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St. John's & Immanuel Lutheran Churches – Kimball, NE & Burns, WY
Second Sunday after Christmas
January 3, 2016
Text: Luke 2:40–52

Grace be to you and peace from God our Father and from our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ.

Merry Christmas!

The Christmas season moves along pretty quickly, as do the details of the Lord's early life. Mary received an angelic visitation stating she would give birth to a Son, the Savior of the world, in the midst of her virginity. Nine months later, she and Joseph, her betrothed husband, travel from Nazareth to Bethlehem and gives birth to Jesus. Angels sing. Shepherds visit and worship. Eight days later, Jesus is formally named and circumcised in obedience to the Law of Moses. Forty days after Jesus' birth, Joseph and Mary take Jesus to the Temple in Jerusalem to be presented before the Lord, again, in obedience to God's Law. Luke doesn't recount the journey of the Wise Men from the east, that's Matthew's task. Instead, Luke ends His nativity account of the Lord's life with vs. 40, "The Child Jesus grew and became strong, filled with wisdom. And the favor of God was upon him."

That's an amazing statement! If we take time to consider all that we've just rehearsed. On Christmas Eve and Day, we rejoiced in the message of the angels who declared that Jesus, Mary's Son, is also the holy Son of God the Father. Jesus is the eternal Word made flesh who dwells among us. That eternal, Divine Son of God became flesh and blood so completely that Luke declares He grew and became strong, filled with wisdom. Such is the mystery of the Incarnation.

God of God, light of light, true God of very God in human flesh experiences growing pains. I do not wish to sound trite or flippant. But please consider that the eternal Word made flesh experiences His voice changing like any other young man. The very Wisdom of God, present with God the Father in the days of creation according to Proverbs 8, must learn His abc's, 123's, memorize Bible readings, learn the in's and out's of His step-father's carpentry trade. God grows! God becomes strong! Because God became man. That's an amazing proclamation!

And where does God grow and become strong, filled with wisdom? In the confines of a simple, pious family in Nazareth. Another amazing statement! Jesus doesn't go off to university. He doesn't grow up under the tutelage of prophets, priests, or kings. The Lord of all creation grows in wisdom, knowledge, and power under the loving care of parents.

God the Father entrusted His incarnate Son to the care of a mom and dad. For that reason alone, the Christian Church has always been dedicated to the preservation and nurture of the family. I will not use today's gospel text to begin a tirade on our society's determination to redefine marriage and the family. For today's purposes, I will only say that the family is God's first and most sacred institution. The Lord Jesus grew up in a family, with married parents, a mom and step-dad, who loved each other and were committed to each other. The Lord knew the dynamics of family life with close and extended relatives. That is the context for the growth of the enfleshed Son of God. Such is the context that every child deserves to have.

Joseph, Mary, and Jesus provide a beautiful picture of the family. From today's reading we learn that this simple, pious family went to Jerusalem every year to celebrate the Passover. And so Luke provides the only detail we know about Lord's early life other than the events surrounding His birth. At 12 years old, Jesus goes to Jerusalem with His family to observe the Passover worship liturgy – as was their normal custom – and gets lost. Listen to Luke's description. Try to imagine the horror Joseph and Mary must have felt. They lost the divine, Son of God (vs. 43–48):

⁴³And when the feast was ended, as they were returning, (*back to Nazareth*) the boy Jesus stayed behind in Jerusalem. His parents did not know it, ⁴⁴but supposing him to be in the group they went a day's journey, but then they began to search for him among their relatives and acquaintances (*remember that extended family life I mentioned earlier?!*), ⁴⁵and when they did not find him, they returned to Jerusalem, searching for him. ⁴⁶After three days (*imagine the terror*) they found him in the temple, sitting among the teachers, listening to them and asking them questions. ⁴⁷And all who heard him were amazed at his understanding and his answers. ⁴⁸And when his parents saw him, they were astonished. And his mother said to him, "Son, why have you treated us so? Behold, your father and I have been searching for you in great distress."

Everybody is astonished at the young man, Jesus. The teachers of the Temple are amazed at Jesus' understanding and answers. Joseph and Mary are astonished that Jesus had been in the Temple over the past few days!

Again, Luke astounds us by recording our Lord's response to Mary's very understandable concern about Jesus' absence. The 12-year old God in flesh said to Mary, "Why were you looking for me? Did you not know that I must be in my Father's house?" (vs. 49).

Jesus is teaching His frightened parents two things here. First, Jesus reminds them who He is, the true Son of God the Father. "I must be in *my* Father's house"? He's not referring to Joseph, His step-father. It's as if Jesus were saying, "Mom, dad have you forgotten who My Father is? Have these 12 years of living with me day in and day out made you forget that I'm your Lord and God? Remember what the angel said to you, 'The Holy Spirit will come upon you...therefore the child to be born will be called holy—the Son of God.'"

Jesus is gently and respectfully reminding His parents that He is God. Luke records this so that we can be reminded that Jesus is God not only from the very moment of His conception in Mary's womb but even at 12 years of age. Knowing this is especially helpful during our modern Christmas celebrations which tend to separate the joy and peace of Christmas from the God who became flesh to give those marvelous gifts.

The second thing that Jesus is telling His mother and us is that He has a divine task. "Did you not know that I must be in my Father's house?" To understand the reference to "my Father's house" you must remember what takes place at Jerusalem's Temple. Teaching God's Word, prayer, worship, and most importantly, the offering of sacrifices for the atonement of the world's sins are what the Father's house is all about.

Jesus is reminding His parents that He came to be the Messiah. It's what the angel told Joseph about the Child in Mary's womb. You shall call Him Jesus for He will save His people from their sin (Mt. 1:21). Everything that took place in the Temple – what Jesus calls "my Father's house" – was telling the world how sins would be taken away. The Temple testified to the identity and mission of this 12 year old Child. He's the final, end-times Sacrifice that takes away the sins of the world, once and for all.

Luke writes that Joseph and Mary did not understand what Jesus was telling them though Mary did make a point to remember it (vs. 50-51). Better understanding would begin to come later when she saw her Son dying on the cross; Simeon had told Mary 12 years earlier that a sword would pierce through her soul because of Jesus' death

(Lk. 2:35). After Mary was filled with the Holy Spirit on the Day of Pentecost, she would understand clearly who her Son is. And she would rejoice in His salvation along with the rest of God's holy people.

Jesus goes back home to Nazareth. Vs. 51 says that Jesus was "submissive to (His parents)." That's another astounding statement! The fullness of the Godhead in bodily form, the head of all rule and authority (Col. 2:9–10) places Himself under the authority of His earthly parents. No tirades of "Don't you know who you're talking too! I am your God, bow before Me in fear and trembling lest I strike you with judgment." The 12-year old, Lord Jesus kept the 4th Commandment, "honor your father and your mother." This too was part of the God-man growing and becoming strong, filled with wisdom. The Lord Jesus submitted Himself to the God-given integrity of His family. We ought not so easily to redefine, undermine, or other dismiss that oldest and most sacred of institutions. By means of His earthly family – with all of its strengths, weaknesses, and idiosyncrasies – the eternal Son of God accomplished His heavenly Father's will of saving the world from sin and death.

Luke began today's Gospel reading with Jesus growing and becoming strong. He concludes with a very similar statement, "And Jesus increased in wisdom and in stature and in favor with God and man" (vs. 52). Remember and rejoice in the knowledge that God grows so His love and grace may be given to us for all eternity.

A Merry Christmas to you all!!

✠ In the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit. ✠ Amen.

Now the peace of God which surpasses all understanding, keep your hearts and minds in Christ Jesus unto life everlasting. Amen.