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Luke 2:41-52
WHAT CHILD IS THIS?

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It is certainly not uncommon for first-time parents to stand by their child's crib and daydream. You have waited a long time for the birth of your child and you hope that everything goes well. You have read books. You have listened to the advice of others. You feel prepared, yet unprepared. You are excited and you are scared. You want to be good parents. You want to be the best parents. You want your child to be someone special, very special. You wish that you had unlimited funds so that your child could have the very best of everything. You dream of what your child could become. Perhaps he will be a doctor or a scientist who finds a cure for cancer. Perhaps he will be a teacher who impacts the lives of so many. Perhaps he will be the quarterback who finally leads the Detroit Lions to the Super Bowl.

If that is true for us, how true was it for Mary and Joseph in regard to their son? What were they thinking after Mary had just delivered their child and he now lay sleeping in the manger? He would be the most special Child of all. He was the very Son of God. Think of all the things that they had been through. The angel Gabriel came to her and told her that she, a virgin from the Galilean town of Nazareth, would miraculously conceive a child through the power of the Holy Spirit, and that child would be the promised Savior of the world. Joseph was assured in a dream by an angel that everything that Mary had told him was true. We just celebrated the miracle of Christmas. They went from Nazareth to Bethlehem, the hometown of King David. There Mary gave birth to a son who would be David's Son, yet David's Lord. Angels appeared to shepherds in the fields who after hearing the good news, went to worship him. They would tell everyone what had taken place.

They would have their child circumcised on the eighth day. He would be presented in the temple in Jerusalem in accordance with the Law of Moses. There an old man named Simeon took their child in his arms and proclaimed that he would now die in peace because he had seen the Lord's salvation. Sometime later Magi, astronomers from the East, came to worship their son, bringing gold, incense and myrrh. King Herod wanted to kill their son. They had to leave in the middle of the night and go to Egypt until Herod had died. Then they returned to Nazareth. Truly there were many things that Mary would ponder. What else would happen? How would their Son be the Savior? We look and wonder
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Parents may wonder what their child would become while he lies sleeping in the crib. When he starts walking and talking, you may become a little more realistic. Children all have certain limitations. Some will get good grades, others won't. Some are drawn to art, to music, to sports. Anyone can play the piano, but few are pianists. Some people work well with their hands, others are klutzy. Some have good social skills and make friends easily, others don't.

I think that it is fair to say that you can see a lot of what a child will be when he or she is twelve years old. The child is still developing in many ways, but there are certain things that you can already observe. Mary and Joseph would see their son grow up in Nazareth. Jesus would learn the carpenter's trade from his earthly father. Since he was sinless, he did not pout about getting his own way all the time. He didn't get into trouble, hitting his brothers for no reason at all. Since he was the Son of God, he truly was the perfect child.

One of the reasons that Jesus came into the world was to fulfill the Law in our behalf. We usually think of the Moral Law which is summed up in the Ten Commandments. He was to show perfect love and obedience to God. He was to show perfect love toward his fellow man. But Jesus also had an obligation as a citizen of the state. Israel was no

longer a theocracy, a government by God. They had been conquered and under the rule of many: the Assyrians, the Babylonians, the Persians, the Greeks and the Romans. At the time of Christ, they were under Roman rule. Jesus did not teach the people to rebel against the government. He taught his disciples to render unto Caesar the things that are Caesar's and unto God the things that are God's. And then there was the ceremonial Law, those things that pertained to the religious life of Israel. Jesus was circumcised on the eighth day. He was taken to Jerusalem for ty days after his birth for the purification of Mary and his presentation as the firstborn son. The appropriate sacrifices would be made.

Both Mary and Joseph took their faith in God seriously. Religion was not a part-time profession. It was a full time commitment. They saw the evidences of God's love in their lives, especially in their Son Jesus. The most significant festival of the year was the festival of Passover. That commemorated Israel's release from slavery in Egypt. According to the Torah, all males were to appear in Jerusalem for the festivals of Passover, Pentecost and Tabernacles. But things had changed. There were different governments that had come and gone. Many Jews no longer lived in the Promised Land, but were scattered throughout the world. Many could not attend three times a year. The Passover would have to suffice.

Mary and Joseph did observe the Law of Moses. They went to Jerusalem for the Passover every year. Women did not have to make the journey but many women did. Entre families traveled together. Sometimes entire villages would make the journey together. Mary and Joseph would probably travel with relatives that would include future disciples James and John. It was customary as they approached Jerusalem to sing the Psalms of Ascents.

There are good reasons why we observe the Church year. We cover every major teaching in the Scripture every year. There are times of fasting and times of feasting, showing that the Christina life is not some dream world where we are always on the mountaintop, but there are also those times of sadness when we go down into the valley of the shadow of death. In both good times and bad, God is with us. He gives us the strength to go on day by day, assuring us that he is not going to leave us or forsake us, but will provide us with daily bread, everything that we need for both body and soul. We do give testimony to an unbelieving world that we do depend upon God. Every time our neighbors see us pull out of our driveway, every time the people in this neighborhood see us pull into the church parking lot, we give evidence of what's really important in our lives. We teach these truths to our children so that the next generation will know of God's love.

It was customary that villages and extended families would come to the festivals together. It was also customary that they would leave Jerusalem at the same time as well. I'm sure that there was a regular designated place where all the people of Joseph's clan and/or the people of Nazareth would assemble before they set out on their return. Since they did this every year and since Jesus was the perfect Son, they would assume that Jesus was there with the rest of the boys. Boys being boys, it would be normal that they would run on ahead playing games while the adults walked a little more slowly and watched over the elderly in their caravan.

And at the end of the day they came to their stopping place. Jesus wasn't there. You could imagine the fear that filled their hearts. You can imagine what Jerusalem was like for Passover. Think New York City for New Year's Eve, Washington D.C. for the fourth of July or Ann Arbor for the Michigan-Ohio State Game. There are people everywhere going in every direction. Mary and Joseph's son was lost. That was almost like being dead. They were now a day away. It would take another day to travel back to Jerusalem and their search would come to an end on the third day. This might just foreshadow some future event.

We could imagine that Mary and Joseph went everywhere in Jerusalem that they would expect a twelve year old boy to be. They would ask people if they saw a boy fitting Jesus' description. Finally they came back to the Temple. Did they go there because someone saw someone who fit Jesus' description there or did they go there to pray for his safe return? Whatever the reason they found Jesus there. He was not doing what we would expect most twelve year

old boys to be doing. He was in the midst of the rabbis, listening to them and asking them questions about the Word of God.

Jesus was truly and amazing person. He brought amazement to one person after another: Mary, Joseph, the shepherds, the Magi, Simeon, Anna. You could now add the rabbis of Jerusalem to that list. His love for the Word of God and his answers amazed the rabbis. That was only the beginning. He would perform many miracles and he would offer up his life for the sin of the world and he would rise again on the third day.

You could imagine Mary and Joseph searching for words. They had every emotion running through their hearts and mind: anger, betrayal, fear, relief, joy, bewilderment, you name it. They knew that they had a very special son. What would they say? What would you say? What's truly important is what Jesus said, "Why were you searching for me? Didn't you know I had to be in my Father's house?"

What child is this? He was Mary and Joseph's son, but above all he was his heavenly Father's Son. He was the very Son of God. We come to another of those things that our minds cannot fathom. How could Jesus be both God and man at the same time? How could the one who was eternal be born in time? How could the one who is omnipresent and fills all things be localized in one physical place? How could he who knows all things grow in wisdom? We cannot explain it. We simply believe it.

Jesus amazed the teachers of the Law with his knowledge of the Scriptures. No doubt he expounded Law and Gospel, emphasizing the love of God in promising a Savior. No doubt many of them saw familiar passages in a whole new light.

Jesus had to be in his Father's house, about his Father's business. That was normal. He would return to Jerusalem over and over again throughout his life until the religious leaders would lead the people to finally reject him by demanding his crucifixion. The temple of Herod would be destroyed but the true temple would remain. Jesus was the true Temple of God. Whoever has seen Jesus has seen the Father.

He is also among us this morning. The body that was the true temple of God, the Word made flesh, worshipped by angels, shepherds and wise men alike, comes to us concealed in simple bread and wine. Do you see his real presence that he announces and promises to us?

What child is this? He is the son of Mary and Joseph, true man. And he is the Son of God, true God. He is your Savior. Thank God! AMEN.