

Luke 2: 41-52

This is the only mention in the Bible of Jesus' childhood. Without this story, we would have jumped from his birth to his baptism, 30 yrs later.

We learn from this story that Mary and Joseph were good, observant Jews. They went to Jerusalem to celebrate Passover every year. The way they travelled was in a large group. Peasants tried to travel in groups in order to discourage robbers along the road. So, a group of family, friends and neighbors left Nazareth to attend Passover in Jerusalem. The same group would have re-gathered in Jerusalem for the return trip home. Mary and Joseph naturally assumed that their son would be with his cousins or his friends, so they didn't start looking for him until the group stopped for the night.

When they realized he was missing, they went back to Jerusalem the next day and searched all over the city for him. Three days later, they found him in the Temple.

Try to imagine being Mary or Joseph, looking for the 12-yr-old Jesus for all those days. You'd be sick with worry. You'd be thinking how something horrible must have happened to him for him to be missing this long. It wouldn't even occur to you that he was perfectly fine.

You'd not only be sick with worry, you'd be drowning in guilt. Not only had you lost **your** son, you'd lost God's son, the Savior of the world. What would happen now? Would the world not be saved? Would the Messiah never come again? What punishment would be sufficient for the couple who carelessly lost the Messiah?

Then, you find yourself in the Temple. Maybe you went there to pray for help, for guidance, for mercy. And there he is. **There** he is! And he's perfectly fine. He appears very well cared-for. And he is surrounded by teachers who seem to be hanging on his every word. Luke says the couple was "astonished." Then, Mary goes up to him, although it is inconceivable that a peasant woman from Nazareth would interrupt a group of Temple scholars. But, somehow, she gets to Jesus and says, "**Child, why have you treated us like this? Look, your father and I have been searching for you in great anxiety.**"

The 12-yr-old responds, "**Why were you searching for me? Did you not know that I must be in my Father's house?**" This confuses his parents, but we know Mary remembered his words.

And they all returned to Nazareth, where Jesus was an obedient son who "**increased in wisdom and in years, and in divine and human favor.**"

Why does Luke - and it is only Luke - tell us this story? Is there some sort of message for us in this little family drama?

While each of us approaches this story, as we approach the entire Bible, with our own eyes/experiences/background and point of view, I would say that the story is about losing Jesus. His parents made some perfectly reasonable assumptions about where he would be on the way home, but they were wrong. This error in judgment cost them several days of anxious searching in a city they didn't know very well. It cost them the company of their family and friends, who went on to Nazareth without them. And when they finally found Jesus, he was where he knew he belonged, in his Father's house. It was so obvious, why had they not thought of looking there in the first place?

I would suggest that we ask ourselves: When, where and why have we ever lost Jesus? How did we misplace him?

Were we in the midst of our busy lives, and just lost track of him?

Did we make the conscious decision to set him aside so we could do or believe something that he would not have found acceptable?

Maybe we replaced him with a Savior who was more amenable to the way we looked at things.

For whatever reason, let's say we suddenly realized what we had lost. And we began to search for him. Perhaps this search eventually led us to church. And there he was. And he was astounding.

But, let's back up. Christ is not exclusively in church. Christ is everywhere. He came and lived among us because he wanted to save the whole world. The popular Jewish understanding for centuries was that God lived in the Temple, specifically in the room called the Holy of Holies, sitting on the Ark of the Covenant, the box that held the Ten Commandments.

As Christians understand God, God is everywhere, all the time. The same goes for Christ. The search for Christ doesn't need to take you any farther than your own heart. But, it is easy to lose sight of that. We think of Christ as being "out there," when he is closer than our breath.

If we understood this, we would never lose track of Christ again. We would know he is within us all the time. He is exactly where we should expect him to be, in his Father's house. In our hearts.

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