

And The Child Grew!

Let us pray: May your Word, O God, be a lamp unto our feet and a light unto our path; through Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen.

One of the highlights of Christmas, for me, is getting cards from family and friends. Sometimes they include recent photos of children or grandchildren. These pictures are reality checks because when you don't see children very often, once you do see them, you're shocked! You realize how much they've grown!

I'm quite sure Mary and Joseph were having similar feelings when Jesus got lost at the age of twelve. They had just spent the Passover Holidays in Jerusalem with their extended family. As they were heading back to Nazareth they discovered that the young boy wasn't with them! After searching for him unsuccessfully, they realized shockingly that they had left him behind, so they had to turn around and go back to the big city to find him. After three days of searching, they finally found him in the Temple of all places. Apparently he was intensely engaged with some of the Bible scholars there.

(I'm not sure which would have been scarier; his being lost or his holding his own with the teachers!"

Like every other human baby, the baby Jesus grew ! And like most parents, Mary and Joseph hadn't yet realized just how much he *had* grown up. Not only were they unsure of where he was; they weren't even sure of *who he was!* "Who is this child, anyway?"

Christmas is without doubt a special time for children. If we don't have small children of our own, we try to find a place to visit where we can be with children. Everyone is attracted to babies and the baby Jesus at Christmas!

And yet, the only reason we celebrate Christmas in the first place is because the baby Jesus grew up to be our Savior! Unless we allow the Christ-child to become a man, we will never understand the true meaning of Christmas-that God was in Christ, not only at birth, throughout his short life, and tragic death, reconciling the world to himself; reconciling you and me to himself.

Christmas is not just for children, it's for grown-ups too! Why is it that we are reluctant to let the baby Jesus grow up?

I remember talking with my father once about his grandchildren. I'm the youngest of six so my father had lots of grandchildren and a handful of great-great grandchildren. He confessed to me some time ago that he enjoyed children especially when they were babies; when he could cuddle them and bounce them on this knee. But after a certain age, it just wasn't the same. I asked him "why not?"

And with a twinkle in his eye, he said, “Well they begin talking back to you!” (Of course, I knew he meant my brother and sisters, not me!)

We’re all familiar with children growing up and, not only getting a mind of their own, but finding their own voice as well. In the long run this is a good thing. But it does take some getting used to.

I remember taking a human development course once. When we were studying adolescents, the professor told us something that I’ve never forgotten. She said teenagers tend to be the “truth tellers” in our society. That is why they can so easily make us uncomfortable at times.

The grown- up Jesus is a truth teller par excellence. His teachings, like the Sermon on the Mount, his parables, like the parable of the Lost Son, and his servant- lifestyle, continually challenge us.

The boy Jesus sitting in the Temple had come of age! His questions and answers, his understanding and wisdom pointed ahead to his public ministry. Do you know that rather than providing us with answers, the Jesus of the Gospels asks many more questions, questions he intends us to live with: such as, “Didn’t you know I’d be about my Father’s business?” or “Who are my mothers and my brothers?” and “Who do you say that I am?”

What we need as a nation right now are truth tellers, like Dr. Fauci, and Dr. Shah? Like the truth of scientific research? Like the truth of our wisdom teachers, especially Jesus!

Where is Jesus now? He is risen! He stands among us now in all his risen power, not only comforting the afflicted, but afflicting the comfortable too. But he also is present through the Spirit to guide us and give us deeper understanding. Jesus told his disciples this: “When the Spirit of truth comes, he will guide you into all truth” (John 17:13)

Jesus is among us now. And what is he about? He’s about his Father’s business. The question is: Are we? There must have been a certain tension and some hurt feelings, when the boy Jesus announced to his parents that they should have expected to find him at his Father’s house. That had to have hurt.

After all, hadn’t Joseph been his foster father since day one? Hadn’t he been the one who, who with Mary, had taught him the Jewish faith and the scriptures, the Torah? Wasn’t Joseph also the one who had provided for him, made sure he had proper food and clothing and shelter? Wasn’t he the one to make sure he had taught Jesus a trade.?

3.

Jesus words must have stung Joseph- at first. But then again, his presence among the Temple teachers must have made them proud as well.. I know that in every church where we had the Youth lead worship, those were definitely the best attended services, especially by the fathers! They were awfully proud to see their girl or boy, reading scripture, or saying a prayer. But those services also had moments of challenge as well. The music the youth chose could certainly get a rise out of the parents! One Youth Sunday in New Gloucester the teens chose the song, "What if God Was One of Us?" by Joan Osborne. But definitely not in the Pilgrim Hymnal!

Jesus felt such a special closeness to God. He also felt especially close to God's people. On two separate public occasions Jesus declared that his true family were 'those who do the will of his Father'.

In other words, **we** are family to Jesus, the **Church**, his followers. And in this family, water is thicker than blood, because membership has nothing to do with sharing a common gene pool. Rather it has everything to do with sharing a common Lord, and being baptized and led by the same Spirit.

Paul tells us in Galatians that we're all adopted children of God! Jesus was the only begotten son, the rest of us were adopted. But the beauty of Paul's words is this: God loves us just as much! We too can address God as "Abba" , which means 'Papa' or "Imma" which means 'Mama". How great is that? That's what we do everytime we say the Lord's prayer! We're sharing in the personal, intimacy of the only Son with the Father! What that means is that Jesus' heavenly father's business is our business now. It is our business to carry out God's ministry of reconciliation-of healing and restoring broken relationships. It is our mission, our business, to share and extend Christ' ministry which he declared as "bringing good news to the poor, proclaiming release to the captives; recovery of sight to the blind and to setting free the oppressed".

So there is no need for us to be sad after Christmas. For we haven't lost a baby, we've gained a brother. We don't have to say good-bye to the Holy Family, because that family is ours now!

Speaking of families, as you know, this is my last Sunday as your Bridge Pastor. I was hired to serve as a Bridge between your Intentional Interim Pastor, Deb Jenks, and your new Pastor!

Well, guess what? You've crossed that bridge! Your new pastor is called. (She's even with us today!)

I have to tell you that it has been such a pleasure ministering with you these past 3 months. It's been a lot of fun getting back into the saddle, so to speak! This has never felt like a job; it's always felt like the 'calling' that I've been accustomed too for the past 45 years!

4.

Now I've got to get back to my own church in Hancock, because I'm filling in next Sunday for my Pastor, T.J. Mack, whose taking a well-deserved vacation! And you are looking forward to embarking on a new journey of faith with your new Pastor, Lisa! So let me close this sermon with just two words: "Thank you"