

“Now his parents went to Jerusalem every year at the Feast of the Passover. And when he was twelve years old, they went up according to custom.”

Merry Christmas! We continue to celebrate the birth of our Lord until Wednesday, January 6th where we celebrate the arrival of the wise men at Epiphany. I invite you to join us Wednesday night for our Epiphany service.

On this 2nd Sunday after Christmas, we get to hear the story of the boy Jesus in the temple. Besides stories of him as an infant, this is the only story we have recorded in God’s Word of Jesus as a child. What an interesting window into the life of our Lord and Savior!

What do we learn from this story? There’s a lot to grasp, but our point for today: **IT IS A BLESSING TO BE IN MY FATHER'S HOUSE.** Of all the events in Jesus’ life, the one event the Holy Spirit saw fit to record for us was Jesus’ time in God’s House, in the temple.

First, I. As a boy, Jesus was blessed to be in His Father's House. As was the custom, Jesus and His family went to Jerusalem for the Passover. This wasn’t the only time Jesus, Mary, and Joseph made the trek to the Holy City for this holy festival. Think of the conversations they had on the way there. Think of what it must have been like year after year for Jesus and His family to go this festival, each year Jesus was a bit older and a bit more aware of what was going on.

Luke tells us, **“And the child grew and became strong, filled with wisdom. And the favor of God was upon him.”** Jesus is fully God and fully man, so it is odd to think of God growing in any way. However, this is not what this text is saying. It is telling us that according to His human nature, Jesus did indeed grow, mature, and learn.

And we indeed have a mix up, Joseph and Mary leave Jesus behind in Jerusalem. You might think, how could they forget him, but even today that happens. If you’re in a big group, it’s hard to keep track of everyone and it’s easy to assume that your kid is in the other group.

But what I find most remarkable is that it took them three days. Three days! To find Jesus. There were no amber alerts or cell phones back then to call around. The police probably didn’t file missing reports back then. But they find Jesus right where they left Him. They find Him in the temple.

Being twelve years old, He’s just around the age of one of our confirmands. Jesus is asking and answering questions of the teachers. Luke records, **“And all who heard him were amazed at his understanding and his answers.”** Even in this comment, we see that Jesus is not just a human, but also God. According to His nature as God, He has wisdom and knowledge that surpasses that of normal humans.

Mary and Joseph essentially scold Jesus saying, “Where were you!? We’ve been searching all over for you!” This is the response we get: **“And he said to them, “Why were you looking for me? Did you not know that I must be in my Father’s house?”**” For Jesus, it was a blessing to be in His Father’s house. For Jesus, although He was an obedient son for Mary and Joseph, His allegiances ultimately were with His Heavenly Father.

Luke then records at the end of the reading, **“And Jesus increased in wisdom and in stature and in favor with God and man.”** Luke then fast forwards to Jesus’ adult ministry. Even II. as a man, Jesus was blessed to be in His Father's House. The only other time the Passover is mentioned in Luke’s Gospel is, you guessed it, during the time when Jesus entered Jerusalem as a grown man to be arrested, to be tortured, and killed.

As Jesus rode into Jerusalem on that Palm Sunday, we know that Jerusalem was not an unfamiliar place to Him. Luke tells us in our Gospel reading He had been there many times before as a child. Jesus knew Jerusalem.

He knew the temple. It was good to be in His Father’s House, but this time the teachers weren’t so amazed with Him like they were when He was a boy. Jesus turned the tables over and drove out the moneychangers. As an adult, Jesus taught in the temple and amazed the crowds. Instead of standing in awe of Him, the teachers sought to silence Him.

Jesus knew the Passover celebration. Perhaps he remembers eating the Passover meal with His family where maybe He sat at the little kids table. **“And when he was twelve years old, they went up [to Jerusalem] according to custom.”** In fact, the only other time Luke uses the word “custom” to describe Jesus’ habits was to describe Him going to Mount Olive to pray after the Passover meal. Could this have been a habit He formed in His childhood? Did He pray with His family there after the Passover meal?

“And he said to them, “Why were you looking for me? Did you not know that I must be in my Father’s house?”” Some translations translate this phrase as “my Father’s business” and that is as good of a translation in my mind, the Greek is vague and it could be either one. And as Jesus went to Jerusalem at that last Passover, we see that He was not only about His Father’s House, but about His Father’s business as He accomplished an Exodus in Jerusalem.

As Jesus hung there on the cross during that festival of the Passover, maybe He was thinking about His times as a child with Mary and Joseph and His extended family. Maybe, just maybe.

But I do know this, He was thinking about you. He was thinking about you as a child—all those times you made your parents pull their hair out, all those sins you committed. Throughout the years, you might have grown in stature, but not always in wisdom. He was thinking about you as a parent, and all those times you

grew impatient with your kids, being harsh to them or not showing them the love they deserved. He was thinking about you today, in all your failures, sins, and shortcomings that you struggle with even now.

He wasn't thinking about you on the cross to condemn you. In adulthood just as in childhood, He was about His Father's business, and that is the forgiveness business. He was thinking of every one of those failures, mistakes, and regrets, and He was praying before His Father saying, "**Father, forgive them, for they know not what they do.**" And guess what? The Father heard Jesus. The Father forgave each and every one of your sins for Jesus' sake.

Jesus died, and they laid His body in the tomb. For three days they missed Jesus. For three days, they knew exactly where He was, but they didn't want to look because the truth would be too hard to bear: He was cold and dead in a tomb. On the third day He rose again, and they missed Him no more. Instead of looking for Jesus, Jesus found them. They needed look no further. Jesus' resurrection is the proof positive that the Father did indeed accept Jesus' sacrifice, and that your sins are removed as far as the East is from the West.

When Jesus ascended into Heaven, He didn't leave His Church. He dwells in each and every one of us and we are individually the body of Christ. III. As the Body of Christ, we are blessed to be in Our Father's House. "**Now his parents went to Jerusalem every year at the Feast of the Passover. And when he was twelve years old, they went up according to custom.**"

As we consider this special season of Christmas, we think of what things we did according to custom. It is with sadness that not many of them can take place in the ways they have in prior years. We mourn the loss of time with our families, friends, and church families.

It is indeed a joy to be in the Father's House. Like the joy of a father seeing his children, it gives me joy to see the people of God worshipping in God's house. It is sad when for various reasons we cannot be there. The pandemic has made it so that it is unfeasible to be all together in community and unity as the Body of Christ like it has this time last year, and indeed this is something to mourn.

Yet the Bible uses the word "custom" in another place, Hebrews chapter 10: "**And let us consider how to stir up one another to love and good works, not neglecting to meet together, as is the [custom] of some, but encouraging one another, and all the more as you see the Day drawing near.**" As we are still the Church scattered across multiple services and viewing online, let us consistently consider how to stir up one another to love and good works. We are to be about our Father's business, part of which is to gather in our Father's house to celebrate the Passover. Not the old Passover of roasted herbs and lamb, but the Paschal feast that is Christ's body and blood in, with, and under bread and wine. Just like boy Jesus

in the temple, gathering for the Passover is the custom, but we gather for a different kind of Passover.

What a blessing it is to be the body of Christ in our Father’s house. As we have arrived at 2021 with the promise of the storm clouds of pandemic clearing, let us not lose heart, but look forward to returning to those habits and customs we have so faithfully cultivated throughout our lifetimes, year after year, Christmas after Christmas, Sunday after Sunday—habits which are not entirely different than what boy Jesus did in the temple: **“sitting among the teachers, listening to them and asking them questions.”**

What a blessing it is to be the body of Christ in our Father’s house. Wherever you’re listening to this sermon, let us as Christians be about our Father’s House: whether that be gathered here in this place right now or looking forward to and yearning for the day when we can all gather here without the need for physical distancing and illness mitigation measures. Until then, let us support one another and build one another up, even as we see the day approaching. Amen.