two words, MY FATHER, are at the core of the Christian religion. In Judaism, only God is God and God ALWAYS chose prophets to communicate God’s message. In the Jewish religion, God would NEVER become a human being. Rather, God would speak through human beings who were called prophets. In the Jewish religion today, Jesus is still one of the prophets.

The same is true of Islam. God ALWAYS

speaks through the prophets, such as the greatest of all the prophets, Mohammed. Allah would NEVER stoop to becoming a human being with flesh and blood. Rather, Allah would always speak through a human being such as Mohammed. Muslims regard Jesus as one of the prophets.

As Christians, we believe that God came to earth as a human being in the flesh and blood of Jesus of Nazareth. Jesus was and is the Son of God

Now what about the Temple being God's house? Jesus believed that the temple he was in was his Father's house, and I believe that the church building we are now in is our Father's house. I am keenly aware that God is everywhere present, at home, work, and at play. But I also want to be clear that God is present in a unique way here in this sacred space. This church building, this space, our temple, is dedicated to God for prayer and praise. We could stay home on Sunday morning but we gather in a sacred space and sing our praises, hear God's word and receive Christ in his holy meal. Just as Jesus was in God's house when he was in the temple at age 12, so we are gathered together today in God's house as well. and not merely a human prophet.

Did not understand. Often in this and other gospels, the disciples do not understand the sayings of Jesus. You would have thought the disciples would have understood; you would have thought Mary and Joseph would have understood. That is the way it works with most of us. We don't understand.

His mother treasured. Mary is the person who very likely narrated this story to Luke so he could include it in his gospel. As the gospels were being written down, it was important that the source of these stories were eyewitness of the events, people who had seen and heard Jesus first hand. Luke may have asked her, "What about Jesus' childhood? Tell me what you remember." No doubt this story probably stood out more than any other and she shared it often.

Wisdom, favor. There are other stories told of Jesus childhood but they were not included in

the canon of scripture, likely because they were thought to be less authentic. So as this story concludes we learn that Jesus grew in years and grew in wisdom and in favor with God and the people.

Let us pray:

Almighty God our heavenly Father, you have given us this Christmas season of holy joy. Fill us with gladness of the Word become flesh in your Son, Jesus, the Christ.

Help us to celebrate these final days of Christmas in humility and gratitude, in unselfish love and cheerful service. Cause the light of truth to shine forth for us as we listen to your Word. Give us grace to follow wherever it may lead us, that we may be guided in the way of understanding and obedience.

Build up your Church in the strength of faith and prayer, that the good news of Jesus may be spread far and wide. We pray for all nations, that in the coming year we may be drawn into closer bonds of mutual respect. May people everywhere hear your voice and know your will, that all may turn from selfish aims and warlike actions to the Prince of Peace.

We pray for your blessing upon your whole church on earth and our congregation, its worship, ministry and witness, its homes and families. Equip the Congregation Council with wisdom and a vision of your will for the future. Bless the work of the Action Plan Task Force as they move this congregation forward toward ever more faithful days to come. Draw those who are seeking a closer walk with you to the Alpha class which starts next Sunday.

Watch over our loved ones who are absent from us. Remember in mercy those who begin the new year under any shadow of affliction: the lonely, the disappointed, the sick, the mourning and those whose strength is failing. Give them comfort and peace, hope and a happier expectation of things to

come. Sustain in hope our brothers and sisters of the Evangelical Lutheran Church of Malawi as they recover from a devastating earthquake. Provide them with the resources they need to help those whose lives have been dramatically changed by this natural disaster.

With thanksgiving we remember those who have passed from this world into eternal rest and with them we join in endless praise as we gather at your table of grace to receive a foretaste of the feast to come. We pray it through Jesus Christ, our Lord and Savior.