

“In His Father’s House,” Luke 2:41-52 (First Sunday After Christmas, December 30, 2018)

<sup>41</sup> Now his parents went to Jerusalem every year at the Feast of the Passover. <sup>42</sup> And when he was twelve years old, they went up according to custom. <sup>43</sup> And when the feast was ended, as they were returning, the boy Jesus stayed behind in Jerusalem. His parents did not know it, <sup>44</sup> but 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, <sup>45</sup> and when they did not find him, they returned to Jerusalem, searching for him. <sup>46</sup> After three days they found him in the temple, sitting among the teachers, listening to them and asking them questions. <sup>47</sup> And all who heard him were amazed at his understanding and his answers. <sup>48</sup> And 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.” <sup>49</sup> And he said to them, “Why were you looking for me? Did you not know that I must be in my Father’s house?” <sup>50</sup> And they did not understand the saying that he spoke to them. <sup>51</sup> And he went down with them and came to Nazareth and was submissive to them. And his mother treasured up all these things in her heart.

<sup>52</sup> And Jesus increased in wisdom and in stature and in favor with God and man.

## PRAY

Our passage for today is unique in all of Scripture because it contains the only information we have about Jesus from the time of his infancy until he was about thirty years old and began his ministry. It contains the only record of words spoken by Jesus over that time.

The occasion is the Feast of the Passover, one of the big three annual festivals that Jews who lived close to the temple in Jerusalem were expected to attend. This would have been a big one for Jesus. He’s in his twelfth year, he’s becoming a “son of the commandment” and leaving his childhood behind and entering into manhood as defined by Jewish culture. Joseph would have taken Jesus around the temple and tried to make sure Jesus understood what everything was for and what it all meant because now Jesus is responsible before God for offering right worship.

But then the time comes to leave and go back home. Joseph and Mary don’t notice for a day but Jesus has stayed behind in Jerusalem. They search and begin to panic but eventually they find Jesus in the temple, and it’s what Jesus says in the temple and what Jesus does after his parents find him that I want us to look at this morning. I’m convinced some of the densest Christology in all the Bible can be found in these verses if we’ll just take the time to reflect on them.

*First, Jesus says, “I must be in my Father’s house.”* *Second, Jesus goes down with them to Nazareth.*

*First, Jesus must be in his Father’s house.* <sup>48</sup> And 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.” <sup>49</sup> And he said to them, “Why were you looking for me? Did you not know that I must be in my Father’s house?” Luke 2:48-49.

I want to show you two things under this point. **First**, when Jesus said, “My Father’s house,” he’s clearly referring to the temple in Jerusalem. And this would have shocked everyone who heard it. **No one in the history of Israel had ever spoken like this.** In fact, several years ago one German scholar did the research and confirmed that in the entire history of Judaism, from the Old Testament through all extrabiblical Jewish writings dating from three thousand years ago until a thousand years ago, there is not a single instance of a Jewish person addressing God as Father.

Moses, who had built the tabernacle, did not refer to it as his Father’s house, nor did he call God his Father. Neither did David, who wanted to build the temple, nor Solomon, who actually did build the temple. No prophet, priest, or king had ever spoken so intimately of God before.

The one thing the Jews of the first century thought they knew with absolute certainty was that their God, Yahweh being his name, was completely and totally transcendent. To meet him face to face meant terror and ultimately death. In Exodus 33:20, we read how Moses begged to see God in the fullness of his glory, and God replied, “You cannot see my face, for man shall not see me and live.” You don’t call someone like that “Father.”

Yet here Jesus is at twelve years old calling God his Father. Later on in his life he’ll go further than that. “My sheep hear my voice, and I know them, and they follow me. <sup>28</sup> I give them eternal life, and they will never perish, and no one will snatch them out of my hand. <sup>29</sup> My Father, who has given them to me, is greater than all, and no one is able to snatch them out of the Father’s hand. <sup>30</sup> **I and the Father are one.**” John 10:27-30.

Jesus does not only claim to have some kind of special relationship with God and that’s why he calls him Father. ***Instead, Jesus claims to be God himself.*** Jesus is one of the persons in the triune God – God the Father, God the Son, and God the Holy Spirit.

Because this is so Jesus makes possible the kind of relationship with God where you never need to be afraid of God or anything else but instead you can know that God loves you and will care for you forever because he is your Father, too. Through Jesus, we also become children of God. After all, when Jesus commands his followers to pray, he tells them to start off by saying, “Our Father who art in heaven ...”

Romans 8:14-16: “For all who are led by the Spirit of God are sons of God. <sup>15</sup> For you did not receive the spirit of slavery to fall back into fear, but you have received the Spirit of adoption as sons, by whom we cry, “Abba! Father!” <sup>16</sup> The Spirit himself bears witness with our spirit that we are children of God ...”

A friend of mine was on a date with his wife, they’re both Christians, and they went to a very expensive restaurant in Oxford. She said after supper she wanted dessert but didn’t think they could afford it. He, though, immediately called the waiter over and ordered it. And she looked at him like, “What are you doing? We can’t even afford the meal, surely can’t afford the dessert!” And his reply was, “Hey, who’s my Father?”

Now that's not a good way to apply the doctrine of our sonship. I don't think having God as your Father means you should go out and spend money you don't have. But, still, years later I haven't been able to forget he said: "Hey, who's my Father?" Because whenever trials or troubles come Christians should say to them, "Do you know who my Father is? He's the Lord of Hosts, he's the Most High God. I know that no matter how grim things might look right he is for me, he is working for my good, and he will take care of me." The book of Job says that God gives orders to the morning; the sun rises because of his decree, he marks off the limits of the sea. And Jesus says that through him this same God is your loving Father.

No one ever spoke like this before Jesus and, **second, *no one ever lived like this before Jesus.*** Look back at verse 49. Jesus said to Joseph and Mary, "Why were you looking for me? Did you not know that I must be in my Father's house?"

I don't think this is a rhetorical question. I think Jesus really means it: Joseph, Mary, **you should have known** I would be here.

How could Jesus expect them to know he was in the temple when he didn't explicitly tell them he would stay behind in Jerusalem?

Well, Jesus could expect them to know because of what the shepherds and wise men told Joseph and Mary at his birth about Jesus being the king of the Jews and a Savior who is Christ the Lord. He could say that because the angel Gabriel himself announced his birth.

But more than that Joseph and Mary should have known because they'd lived with Jesus for twelve years. They knew what kind of child he was. Jesus was not sent off to school eight hours a day. Joseph had a business he operated out of his home and Jesus would have helped him with that every day. They spent every Sabbath together. On top of it all, they all lived in one room. They were together twenty-four hours a day for twelve years.

They should have known what kind of child he was – perfect and sinless. What would it be like to live with someone who was sinless? You might be tempted to think that it would be awful, because that meant Jesus was some kind of goody two-shoes rule follower who loved to go around pointing out everyone else's flaws and making them feel guilty and ashamed about their sins.

Nothing could be further from the truth. It would be wonderful to live with someone sinless.

Ninety-nine percent of the pain in this world is caused by people who, in the moment, feel miserable about themselves. They feel guilty or ashamed about what they've done, or they feel insignificant, or they are worried or anxious about the future. All that junk leads us to take our frustrations out on or neglect the people around us.

But Mary and Joseph had to notice how Jesus from infancy was radically different from every other child. He was totally content and at peace. He was never at war within himself. He never failed to feel the Father's love flowing through him. He never obnoxiously sought his parents' attention. He was able to consider the needs and thoughts of others. Can you imagine how kind

he must have been to his younger siblings? How patient he must have been with them? More patient than Mary and Joseph were with them.

So Jesus says to them, “With all due respect, *you should have known*. You should have known now that I’m about to become a man I have to be about my Father’s business and in my Father’s house.”

You see it wasn’t just that Jesus was the first to talk about God as his Father; he *was the first and only person who actually lived as if God was his Father*. This is the ultimate proof that Jesus is God. If you’re here this morning and you have doubts about Christianity, then for the sake of argument just forget about all the prophecies fulfilled by the birth, the life, and the death of Jesus. Forget about all the accounts of the miracles he performed. Forget about his sublime teaching. Just consider his life.

Consider that there were only two men in world history about whom it was said not “who are they” but “what are they.” They are Jesus and Buddha. Buddha was by all accounts an extraordinary man but he always said, “I am not God. I point you toward the divine, but I myself am not God.”

Jesus, on the other hand, said, “I and the Father are one.” His disciples, men who lived with him day and night for three years, believed this claim. They’d had plenty of opportunities to see if Jesus would slip or let down his guard, but it never happened. They went to their death saying, “Yes, he is God in the flesh.” When he calmed the storm on the Sea of Galilee, they cried out, “**What sort of man is this** [old KJV: “what manner of man is this”], that even winds and sea obey him?” Matthew 8:27.

Jesus is God in the flesh. That’s what we can learn from him saying, “I must be in my Father’s house.”

But then, second, Jesus goes down to Nazareth. That’s verse 51a: “And he went down with them and came to Nazareth and was submissive to them.”

Even though Jesus is God, and he knows he’s God, and Joseph and Mary should know Jesus is God, nevertheless he leaves the temple, goes back into their home in Nazareth, and is submissive to them. He obeys them. God in the flesh is willing to obey good, devout, well-meaning, yet still sinful, flawed, fallen human parents.

And he’s not just submissive to them for a week or so. Eighteen years until he is 30 and begins his public ministry and journey to the cross he lives in Nazareth in poverty and in obscurity. No one knows who he is!

The question is: why? Why does he put himself through that? He knew his mission as God in the flesh was to die for the sins of the people. If it were me and I had to go to earth and do that, I’d want it over quick. I wouldn’t want this thing to be drawn out. Just go down and knock it out over a weekend and get it over with.

Why does Jesus go down to Nazareth and put himself through all that? Why couldn't he just die for our sins and it be done with?

Hebrews 4:15 tells us: “<sup>15</sup>For we do not have a high priest who is unable to sympathize with our weaknesses, but one who in every respect has been tempted as we are, yet without sin.”

He couldn't have done it over a weekend because if that had been the case Jesus would not have been “one who in every respect has been tempted as we are.”

Jesus had to be tempted as an infant the way infants are tempted, to be selfish and impatient, so he could stand for infants. He had to be tempted the way children are tempted, to be disrespectful to their parents and to cruel to their siblings, so he could stand for children. He had to be tempted in all the ways adults are tempted. With others in the carpenter's shop and just walking around Nazareth, he must have been tempted to be impatient with the rampant stupidity around him.

I like to think that Jesus' neighbor in Nazareth was an amateur philosopher who considered himself an expert in the mysteries of life, and he thought Jesus was kind and interesting so he'd come over every day and just start rambling while Jesus was trapped in his shop building furniture. He'd say, “You know, Jesus, I've been watching a lot of Fox News lately and I've been watching MSNBC, I'm watching both sides, so I think I've finally got it figured out. I really think I've got the answers.” And Jesus just keeps planing his word and thinks to himself, “You couldn't be more wrong about everything, pal.” How much inane talk did Jesus have to sit through? Yet he did, patiently and kindly. Jesus, God in the flesh, truly was tempted in every respect we have *yet was without sin*.

“Although he was a son, he learned obedience through what he suffered. <sup>9</sup> And being made perfect, he became the source of eternal salvation to all who obey him ...” Hebrews 5:8-9. The suffering the author of Hebrews writes of is not the suffering Jesus endured on the cross. This is the suffering he endured in his life.

It wasn't until he *learned obedience by suffering through actually resisting the temptations he faced* that he could be our source of our eternal salvation.

Jesus Christ for thirty-three years (not just a weekend) lived the life you should have lived. A life of perfect obedience to God, resisting temptation all the way – that's suffering. On the cross he died a horrible death he did not deserve to die, but you do and I do. And because he is one who in every respect has been tempted as we are and because he learned obedience through what he suffered Jesus Christ is not just someone you must follow as God.

Because Jesus substituted his perfect life for you now you can know that all the blessings he earned by that life *belong to you*. Because of Jesus, God treats you *as if you've earned it*. That's good news.

How should you apply this? Let's try it like this. If you are struggling with some sin issue in your life and you keep giving into it, that's wrong. That's bad. You shouldn't do it. It displeases the Lord and it will wreck your life. You can't play around with sin and not get hurt.

But guess what? If you've trusted your life to Jesus as your Savior your sins do not count against you. They do not make God love you any less or care about you less at all. Why? Because Jesus has already lived the perfect life in your place. Jesus has secured your place as God's child and nothing you can do, no sin you can commit, can shake it. Nothing can take away God's love for you and his desire to bless you.

*Do you see that? Jesus is someone you can trust with your life, and to the degree you see that it will transform you into a truly glorious person who wants less and less sin in their lives, who sees how it only brings misery, and instead wants more and more to live of life of peaceful obedience to the will of God.*

One last thing. Let's read all of verses 49-51: "And he said to them, 'Why were you looking for me? Did you not know that I must be in my Father's house?' <sup>50</sup> And they did not understand the saying that he spoke to them. <sup>51</sup> And he went down with them and came to Nazareth and was submissive to them. **And his mother treasured up all these things in her heart.**"

It's clear that even though Mary should have known Jesus is God in the flesh, she clearly didn't. Not at first. She and Joseph did not understand what Jesus was saying to them. Fast forward eighteen years and as Jesus begins his ministry Mary still doesn't believe. We read in Mark 3 that when Jesus first begins teaching publicly Mary and Jesus' brothers think he is out of his mind. They come and try to "seize him." They want to lock him up. They don't think he's the Son of God; they think he's insane.

It's pretty bad when your own mama thinks you're insane. You'd think that if you could get one person to believe you are the Son of God it'd be your mom.

Yet we know that eventually Mary was convinced. We read in Acts 1 that after the resurrection of Jesus she's gathered with the early church. It took all of Jesus' life and, probably, forty days beyond, but she finally believed.

How? Because she never stopped "treasuring up all these things in her heart." Friends, if you here today and you can't yet say you're willing to give your life to Jesus completely, well I'm not going to say that's a good thing. The Bible does say that now God commands all men everywhere to repent.

However, I will say that Jesus does not expect you to believe in something you can't yet believe. It does no good to just go through the motions of joining a church and mouthing certain phrases if you don't really believe them.

But do you know what you can do? Do you know what will get you to belief? Be like Mary. Treasure up all these things in your heart. Ponder the gospel story. Ponder the life of Jesus. Did anyone else in human history ever speak like this man? Did anyone else ever live like this man?

Did anyone else ever die like this man? Did anyone else ever come back from the dead? Even if now you don't believe in Jesus, don't you at least want the stories about him to be true?

Are you treasuring these things in your heart? I charge you to do at least that. You may not yet be able to believe, but you can do that. And if you will, I'm convinced that you'll find him and one day you'll be able to say, "Oh, yes, I see it perfectly now. Jesus had to be in his Father's house." AMEN.