

Sunday after Christmas C

December 27, 2009

Hymns: 67 - 707 - 366 - 64

**LUKE 2:41-52 (slide 1 – just before reading of text)  
WHAT CHILD IS THIS!?**

**\*The Son Of God: A “Normal” Adolescent?!**

**\*The Son Of God: A “Unique” Human Being.**

*Train a child in the way he should, and when he is old he will not turn from it. Amen! (Proverbs 22:6)*

Dear Child of God (child of some earthly parents, and maybe parent of “some” child or children!), We never know what to expect from a child. A particular teacher learned that the hard way. One day there was a big snowstorm. She felt she should warn her pupils against playing too long in the frigid weather. She said: “Now children, you must be careful about cold and overexposure. I had a precious little brother, only seven years old, who went out into the cold and snow with his new sled and stayed too long. He caught a cold, pneumonia set in, and three days later he died.” For a moment the class sat in awed silence. Then a hand shot up in the back of the room. A youngster asked: “What happened to his sled?”

Children will surprise you. And sometimes they will drive you out of your mind. Has anyone in the room ever had difficulty with one of your children? Of course, I could ask our young people, have any of you ever had trouble with your parents? Don’t hold up your hands. Generational issues are a part of being a family. Even in the very best of families there is tension. We know that because it happened even in Jesus’ family.

There is only one story from Jesus’ childhood that made it into Scripture. There were many other stories that did not. You see, like any other towering figure in human history, there were myths and legends that grew up about Jesus. Some of these were collected in books that were rejected by the early Church when they canonized the Scripture. The story that did make it into Scripture is the one that occurred when Jesus was twelve years old. That’s the time when a Jewish boy celebrates his Bar Mitzvah. This sacred event marks the transition from boyhood to adulthood. The celebration of the teenage years is a relatively recent occurrence. Until after the Second World War, it seems you moved directly from childhood to being adult. The idea of teenage rebellion was absurd. There was not time. There were too many responsibilities that had to be taken care of.

Every year Jesus’ parents went to Jerusalem for the Feast of the Passover. When Jesus was twelve, however, things did not go as planned. After the Feast was over, his parents started home. Unknown to them, the boy Jesus stayed behind in Jerusalem. Thinking He was in their company, Mary and Joseph traveled on for a day. Then they began looking for Jesus among their relatives and friends. When they did not find Him, they went back to Jerusalem to look for Him.

After three days they found Him in the temple courts, sitting among the teachers, listening to them and asking them questions. Luke tells us that everyone who heard the twelve-year-old Jesus was amazed at His understanding and His answers. When His parents saw Him there in the temple, 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.” “Why were you searching for Me?” young Jesus asked. “Didn’t you know I had to be in my Father’s house?” But they did not understand what He was saying to them. **(slide 2)** Then, Luke tells us, Jesus went down to Nazareth with His parents and was obedient to them. “But His mother treasured all these things in her heart,” Luke continues. “And Jesus grew in wisdom and stature, and in favor with God and men.”

Every parent has wondered how Mary and Joseph could have gone a full day’s journey from Jerusalem without realizing that Jesus was missing. One reason could be that they didn’t have to worry about the kinds of things happening to their kids that we worry about today. The world has changed. Also, they were a part of a large company of family and friends traveling together. What could go wrong? Still, when they returned to Jerusalem and could not find Jesus for three days, it must have driven them crazy with worry. Those of you who are parents can relate. No wonder Mary asked sternly, “Son, why have You treated us like this? Your father and I have been anxiously searching for You.”

Jesus' answer seems a little impertinent. "Why were you searching for Me?" He asked. "Didn't you know I had to be in My Father's house?" Then Luke adds, "But they did not understand what He was saying to them." There were a lot of things Mary and Joseph just were not going to be understanding about this special Son of theirs! It would not be the last time that Jesus' family did not understand Him. Important for us to understand is that 12 year old Jesus didn't understand everything that was going on in His life, nor did He understand exactly where His life was leading Him. God emptied Himself of the use of His divine knowledge in becoming man. This is one of the many incomprehensible parts of this adolescent being Who was both God and human. Jesus knew that the teachers in the temple had the Scriptures. He knew that clues for His life lay sacred Writ. And He was so driven to find out what His life meant – so driven to be about His heavenly Father's business, so driven to be in His Father's house - that He innocently forgot that His earthly parents would not be on the same page with Him.

To a degree and in a sense - every healthy family has been there, especially as young people approach their teen years. **(slide 3) So, let's start here: it is natural for there to be tension between young people and their parents.** If it could happen in Jesus' family, it can happen in any family. And Jesus wasn't even quite a teenager yet. Why did God have Abraham take his only son Isaac to the mountain supposedly to sacrifice him when Isaac was, as thought by many, 12? And the answer is, of course, if Isaac had been 15, Abraham may have actually gone through with it. It's just a joke, of course, but every family has problems, disagreements, conflict. It's inevitable. Young people will not and should not be carbon copies of their parents. They must find their own identity. Plus society throws them into an adult world while they are still maturing physically, mentally, and emotionally.

Add to this, that according to research by neuroscientists, the human brain does not fully develop until the age of twenty-five. It appears that the brain matures from back to front, with the areas that control physical coordination, sight, hearing, and other skills maturing throughout the childhood and teen years. The prefrontal cortex at the front of the brain--the part that controls critical thinking, judgment, self-control, and other high-functioning skills--is the last to mature. With this in mind, it makes sense that teens seem more impulsive, emotional, or indecisive than adults. The teenager's brain is still going through the maturation process, and many teenagers do not have the necessary neural pathways in place to delay gratification or prioritize their time. One researcher jokes that Avis, the car-rental agency, must employ some good neuroscientists, because they don't allow anyone under the age of twenty-five to rent their cars. In Jesus' day one was not considered a man and could not teach other men until he reached the age of 30. So, Jesus waited and carried on a carpenter's trade until He reached that age of maturity.

That is not a slight at our teens. It is simply a statement of fact. Maturity takes time. Some young people, like some adults, are able to control their impulses and their emotions better than others. But, while that maturing process is going on, there can be almost intolerable tension between young people and their parents. It's natural.

**(slide 4) Just because there is tension, however, does not mean that young people do not need their parents . . . And conversely, that parents are ever excused for surrendering their parenthood, or taking vacations from being parents.** Because of computers and countless other learning devices, one might think teens today are better informed than previous generations. But there is a mountain of misinformation out there about vital issues of importance to young people. Surely, Satan has his hand in that too! Even more importantly, while each generation has had the same sinful flesh to deal with, there are different and it seems more temptations from the devil and the world for today's youth than any generation before has had to confront. And even if a young person is equipped with all the knowledge in the world, there is that maturity gap. Sometimes they need someone who is older, who has been there before, and now has the perspective to offer guidance. Admittedly, not every parent is a good guide to follow. Parents are flawed – sorry, Mom and Dad! No one gets off without sin. We are all imperfect human sinners, who need mercy through the gift of God's Son to this earth to work out our redemption from sin and this corrupt world that our first parents left to us! But it is vital to keep the inter-generational lines of communication open.

It is natural for there to be tension between the generations, but Jesus needed to be obedient and submissive to His parents for righteousness' sake. There also is the reality that adolescent Jesus, emptying Himself of the use of His divine power, very much needed the guidance and direction of conscientious, loving parents.

**(slide 5) This brings us to the last thing that needs to be said: all of us need to know that someone is there for us.** We need that at any age. David's favorite color was black. His clothes were mainly black and he wore the big wide leg pants with lots of metal studs and all. He had the big chains and collars that looked like dog collars. And he'd dye his hair--sometimes blood red, sometimes very black, sometimes teal. One of the grandmothers at her church pulled his single parent mom aside one day and said, "Now Barbara--remember that this is how David needs to express himself. He's searching for his identity, and it cannot look like you. And remember that it's only hair and clothes and that he's still coming to church. So pick your battles carefully."

Unknown to the mom until later on was the kindness of one of the men in the church to David during those teenage years of finding oneself. When this man, named Jerry, died of cancer, David was greatly saddened. The mom didn't know the connection and asked why he was so upset. David told her that Jerry was the one grown-up who would come and talk to him during fellowship time. Didn't matter how weird David looked, Jerry would come over and ask him how school was going and talk about lots of things, but never . . . never how David looked. He was one of the reasons David kept coming to church.

Every young person needs to run into a Jerry, someone who will accept them unconditionally, just as God accepts each of us unconditionally. We are proud of our young people, and thank God for them. Sometimes there can be tension, though, in families. That's natural, as we can see in Jesus' family. Still, we need one another. We need to answer the question affirmatively, "Will you be there for me?" We need to be there for one another as God is there for each of us.

Well, Mary and Joseph as good parents came looking for Jesus. Jesus needed them more than He may have possibly understood at that point. Jesus did know that he needed to be obedient to them. And so, He went down to Nazareth with them. ***And Jesus GREW in wisdom and (physical) stature, and in favor with God and man.*** Until, until, that fateful day when Jesus gave up His life on Calvary's cross for your sins and mine – for all our sins of disrespect and disobedience toward our parents and others in authority. The Son of God died to take away the sins of all of us parents who have come up short in doing a perfect job of raising our sons and daughters. Amen.

May the Lord our God be with us as He was with our fathers. May He never leave us nor forsake us. May He turn our hearts to Him, to walk in all His ways. Amen.