

Christmas 2B, 2009

Text: Luke 2:41-52

Title: God the Teenager

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Today God is a teenager, well, a twelve year old, to be precise, but close enough.

At Christmas there was the wonder of God as a baby. At Christmas there was God in a manger, God in diapers, God who learns to crawl and walk and talk. It's a great mystery, but we've heard the story many times and know it well.

But babies quickly grow, and God does not remain a baby for long. The gospel story moves quickly to God as an adult man, God who is baptized by John, tempted by Satan, who teaches and heals and does miracles. God who goes to Jerusalem, who dies and rises again in our place. Again, how God can die is a great mystery, but we've heard the story many times and know it well.

But today we have the in-between story. It's the only one. Today's gospel story is the only one that tells us anything about the "missing" years between Jesus as a baby and Jesus as a man.

Last week we heard about the flight to Egypt, when Joseph was warned by an angel and ran away with Mary and Jesus in the middle of the night to escape Herod's soldiers. After Herod's death the holy family returned to Nazareth and that's the last we hear of Jesus until His baptism in the Jordan River.

Except for today. Today we get Jesus, the teenager.

You remember what it's like to be a teenager, don't you? Not quite a child, and not quite an adult. Trying to figure the world out. Pushing the boundaries. Seeing how much you can get away with. Thinking about the future- what your life would be like.

Some of you may remember what it's like to be the parent of a teenager. Wanting to give your child more freedom and responsibility, but always scared when they head off to high school, when they take the car out for the first time, when you leave them home alone for the weekend.

The transition from child to adult can be difficult in any time or culture. And it's difficult being the parent of a teenager in any day and age.

Imagine what it must have been like to be the parents of a teenage Messiah. Mary and Joseph had experienced the joy and wonder of Jesus' birth. But then things settled down a bit. They returned home and started raising a family. Jesus grew up like any other boy in Galilee. He went to school. He played with his friends. He went to the synagogue with His parents. He fell and skinned His knee and mommy's kiss made it all better.

To the outside observer, they were a typical family. But Mary and Joseph knew that their son was different. They didn't go around telling all the neighbors, but they knew that Jesus was special. The angel had told them that he would be the Messiah, the promised savior, the one who would rescue his people and rule on David's throne.

But Simeon had also told Mary that a sword would pierce her own soul one day. It must have been difficult to be Jesus' parents, especially as He was growing up. Knowing that their son was special, different, but not quite understanding how.

One thing that they always did as a family was take a trip to Jerusalem as a family every year for the Passover. Only the men were required to go, but the women and children usually made the trip, too. Every spring their whole family, together with their friends and neighbors made the journey down to Jerusalem for the feast.

It was a time to give thanks to God for the blessings of the past year, to remember the first Passover when the Lord set His people free from slavery in Egypt, and to pray for Him to liberate them again from the hands of the Romans.

The men led the way, talking about guy stuff- sports, politics, their work, and the women and children followed behind at their own pace.

The teenage boys would go back and forth between the two groups. They wanted to be grown-ups and hang with the men, but they also needed the care and comfort only mom could give. But everyone was close by and together, as a group they made their way to Jerusalem.

A trip to Jerusalem for the Passover included a family Passover meal- bread, wine, lamb, and the story of that first Passover in Egypt. Joseph would have told his family all about the slavery, the plagues, and the great Exodus when Moses led the people through the Red Sea.

There was also a trip to the temple to give thank offerings to the Lord. The temple was a bustling place. It was the center of life for Jerusalem. The merchants were there, selling sheep, goats, grain and birds for the offerings. The teachers and the scribes were there, too, teaching the people about the Lord and the promised messiah. Pilgrims were there, too, from every corner of the Empire- Spain, Italy, Greece, Africa, Babylonia, Persia, Arabia, all there for the feast.

So Jesus takes part in all of these things. He learns the traditions of His family and His religion. He is part of a this community, the people of God. He is like us in every way. He was a baby, he was a child, and now He is a teenager, doing what teenagers do.

Except this is one amazing teenager. Mary and Joseph expected Jesus to be eager to get back home, and to leave with the rest of the friends and family and head home to Nazareth. What teenager wants to stay in church? What teenager wants to be in Bible class? But Jesus defies expectations, even as a teenager. He sits quietly in class, He asks good questions, and He has answers that stump His teachers.

The teachers are amazed at what comes out of this child's mouth. Mary and Joseph were amazed, too. They were amazed that their perfect little boy had stayed behind rather than come along with the caravan. Mary had some choice words for Jesus. "Your father and I were worried sick about you. Why didn't you let us know where you were? (Sound familiar?)

Listen carefully to Jesus' response. These are the first recorded words of Jesus in all of Scripture. Jesus has something to teach us, even Jesus the teenager.

Jesus says, "Why were you searching for me? Didn't you know that it was necessary for me to be in my Father's house?" Now that last phrase is difficult to translate. The King James has it as "I must be about my Father's business." Literally, the phrase reads, "it is necessary for me to be among the things of my Father."

Jesus knows what's best. Often we fault teenagers for not having their priorities straight. But Jesus the teenager teaches us where our priorities should be. He is in His Father's house, listening to God's Word and discussing it with the teachers. This is what it means to be a child of God. This is what it means to be part of God's family.

Mary and Joseph had their own notions of family, but they weren't big enough. But Jesus sets them back on the right path with this gentle reminder. His is the Son of God, and He belongs in His Father's house, among His Father's things, doing His Father's will.

Jesus continued to be among His Father's things, doing His Father's will as He grew. He was obedient to His Father even to the very end, as He commended His spirit into His Father's hands. And so with Jesus first word and with His last, Jesus does His Father's will, and He does it all for you.

Jesus goes through all of this for you. Jesus not only died for you, but He lived for you. He went through everything that you're going through, even the teenage years. Jesus goes through the awkwardness of adolescence for you. Jesus' voice changes, Jesus gets zits, Jesus has a few rubs with His parents, and He does it all for you. He shows you what it means to be a child of God, even as a teenager.

And in the midst of all, Jesus remains obedient to His heavenly Father and to His earthly parents as well. Luke tells us that Jesus was obedient to His parents, to Mary and Joseph as well. Even though He was their Lord and Savior, Jesus still listened to His parents. Jesus still cleaned His room and did the dishes as He was told.

Solomon asked the Lord for wisdom. If you're looking for wisdom in the year to come, learn from Jesus the teenager. Learn what it means to be a child of God, to be connected to the things of your Father.

At the very least, today's gospel lesson should make you curious about this God who came to earth to be a teenager, who frustrated His parents, and confounded His teachers.

How can God be a man? is the question Christmas provokes. As the story progresses, the questions multiply. If God is all-knowing, how can He grow in wisdom?

Who is this Jesus, Joe and Mary's boy?

Epiphany is all about this question- Who is Jesus? From Jesus' Baptism through His transfiguration the Sundays in Epiphany give more and more answers to this question. Who is this baby who was born in Bethlehem? Who is this teenager who lingers in the temple? Who is this man being baptized by John? Who is this preacher, this exorcist, this healer? Who is this one who shines more brightly than the sun? And finally, who is this one who goes the way of Calvary for me?

If this piques your interest, if you've still got questions even after all these years, come back to the Lord's house next week (and down in the basement for Bible Class, too), and join Jesus the teenager in listening, asking questions, and being among the things of your Father .