

ALREADY?
Luke 2:41-52

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The lectionary is a schedule of Bible readings used by many churches throughout the world - for each Sunday, the lectionary gives at least four suggested passages: a psalm, a reading from the Old Testament, one from the gospels and one from another part of the New Testament. If you were to read every lectionary passage every Sunday you would have read almost the entire Bible in three years.

For the Sunday after Christmas which is of course this year the DAY after Christmas, the lectionary gospel reading is the story of Jesus when he is 12 and visiting the temple in Jerusalem.

I can't tell you why we're given this passage already. We've barely laid the baby in the manger, and now he's 12. It doesn't even make sense according to the liturgical church calendar. Epiphany happens 12 days after Christmas and that is the day the magi bring their gifts to the baby.

It seems too soon for Jesus to be 12. We're not ready.

In some traditions, this Sunday is known as the Feast of the Holy family, and one purpose of it was to portray the family unit of Jesus, Mary and Joseph as the model for all Christian families. However, this reading from Luke presents a less than idyllic depiction...it's actually a fairly realistic depiction of family life with teenage children. We meet the young Jesus acting impetuously, seemingly oblivious to the impact his actions have on others. Despite the fact that he eventually caves in to his parents' demands, it is clear that a decisive break has occurred. Jesus is separating himself from his earthly

parents and is dedicating himself to a claim that God is making upon his life. One author says that here Jesus “looks like something less than the son one dreams of.”

Just 36 hours ago, we heard once again the story we love from earlier in the second chapter of the gospel of Luke - the story of the birth of Jesus, a story of miracles and magic, angels and shepherds. Now, already, Jesus is 12. What happened between the time Jesus was born and the day that he travels with his parents to Jerusalem and sits at the feet of the rabbis?

The first verse of today’s passage gives us the first clue: “Now every year his parents went to Jerusalem for the festival of the Passover.” What we learn is that Mary and Joseph are observant Jews. They don’t go to Jerusalem for the Passover some years, or when they feel like it. They go every year. This practice of the faith is important to them, and so we can assume that they also practice the faith at home, and that Jesus is raised spending time in the synagogue. He grows up knowing the scriptures. The rhythm of the Jewish life is the rhythm of Jesus’ heart. It forms him.

How is it possible that Jesus’ parents don’t know he’s missing for a whole day? Well, it would have taken about four or five days to walk from Jerusalem back to Nazareth. And they are not traveling as a nuclear family. They would have traveled with a caravan of extended family and friends. You can imagine how it would have happened — the adults are walking and talking together, with the youngest children in tow, and the adolescents convince the adults that they can take care of themselves. It isn’t until it’s time to camp for the night that the family units reconvene and Mary and Joseph realize Jesus is missing. Jesus grows up in this kind of a trusted and trusting

community, and it is in this wider circle of trusted adults where his parents find him, back in Jerusalem.

Every parent knows the feeling of panic when your child is missing from your sight. Imagine if it took you a day's walk, and then another day's search, to find that missing child. And imagine finding him back in the temple that you'd left. Mary and Joseph must have been overwhelmingly relieved, and perhaps a little angry, and also very confused. Luke describes them as astonished, to find Jesus sitting at the feet of the rabbis. Jesus didn't think of himself as lost; rather, Jesus seems to have found a second home there in the temple, where he could learn and converse, where his questions were welcome and his understanding was respected. Mary says, "Child, why have you treated us like this? Look, your father and I have been worried! We've been looking for you!"

This is no ordinary twelve year old. This is a twelve year old who has heard God speaking to him through the verses of scripture, a boy who has discovered a depth to his life at that early age that is compelling him to explore further, go deeper still.

And then they walk back together, these three. I think it was a quiet walk, each of them contemplating what it was that had happened. Mary and Joseph, realizing that this young man of theirs was experiencing something extraordinary in his inner life. Jesus, reliving the conversations with the rabbis, the questions and answers rolling around in his head. From that time on, he is obedient to his parents, Luke tells us.

Seeds have been planted in this young life. The trips to Jerusalem, the time in the synagogue, the Sabbath prayers spoken at the dinner table every Friday night, the psalms he has recited...they are working in him. The next time we will see him he'll be

30, ready to be baptized by John in preparation for his public ministry. Between now and then, we have only this verse, the last one in our passage for today: “And Jesus increased in wisdom and in years, and in divine and human favor.”

From 12 to 30, what happened? All we know is that those seeds grew. Jesus’ physical growth is matched by his intellectual and spiritual development. By 30 he will know the scriptures inside and out. By 30 he will know who he is. He will be so attuned to listening to God that he will be crystal clear about his life’s purpose.

Jesus doesn’t become a teacher, a preacher, a healer, a leader over night. It happens slowly, day by day, week by week, season by season. It happens with practice, as prayer becomes as natural to him as breathing.

This is the time of year when many of us can take a breather and spend some time reflecting. The turn of the year, the changing of the seasons, a couple of days of vacation for many - they provide natural opportunities for us to stop our normal routines and assess who we are, who we want to be, what direction our lives are going.

Sometimes we make dramatic decisions that change the course of our lives. We’ve seen it happen often over the past two years that people have quit jobs, careers even; I’ve read dozens of articles about what has been called “The Great Resignation.” The pandemic has caused people to think differently about what’s important to them. Maybe the reminder of mortality has left some people to conclude that they want something different out of life. I’ve known many people over the years who have made dramatic, life-changing decisions. Some people decide that alcohol consumption is not healthy for them and they decide to stop. People leave unhealthy relationships. People take up a new year’s resolution and decide to write a page a day and when the next

year comes, they realize they've written a book! Sometimes life changes when we make big decisions.

But most of us change our lives in small ways, and most of us become who we are because of the everyday decisions of our daily lives. As the writer Ann Patchett says, "The way we spend our days is the way we spend our lives." Relationships are nurtured in small, daily ways. Habits are built not by the person who goes to the gym on January 1, but by the person who goes to the gym two or three times a week, every week, all year long.

Jesus became who he was by practicing his faith when no one was looking. No gospel writer records anything about Jesus between the years of two and twelve, between the years of twelve and thirty. No one was watching, but the way Jesus spent those ordinary days made all the difference.

Our story for today is a snapshot in time, the only one we have in Jesus' family album, but - as it happens - sometimes, one snapshot tells us all we need to know about this family. These parents were astute enough and healthy enough to allow their child to become who he was meant to be.

And Jesus trusted the wisdom that resided deep within him, and patiently, very patiently, one hour at a time, one day at a time, became the person the world needed. Our last verse says, "Jesus matured in wisdom and years, and in favor with God and with people."

Let us pray.

Holy God, as one year ends and a new one begins, help us take the time to reflect on who you are calling us to be. Help us to nurture our own inner growth and

may we allow those around us to change as well, so that we may all become the people
this world needs. Amen.