

## Luke 2.41-52 Boy Jesus and his parents

*Dec 2018  
Christmas 2*

### **Luke 2.41-52**

<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.

### Message

Jesus the boy-man  
and his parents

### **Intro:**

Five days ago we began celebrating Jesus' birth in little Bethlehem.

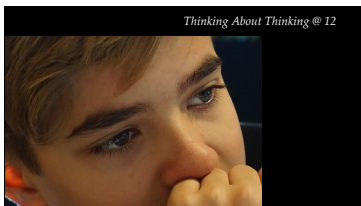
**Q:** What happened next?

- A:** It is only in Luke's Gospel that we are told anything about Jesus between birth and beginning his ministry as an adult. It's all to be found in Luke chapter 2 and covered in two incidents.
- a) His dedication in the Temple as a baby
  - b) The story we heard today about a 12 year-old being lost by his parents only to turn up in the temple speaking to scholars.

I would like to look at that temple story today.

Twelve years have passed since Christmas and Jesus is now a twelve year old.  
In English age categories, 12 year-olds are about to become teenagers on their 13<sup>th</sup> birthday.

In our industrialized world becoming a teenager is also described as an 'adolescent'. Adolescence is the time between when children could become adults and when the modern world is ready for them to be adults and do adult things as independent members of society. Adolescence is most often filled with education until the young person is economically ready.



One of the big things that happens around age 12 in the life of a young person is brain development.

Around that age abstract thinking begins and they can do things like algebra or get subtle jokes. The teenager becomes capable of much more sophisticated thinking than the child and they are open to big ideas. Justice, authority, history and long term planning become topics they can think about and debate.<sup>1</sup>

They may even become idealistic. This development is not always even or consistent with emotional development so there can be all sorts of surprises even as it proceeds through those years.

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<sup>1</sup> For a brief overview of this refer to University of Rochester Medical Center  
<https://www.urmc.rochester.edu/encyclopedia/content.aspx?ContentTypeID=90&ContentID=P01594>

In today's gospel reading Jesus is now twelve years old.

About this time he would have been received into the community of Jewish men with a bar Mitzvah ceremony as adolescence had not yet been invented. He went directly into adulthood. All his childhood learning would have been tested and put on show. In Jewish eyes he was now recognized as a young man able to engage people on matters of Torah and scripture.

So this was a year of transition for him.

He had moved from being mother's boy to being one of the men alongside Joseph.

This seems to be a very normal pattern for male development and a time when fathers or uncles need to be involved in the lives of young men around this age.

One of the common mistakes I see being made is fathers not being active in boy's behaviour and leaving that to mothers. Boys need dads to watch and train them in a male way which is typically quite different from how mothers handle them. If Jesus was a normal boy-man this applied to him too.

But this is easily glossed over as if Jesus were 'wonder child' devoid of what 12 year old boys normally experience. Just a few days ago we sang 'Once in Royal David's City' with these words:

*And through all his wondrous childhood  
he would honour and obey,  
love and watch the gentle mother  
in whose tender arms he lay:  
Christian children all should be  
kind, obedient, good as he.*

I wonder whether the composer of Once in David's Royal City, had ever reflected on today's gospel passage? <sup>2</sup> Somehow the words: 'kind, obedient, good as he' don't relate to this one childhood story of an independent minded lad who took it into his head to extend his holiday visit in the big city without telling anyone.

### Text

So what happened?

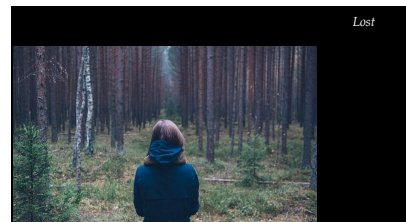
We are told that every year his parents went from Galilee to the Passover festival in Jerusalem. Ancient Judaism knew the value of annual festivals and pilgrimages like our Christian summer festivals. The wisdom holds as good advice: take your family to Christian festivals.

Then when all were ready to go back home either Jesus lost his parents, or his parents lost him.

### Reflection

I lost my son several times:

- 8 year-old in the dark among the trees at end of 'Carols in the park' – It was 10 minutes and very worrying!
- 10 year-old in the waves at Surfer's Paradise, Australia – too many seconds.
- 12 year-old in isolated wooded hills as darkness fell - about an hour but it felt much longer?



Twelve year-old Jesus is separated from his parents for five days! It is four days between the time when Mary and Joseph even realize Jesus is missing and when they find him sitting in the Temple. I found ten minutes or an hour very difficult, they had four days of it! This would be a holy-day journey they would never forget.

<sup>2</sup> Cecil Frances Alexander 1823-95

Then when Mary expresses her anxiety as any caring parent would:

“Child why have you treated us like this? Your Father and I have been sick with worry looking for you!”

Her 12 year-old son is unapologetic:

“Why were you searching for me? did you not know that I must be in my Father’s house?”

Or to put it in more 20<sup>th</sup> century 12 year old vocabulary,

‘Chill Mum. I wasn’t lost. I’ve got bigger things think about than whether you know where I am or not. You are my parents but I am more concerned with what God has for me.’

Predictably Luke tells us that Mary and Joseph did not understand. I would expect the journey back to Nazareth to have been quiet and cool until normality resumed on Nazareth.

If we remember the words of Simeon, (Luke 2:34,35) the old man living in the Temple at the time of Jesus’ circumcision, who said to Mary:

“This child is destined for the falling and rising of many in Israel, and to be a sign that will be opposed so that the inner thoughts of many will be revealed - and a sword will pierce your own soul too.”



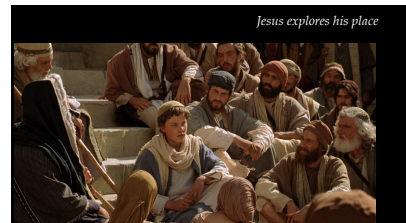
In the year Judaism recognizes a boy’s move from childhood to manhood, Mary was feeling the point of the blade. It would be another eighteen years or so, during which Jesus was an obedient son, before Jesus took his full leave of his mother to step into a public ministry. At age 12 the call of God on his life was already real to him.

### Application

There is something in this that we as parents, and ‘Yes, you 12+ year olds’ and others at whatever stage of life need to be clear on:

- What are the priorities by which we steer our lives?
- What is the big encompassing vision that fills our horizon?
- Where does God’s call fit in relation to the many obligations, expectations and assumed priorities that tell us what we should be doing and how to do it?

At age 12 Jesus was already aware that the call on his life was about taking hold of God as his heavenly Father. Deep was calling to deep and Jesus was listening.



We may recognize some clumsiness in relation to the feelings of his parents, not to mention the great inconvenience to the travelling party they were journeying with from Galilee, but this was an important stepping out to orientate to God and affirm his focus.

This is not a sermon asking you to do more and adopt an extra commitment in 2019. Most people seem to do too much already! This is more about living our lives in a response of faith to God, even if we are only 12 years old. **Living our lives as vocation may actually mean doing less in total but more in faith. It may mean fewer accepted responsibilities but more commitment.** That is the real challenge for busy people.

It applies very much to the 12 year olds in this church.

If you have read my blog on the subject you will know what I have recognized is happening for our 11-17 year olds.<sup>3</sup> The basic story is that their lives are being over filled to the point where space for growing as a child of God is being squeezed out.

On Thursday Barbara met a former member of this church, Annette, who since leaving us served several years as a youth leader in Vineyard Brussels -a international church like us- and now serves as a youth leader in a small Dutch church in Den Bosch. On comparing experiences Annette described the same dynamics we have here as happening in the two churches where she served as youth leader.

**Parents want the young people to have God in their lives and do that alongside other young people but at the same time often set them up to live lives without time for that.**

Imagine if our 12+ year-olds imitated Jesus and simply rescheduled their life with time for seeking God. Imagine if they cancelled a school week or stepped out of a family holiday to go and meet a bible scholar in another city or attend a prayer meeting because they wanted to primarily be about God's business?

And imagine if then when we or their parents complained about the worry and inconvenience caused they pointed to Jesus and asked:

“This is what teenage Jesus did! What's the problem?”

How would you respond to that line?

So seriously, at the end of a year if you are a parent consider: How much time and space do your teenagers have to consider God their heavenly father?

I think the answer to that lies with parents, unless you are a sharp minded and willful child, like Jesus who loved his parents but loved God as his ultimate father even more.

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<sup>3</sup> <https://trinitychurcheindhoven.org/2018/11/22/after-praying-for-youth-in-trinity-church/>