

All Who Heard Him

Luke 2:41-52

Today is traditionally known as the Feast of the Holy Family, and one purpose of it was to portray the family unit of Jesus, Mary, and Joseph as the model for all Christian families. However, this reading from Luke presents a less than idyllic, if realistic, depiction of family life with teenage children: we meet the young Jesus acting impetuously, seemingly oblivious of the impact his actions have on others. Despite the fact that he eventually caves in to his parents' demands, it is clear that a decisive break has occurred. Jesus is separating himself from his earthly parents and is dedicating himself to the service of his heavenly "Father" ([2:48-49](#)). Although his parents have been told that Jesus will be the savior and Messiah, these revelations come as a surprise, even a shock. Here Jesus "looks like something less than the son one dreams of."

Gracia Grindal, who teaches at Lutheran Seminary in St. Paul, Minnesota, said she loves the story about Jesus and his parents and is astonished by Luke's deep understanding of the human condition. Mary and Joseph were facing the adolescent years with a most unusual child. She wonders how Mary and Joseph could have left Jerusalem without their son. I can tell you how it happened. When I was a child my parents left one of their children at church. Some of you have also shared stories of children left behind. In my parents' case they had so many children that they forgot to count heads and were sitting down to Sunday dinner before they noticed the empty place at the table. In the case of Mary and Joseph, Jesus was at that in-between age where he could have travels with the women and children because he was not yet a man, but he could have easily traveled

with the men because by the next Passover he would be old enough for his bar-mitzvah ceremony, and would have been called a son of the covenant.

Another thread in this passage concerns Jesus' innate sense of the divine wisdom that exceeds that of normal human beings like his parents. Many commentators have focused on Jesus' comprehension of the law ([v. 47](#)), his pronouncement that he would naturally be found in his "Father's house" ([v. 49](#)), and his growth in "wisdom" ([v. 52](#)), as these affirm him as one who unusually reflects, even basks in, the divine wisdom. Early Christian interpreters argued that these passages proved that Jesus is truly the Son of God. "Just as everything else about him was extraordinary." Jesus' questions in the temple did not reveal ignorance but that he had already perfected the method of questions and answers. The discovery of Jesus in the temple also gives practical instruction concerning holiness: "For it is there that the Son of God is found. If you ever seek the Son of God, look first in the temple; hasten thither. There you will find Christ, the Word and Wisdom—that is, the Son of God."

Luke's infancy narratives reinforce Jesus' status as a Messiah in the Davidic line, they also make clear that Jesus was raised within a particularly observant family that followed the customs and traditions of the Judaism of his day ([vv. 41-42](#)). Jesus' observance and obedience also provide teaching on the incarnation. Jesus' behavior casts light on the surprising ways that God's wisdom is revealed in the context of ordinary life. For John Wesley, this passage also provides practical teaching regarding progress in holiness—Jesus, though perfect, continues to grow in perfection, and thus "it plainly follows" that even "pure" Christians "have room to increase in holiness" and "in the love of God."

In the context of this passage, we learn that God can be found even in difficult family circumstances. It teaches that God's wisdom is available to the young as well as to the old, which means that we must make room for God to surprise us with unexpected revelations given by unusual messengers. It teaches us that though God's wisdom and holiness remind us of our limitations, it is precisely within these limitations that wisdom is often revealed.

A friend and colleague, Dr. Irvin Green, once explained that at the age of 12 many Jewish boys were examined by the teachers of the Law to determine which ones would be accepted to school to become teachers of the Law themselves. Jesus demonstrated that he was well qualified to become such a student. Jesus' decision to do the business of his "Father" and his grasp of wisdom foreshadow not only the entire scope of his earthly ministry, but more specifically the moment where he stands in the synagogue in Nazareth and proclaims, "The Spirit of the Lord is upon me" ([4:18](#)).

That the incarnation took this shape in the life of the holy family gives hope for families of all kinds and conditions on this day. The model of living that the holy family offers is not, as is sometimes depicted in romantic paintings and portraits, that of a family perfectly ordered and without division or differences. Rather, it is of a family that lives into messy moments with the confidence that God in Christ Jesus has entered and redeems them from within. (William J. Danaher Jr.)

This is first and last a story about Jesus and his human development and growing awareness. It provides his first personal report about his unique relationship with God. Nevertheless, consideration of the family context here does provide a window into the elemental human characteristics of Jesus'

life as well as our own. He has a mother and father who care for him; they are part of a larger community that honors religious tradition (they travel to Jerusalem for Passover among friends and relatives); he honors these relationships; he matures and grows; he listens, learns, and teaches; time passes from one stage to the next. In all this, his humanity is described and affirmed.

Just as Luke's birth narrative revealed Jesus' special position, this story provides a transitional marker emphasizing his growing self-knowledge of his need to be "in his Father's house" ([v. 49](#)). As time progressed and Jesus continued to move into his human maturing, he invited all others to consider "his house, their house"

In this critical incident when Jesus was twelve years old, his understanding concerning his relationship to his Father's house seems age appropriate and, but also astonishing and perplexing, if not a little irritating as Mary and Joseph experience him—a very human parental response ([Luke 2:48](#)). And we observe that Jesus provokes astonished perplexity and occasional irritation for all those who are captured by his precocious and holy charisma. As in most healthy families, children will rise up to become their parents' teachers, often to the parents' chagrin. (**Stephen Bauman**)

This story marks the transition between what others say about Jesus (Gabriel, Simeon, the angels at Jesus' birth) and his own words, which begin in this passage ([v. 49](#)).

The teachers are amazement at the young Jesus' words ([2:47](#)) and mature wisdom ([4:32](#); [20:26](#)). Amazed is also the reaction of Jesus' parents to this scene in the temple ([2:48](#)), indicating that even those closest to him had difficulty coming to terms with him. This story shows Jesus to be fully human in his maturation in wisdom and in stature, anticipating his total

dedication to the mission with which his Father has entrusted him. This temple story also portrays the resulting necessities under which Jesus fulfills that mission, from this early announcement of the necessity of being in his Father's house to the subsequent necessities of his ministry: preaching the kingdom of God ([4:43](#)), casting out demons and performing cures ([13:32-33](#)), and finally suffering many things, being killed, and being raised from the dead ([9:22](#); [17:25](#); [22:37](#); [24:7](#), [26](#)). (**Paul J. Achtemeier**)

In this story Luke includes at least three themes that will remain central throughout Jesus' ministry: (1) the importance of the temple in Jesus' life, (2) the boundaries of Jesus' family, and (3) Jesus' authority as a teacher of God's word.

The Importance of the Temple in Jesus' Life. In Luke's Gospel, Jesus was carried into the temple before he can even walk. His parents were both observant Jews who do all that Torah requires of them. Having circumcised their son on the eighth day of his life, they carry him to the temple a little less than a month later to present him to the Lord ([vv. 22-24](#)). There Simeon and Anna both recognize him as destiny's child, seeing something in him that amazes even his mother and father.

In today's scripture Jesus returned to the temple for one of the three annual pilgrim festivals described in Torah. As before, the temple turned out to be the place where others see something in him that his parents do not. It is in the church, where those who are not our kin sometimes see things in us that our kin cannot. It our responsibility to encourage the young and mature people that come in and out of these doors. Parents welcome other adults in the community of faith looking after their children when those children seem lost to their own families. Are you a Simeon or Anna sitting here just

waiting for permission to say what you see when you look at the children and members of this congregation?

The Boundaries of Jesus' Family. Jesus' parents do not miss him for three days, because they are not traveling as a nuclear family. They are traveling with a caravan of extended family and friends. When they return to the temple, they find Jesus happily relating to an even-further-extended circle made up of those who teach Torah in "his Father's" house.

Jesus' Authority as a Teacher of God's Word. Here at the beginning of Jesus' adulthood we see him in a self-devised confirmation class, exchanging questions with teachers in the temple.

On this First Sunday of Christmas, we remember that Jesus grew sturdily from his religious roots. This boy who was filled with wisdom as a child ([v. 40](#)) increased in wisdom as he grew ([v. 52](#)). He is Wisdom's child as well as Mary's, whose first awareness of his parentage came to him in his Father's house. (Barbara Brown Taylor)

All who heard him as a child were amazed. Now as we attempt the walk the Christian life, we too listen to Jesus as he teaches us God's word through Bible reading, studying, sermon and song. You will be amazed what you hear!

Feasting on the Word: Preaching the Revised Common Lectionary - Feasting on the Word – Year C,
Volume 1: Advent through Transfiguration.