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**SECOND SUNDAY AFTER CHRISTMAS**

**January 4, 2015**

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## **“Jesus as a Boy”**

*(Luke 2:40-52)*

Rev. David K. Groth

*“And Jesus increased in wisdom and in stature and in favor  
with God and man” (Lk. 2:52).*

## **Collect of the Day**

Almighty God, You have poured into our hearts the true Light of Your incarnate Word. Grant that this Light may shine forth in our lives; through the same Jesus Christ, Your Son, our Lord, who lives and reigns with You and the Holy Spirit, one God, now and forever. **Amen**

Apart from this one episode, we know very little about the early life of Jesus. Nothing is said in the Gospels about Jesus as a toddler or teenager, or even as a young man in his twenties. We have only this one paragraph from when he was twelve.

Obviously he received some form of education but we don't know what it was. We can speculate his teachers in little Nazareth were not able to satisfy his curiosity. Perhaps that is in part why he was captivated by the instruction taking place in the temple in Jerusalem.

At some point, he began to learn his father's trade as a carpenter. Surely he formed friendships with others his own age in Nazareth, and had a relationship with his brothers and sisters, but we're told nothing about that.

What did those in Nazareth think of him? Did they notice he was morally perfect? The 8<sup>th</sup> grade confirmands I know best are the ones I have to keep an eye on, and those I know least are the ones who are quiet, attentive and cooperative. It's unfortunate but hardly new.

This text, by the way, is the last time we ever hear of his father Joseph. The assumption is Joseph died fairly young. We wonder how Jesus handled that. And what did people in Nazareth say about the fact that Jesus was apparently not interested in marriage? These and many other questions remain unanswered. We simply do not know because we are not told.

I suspect James and Jude, the brothers of Jesus who, after Pentecost, would become prominent leaders in the church . . . I suspect they often fielded questions about what home life was like in Nazareth with their elder brother Jesus.

The subject is fascinating and ripe for speculation. Of course many writers would attempt to fill in the gaps as if they were eye-witnesses. And so we have fanciful stories about the childhood of Jesus but they are just that: non-biblical, non-authoritative stories written a century or two after Jesus. People are still writing them. We have only one reliable account from the boyhood of Jesus, and it is this one.

Why? Why did the biblical writers mostly ignore his childhood? John provides one answer at the end of his Gospel. “Now Jesus did many other [things] in the presence of the disciples, which are not written in this book; but these are written so that you may believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God, and that by believing you may have life in his name” (Jn. 20:30-31). These are not written to satisfy all our curious questions. What is written is written so we may believe Jesus is the Christ. John also adds a second reason, “Were it all included, the world would not be big enough to contain the books that would be written” (21:25). I know as a newly minted pastor in St. Louis, I usually erred on the side of trying to say everything all the time. The important things got buried, and sermons got lengthy. Of course, that doesn’t happen anymore at Good Shepherd!

So, what are we to do with this single episode in the Lord’s early life? What is the great lesson of this text? What does the Holy Spirit intend to teach us with it?

Luke gives us a clue by using an ancient literary technique. Remember, he’s writing in the day before chapter headings or tables of contents, before indices and italic print, before footnotes at the bottom or titles at the top. So author’s signaled their intentions by other means. One of these techniques was called *inclusio*. An *inclusio* is a statement at the beginning of a section that is repeated at the end of the section and so identifies the theme of the material in between. They work like bookends.

Verse 40 is the first part of the *inclusio*: “The child grew and became strong, filled with wisdom. And the favor of God was upon him.” Then comes the body of the story and is finished with the second part of the *inclusio* in verse

52: “And Jesus increased in wisdom and in stature and in favor with God and man.” So the inclusio tells us the overall theme is Jesus flourished as a child under Mary and Joseph. He grew physically, spiritually and intellectually.

This story from Jesus’ childhood reveals something of the nurture Jesus received in his home. Notice, he already has a high sense of calling. “I had to be in my Father’s house” he tells his anxious parents. Surely that relationship was there from before the foundations of the earth, but Joseph and Mary also nurtured that sense of calling. They did not tamp it down or steer Jesus away from taking all this religious stuff too seriously like some parents do today. By their own instruction and example, they encouraged a close relationship with the Father.

This text reveals Jesus to us as a boy of twelve, but it is also a paragraph about faithful parenting. The text says the teachers in the temple were amazed by his understanding. Of course we know he is the Son of God, but that doesn’t mean all this knowledge came instantaneously. Jesus was not born with the ability to speak right away, or read. He had to learn. And part of the mystery of the incarnation is that the Word Incarnate had to learn God’s Word over time. He may have been a prodigy of sorts, but most of what he knew his parents taught him. It didn’t come out of thin air. It came from being dandled on his father’s knee and hearing of the exploits of Jonah and Noah and the others. It came from sitting as a boy in the synagogue on the Lord’s Day in Nazareth, trying to understand what was being read from the Torah, and asking his parents about it on the way home. It came from observing the faith life of his own parents and noticing their own personal relationship with the Father.

So it tells us something about faithful parenting, but this text also shows us what it looks like to be a faithful child of God at the age of 12. You young people in the congregation . . . it is not enough to plan to be a serious Christian when you’re older. Now is the time to be God’s son or daughter. If you’re old enough to read, you are old enough to read the Bible. And if you’re old enough to speak

you're old enough to pray. And if you're old enough to recognize right from wrong, you're old enough to walk in God's ways. Jesus did all these.

And parents . . . when your children express curiosity about things spiritual, things biblical, those are crucial conversations. Don't brush them aside with a few ill-chosen or careless words. Most of what your children will learn of the Bible will come not from me. It will come from you. That's a huge responsibility God places on parents and we dare not abdicate it. I fear if Jesus had been raised by many Christian parents today, he would have learned from their example how relatively important the Packers are for instance, but how unimportant is the House of God and the Word of God are and how it's okay to take God's law lightly.

The inclusio says Jesus increased in wisdom and stature and in favor with God and man. He grew physically, intellectually, spiritually. It sounds like Mary and Joseph provided a well rounded education, and it makes me wonder about the imbalance in the lives of many of our own youngsters. Athletics, of course, can become all consuming. Coaches hold the trump cards today, not teachers. Out of town competitions get you out of chemistry, no questions asked. Actually, there are few boundaries anymore. In our text Jesus was twelve. Today, twelve year olds are hauled around to regional tournaments hours away, tournaments that last the weekend and leave no room for the Sabbath, or for serving others. When will it reach the point when as parents we say "Enough already! Junior probably isn't going to turn pro and make a long, satisfying career of it. And there probably are more productive things we could be doing with this time!" All things in moderation, including athletics!

Of course, this inclusio of growing in wisdom and stature and favor with God and man makes me think of all the time our youngsters spend in front of the screens. The LA Times published a report saying young people ages 8 to 18 now devote an average seven hours and 38 minutes a day playing video games, watching TV, and using a computer for

entertainment. That's about 27,000 hours a year marinating in the juices of modern media. Do you think that has an impact on who our children turn out to be? Do you think the Lord smiles on that? Do you think a child grows to be all he can be physically, intellectually and spiritually in that kind of electronic stew? When you watch all those zombies on the screen, at what point do you start to look like a mouth-breathing zombie? What might you achieve if just a portion of that time went towards going for the A rather than being satisfied with a B? What might you achieve if you spent one seventh of those seven hours a day practicing a musical instrument? And how about reading a good book, or learning to grow your own food, or taking the dog for a run, or serving meals at Bread and Roses? No employer will ever ask, "So what level did you reach in Call of Duty?" If they do, it's probably a trick question.

"He grew in wisdom and stature and in favor with God and man." When I remember my own childhood and set it up against the boyhood of Jesus, I fell well short. And when I think about my own job of parenting, and stand that up against the example of Joseph and Mary, again, I've fallen well short. How about you?

What a good thing, then, that God sent us his Son Jesus! What a good thing it is that he lived obediently through the childhood years thus sanctifying those years. Because Jesus was once an infant who messed his diapers and cried, it's okay when our infants do the same. Because Jesus was still a boy at the age of 12, it's okay for children to be children, and not just small adults. Because Jesus had a case of acne as a teen, it's ok when we do as well.

And what a good thing it is that our Lord loves to forgive children and their parents. He gave his life for them all, for us all, and loves to show mercy. He gave his obedience and took on our disobedience. He sacrificed his years, talents, his gifts, for us who have wasted ours.

And what a good thing the Lord sends helpers for children and their parents . . . faithful teachers who take their calling very seriously, but who also nurture our kids as if

they were their own. I thank God for them, whether a kindergarten teacher here, or a special ed teacher at Webster, or a university professor at Madison or Mequon. What a gift they are to us as parents who fall short.

God sends other helpers too. If a small child were separated from his parents today in a major American city, all he or anyone else would need to do is find a man or woman in a police uniform, and I have no doubt that child would be kept safe, probably well fed and entertained too, until reconnected with the parents.

The Lord also sends his mighty ones, the angels, who do his bidding, who watch our children. And don't forget the communion of saints, strangers whose names you don't know, but who, in Jesus' name, are watching out for the physical, spiritual and intellectual welfare of your children. It seems as if the Lord takes a giant salt shaker full of Christian men and women and looks for where our kids are and sprinkles down on them generously. Maybe you can be one of those sprinkles for children whose own parents are not on sight. After all, someone took the boy Jesus home during those three days he was without his parents. Someone fed him, sheltered him. Someone presumably walked him back to the temple, a safe place, even a nurturing place for him in the presence of all those respected teachers .

We are not alone as children of God, or as parents of children of God. We have a Savior and many other helpers he sends as well. Thanks be to God!

