

Year C Christmas 1 Luke 2 41 to 52

Every time I hear this passage or read this passage, I always wonder how Jesus' parents did not know he wasn't with them when they left Jerusalem. And then I wonder, why did it take them three days to finally look for Jesus in the Temple? These are questions, perfectly natural questions I might add, that take our thoughts away from the really important things Luke is trying to tell us with this story. For the first time in Luke's Gospel, Jesus speaks. That's huge. Jesus is the focus of the story not the seemingly questionable parenting skills of Mary and Joseph. But let's just quickly address that concern so that we can turn our minds fully to Jesus.

Mary and Joseph would have travelled to Jerusalem with a sizable group of people for safety's sake. And, if you've been to any large gathering of family and friends, you'll know that children make the rounds, visiting new and interesting people, reacquainting themselves with their favourite uncle, and so on. Children see their parents all the time – most jump at the opportunity to be social butterflies with everyone but their parents. Families in the time of Jesus were extended families. Mary and Joseph were likely quite comfortable and confident that Jesus was hanging out with someone in the extended family. We know that Mary and Joseph truly cared for Jesus because, with great anxiety, they looked for him when they did realize he was missing.

Why did it take three days to get to the Temple? Mary and Joseph would have checked the lodgings of friends and family – probably the places they'd stayed in or visited during the lengthy festival in Jerusalem. And, Luke is making a point here...Three days is always a significant number in the Gospels and they found Jesus in a place where they did not expect to find him.

That brings us back to Jesus. He is twelve in this story. This was the big cue to Luke's audience that Jesus was on the very verge of becoming a man. A 12 year old Jewish boy like Jesus would suddenly be considered a man on his 13th birthday. Luke is introducing us to the young Jesus who is showing us the independent thinking and acting, the questioning and the teaching that we see in the man Jesus in the rest of the gospel. As is typical with Luke, the Gospel writer

is taking the opportunity to launch a jab at the Roman Empire. You'll recall that, when introducing us to John the Baptist, Luke first gives us the "who's who" list of political and religious leaders and then tells us how very powerful is the Messiah whom John is announcing. Likewise with Jesus' birth – the power and glory of Emperor Augustus – who ordered the entire population to travel to their hometowns to be counted – is totally usurped by the angels who sing of the power and glory of the newborn King using the same words the Roman Emperor liked to use about himself. Here, Luke is at it again – at the age of 12, Jesus is displaying incredible knowledge and wisdom about God, impressing all of the skilled teachers of the Temple.

This is a story of a young prophet and future leader – a story that "echoes Roman heroic leaders like Augustus. Emperor Julius adopted his nephew Augustus, who received an exceptional education at an early age. Augustus gave the funeral oration for his grandmother Julia Caesaris, the sister of Julius Caesar, [at the age of 12]" (Niveen Sarras at Working Preacher.org). Time after time, Luke hammers it home that Jesus is the true Messiah – not a Roman leader who calls himself Messiah – and Jesus is the true Son of God – not a Roman leader who calls himself the Son of God. Jesus is the true power, the true Saviour of the world, the one who brings true peace, the actual Son of God. Luke wants us to know that Jesus is the leader, the only leader, we are to worship and to follow. We can trust him, we can believe him...if we can find him.

Like Mary and Joseph, we search for Jesus, often with the great anxiety that Mary expresses. We may ask, with concern and even a touch of anger, "Where are you? Why are you treating us like this? We are searching for you." At this time of year, in the darkest months of winter, it is particularly difficult for many people. The Christmas decorations will be put away, family and friends go home, brightly lit outdoor lights and decorations return to the basements or attics from whence they came and the world looks so very dull and ordinary. The merriness and warmth of Christmas greetings disappear and a kinder, friendlier world fades away along with them. The world that seemed to be, finally, making headway toward the perfection God intends, is back to being a little more cold, and a little

less neighbourly. After the joy and hoopla of celebrating the coming of the baby Jesus, many people keenly feel the physical absence of the man Jesus.

For many, the pandemic will intensify these feelings of depression and loss that follow on the heels of Christmas joy. Many are already struggling with feelings that their God is an absent God. Where are you in this time of trouble? Why can't I feel you with me? Why have you treated us this way, we've been searching with great anxiety?

With Mary, we hear Jesus' answer. The first words that Jesus speaks in the Gospel of Luke are, "Why are you searching for me? You should have known I would be here." That isn't a horribly helpful answer for us at first glance. The answer is very vague and general. In fact, the Greek literally says, "Don't you know it is necessary for me to be in the?" In the what? Luke does not give us a noun. You can picture Jesus gesturing to his parents as he says it to them...This is necessary he says but what is Jesus gesturing to? Translators of Luke's Gospel couldn't leave us with an incomplete sentence like that so they filled in the noun for us. The translation we hear today says, "house" – it was necessary for Jesus to be in his Father's house. Other translations say, "household" – necessary to be among the people of my Father (the teachers and scribes of the Temple). Still other translations say, "things" – it is necessary to be about the things of my Father...the teachings? the business? Who knows?

Luke, being the brilliant writer that we know him to be, most certainly has deliberately left us hanging without a specific word supplied for us. The fact that Luke tells us that Mary and Joseph did not understand what Jesus was talking about is our foghorn of a clue that the simple answer – his Father's house, his Father's people, his Father's business – is not the right answer...or at least not the whole answer.

We do find Jesus here in his Father's house. We do find Jesus in each other – his Father's people. But to say we find Jesus in his Father's business is where things get much more complicated. This is where Luke leads us into the rest of his Gospel. Jesus the boy is on the cusp of becoming Jesus the man – the man we will see going about his Father's business throughout the rest of the Gospel. God's

business embraces a lot of things. We see Jesus healing, we hear him teaching his disciples and the crowds, we watch him resting in God's love in prayer. We listen to his stories about life in God's kingdom. We join him at dinner with the outcasts and the sinners and nod in agreement as he calls out the hypocrisy of the worldly leaders. We hang our heads as he points out that we are not perfect and we rejoice as he reassures us of his love for us anyway – a love that will transform us, a love that leads us to the cross with him as he gives the world his love.

But, Jesus physically left this world. Where are we to find him going about his Father's business now? Throughout his Gospel, in the words of Jesus, Luke gives us the answer. "Whoever listens to you," says Jesus, "whoever listens to you, listens to me" (Luke 10:16). We are to forgive as he forgives, love as he loves, proclaim the kingdom as he proclaims it...we are to do all of these things and more. Finding Jesus means searching within ourselves. We certainly do not have the monopoly on Jesus...Christ within us means Christ within others as well. We must open our eyes to his Father's business going on around us – sometimes in the most unexpected places: the homeless person who feeds her dog before she feeds herself; the restaurant that provides a free Christmas dinner to those who need it; the hungry thief who leaves a note of apology for having broken a glass as he raided your cupboards...the light of Christ is everywhere, in the strangest places, waiting for us to notice and join in so that the tiny flicker becomes a great light.

Luke is not yet done with his wisdom for us though...We hear in his gospel today that Jesus was found by his parents in the Temple, "sitting among the teachers, listening to them and asking them questions." But then Luke says the teachers were amazed at *his* understanding, amazed at *his* answers. Jesus was searching for answers and providing answers. We, like Mary and Joseph search for Jesus while at the same time we reveal Jesus to others. We are the destination for those around us who are searching for Jesus. We sometimes may not feel much like that but we are the light of Christ in the world for others even while we search for that light in ourselves and in the world. In others words, we are in it together. We struggle together and we shine together.

The pieces fall into place for us...even as we wonder where Jesus is, he gives us the answer – Why are you searching? You know where I am...You will find me in God's house, in and among God's people, and in all of God's business in the world. What do we do with this answer? We get to work. At the end of Luke's story today, Jesus heads to his hometown, far removed from the world's centres of politics and religion just as we are. And Luke describes what happens to this child of God – what happens to each one of us as children of God: We, together, in God's house, with God's people, and doing God's business, we will continue to grow in wisdom and in stature, in divine and human favour. Why are you searching for me? Says Jesus, "You know where I am."