



## **“Chosen Home”**

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Luke 2:41-52  
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We’re fascinated with origin stories, from Greek mythology to Marvel superheroes to Disney villains. So it’s little wonder that the lack of childhood narratives about Jesus’s life would be a source of profound disappointment, leading some to attempt to fill the void by creating their own stories. There are early writings like the apocryphal Gospel of Thomas, replete with fantastic and sometimes horrifying stories of miracles performed by boyhood Jesus. One modern example is the comic novel *Lamb: The Gospel According to Biff, Christ’s Childhood Pal*, which traces Jesus’s exceptional childhood years through silly and irreverent tales.

Contrast that with our Gospel Lesson for today, the only biblical account we have of Jesus between his toddler years and his adult ministry. Luke portrays Jesus not as a Wunderkind, but as a somewhat ordinary boy – attending religious festivals as other faithful Jews did, traveling with his family, even giving his parents the slip on occasion. Luke makes a point of saying at the conclusion of the story that Jesus “matured in wisdom and in years,” a further indication of his humanity. Jesus was not simply God wearing a human disguise.

But in other ways, the adolescent Jesus we encounter in Luke is entirely remarkable. The few days he was on his own weren’t a biblical version of *Home Alone*. He wasn’t panicked when he was left behind, but seemed utterly content to remain in Jerusalem. Nor did he seek out the wonders of adventure that might await a boy on his own in the city or find his way into mischief, but made himself at home in the temple listening and asking questions of the teachers. And those who saw him in the temple were “amazed at his understanding and his answers.” His decision to hang out in the temple must have been a surprise even to his parents, because it took them three days to find him!

If this story is meant to offer a biographical portrait of childhood Jesus, many thoughts swirl through my head. How did Mary and Joseph not know he wasn’t with them? Was a cousin in charge of counting heads as they loaded the donkeys? Did Mary pull a Kate McAllister, with a nagging feeling she had forgotten something but unable to say what until, suddenly, she cried out, “Jesus!?” And if Jesus was on his own for three days, what did he do at night? Where did he sleep? How did he take care of himself? Was he completely on his own or did some kind soul from the temple take him in? These are the things being a parent makes you think about.

I suspect Luke’s intention wasn’t biographical, but theological. Themes of Jesus’s adult ministry were already on display here. He had separated from his family to be about his Father’s business (KJV) or to be in his Father’s house, just as later he would do permanently and expect of his followers. He engaged the temple leaders in deep conversation, the very people with whom he would be in conflict as an adult, astounding them into silence with his questions. Everyone around him was amazed by what he said. Already we can recognize the compelling teacher he would become.

And yet, we also recognize that this is a portrait of Jesus in the process of becoming. He was not yet the famed preacher and healer of Galilee; he was a 12-year-old boy. He hadn’t gained renown through his miraculous works; he probably spend his days helping Joseph around the carpentry shop. He wasn’t ministering on his own across the countryside; but still lived under his parents’ roof. Yet, even though he was a boy in a grownup’s world, he felt right at home in the temple, in conversation with the wisest teachers around.

That got me thinking about our own young people and the ways they sometimes surprise us. I asked some of our youth leaders and teachers about how they experience working with youth at Church of the Saviour. Each of them told me that what most adults see in our youth is only a fraction of the picture.

Tom Wadsworth and Brian Broadbent have been teaching sixth and seventh graders since their own kids were in middle school. Besides the mind-boggling quantity of bagels and donuts they’ve gone through over the years, they’ve also seen an amazing capacity to engage and retain stories from scripture. Both Tom and Brian experience regularly the joy of an unexpected spark of insight that comes from one of the kids in their class. Brian says often it appears that they’re not paying any attention, but four weeks later they’ll bring up a point from that very lesson. Tom attests to having several moments each year where the kids have him saying, “Wow!” Their ability to make connections from one passage to another and to synthesize what they learn is a surprising joy. One highlight moment for Tom is when the kids make the

connection between the Passover story and Jesus as the Lamb of God. Those are the *Aha!* moments that Brian says make teaching so gratifying and have kept them hooked.

Laura Evangelista, who serves as one of the Confirmation leaders, describes observing one young person a few years ago who seemed completely checked out. He was always fidgeting and noodling with something during class instead of paying attention. Whenever Laura would call on him, he'd get that "deer in the headlights" look before mumbling some wild guess, if he responded at all. And yet, as the conversation would unfold, sometimes out of the blue he would contribute something amazingly deep. When that happened, everyone would sit in stunned silence for a moment, then the conversation would progress to a whole new level. That's a reminder to all of us that God can work in all kinds of vessels and in all kinds of ways.

Curt Campbell, who's been closer to our youth over the last decade than anyone, has had more than a few moments when he was completely blown away. Once, a kid on their very first day of their first mission trip gave a brilliant devotion on the Hebrew scriptures about sacrifice and atonement. On another occasion, when reflecting on the story of the feeding of the multitude, a youth observed that the real point of the story wasn't about the people having their caloric needs met, but about having their souls fed by knowing and hearing and meeting Jesus, then seeing the multiplication of that experience.

If you've ever been here for a Youth Sunday worship service, you know how powerful it is to hear kids share their faith and how inspiring that experience is for all of us. These are the same kids who might appear to be too loud, too distracted, too casual, or too absent to meet the expectations of some of us adults. But we should remember that there's often a lot more happening than we realize.

I'm not suggesting that these stories are direct corollaries to Jesus in the temple or that the insight our kids have is on the same level as his. And yet, I think there's a lesson in this story for us when it comes to how we relate to our youth, one I think Jesus would want us to get. After all, he's the same Jesus who would later go out of his way to make room for kids to be around him and the disciples.

We may not know how he came to be there that day or how he managed on his own for three days, but Luke tells us Jesus felt entirely at home in the temple, so much so that he couldn't understand why his parents would have looked for him anywhere else. That's still part of our charge today, to provide a place of welcome and encouragement that feels like home to our kids. In many ways, we do that. If you've ever been around here on an Upward Saturday or during a COTS Youth event, you know the sound of kids bounding down the hallway, laughing and calling out to each other, hanging out and just being kids. This is a pretty cool place to play hide and seek, too. Those sounds are some of the most joyous I experience here, even if I might worry what they've gotten into this time and secretly pray no one hurts themselves doing it.

But we remember that our kids are multi-dimensional. They're more than just the laughter and the play that exudes joy. They're capable of amazing depth when they talk about the challenges of daily life and how their faith shapes the way they see the world. Many of us have been privileged to be present when children and youth pray for each other. It's a moving experience to witness their sincerity and their love.

Jesus's adolescent venture in the temple reminds us that making church home isn't just about kids being with other kids, or just having a handful of adults who we designate to watch over them. Youth ministry is multigenerational. Youth are not merely an extension of the church – they *are* the church. And they need to be in relationship with people of all ages as much as we need to be in relationship with them. If you see a kid walking down the hall, say "Good morning" and offer your name, opening the door for them to give theirs in return. If they look at you like you have two heads, don't give up – adults haven't always earned trust from kids, and it takes time to build relationship. Encourage our kids by supporting youth ministries, but also invite youth to be part of what you're doing – not just to do something *for* your group, but to be an active part of it. The best way to make a church a home is to include everyone and make sure they know they belong. And if you do, prepare to be amazed.

Of course, making the church a chosen home isn't only about what we do for our kids. The story of Jesus in the temple reminds us of the importance of making a space for all, that an essential element of Christian witness is hospitality and welcome. How can we step up our game so that not just every *kid*, but every *person* is included and belongs here?

Let's strive to be a place where all can gather to experience the presence of Jesus and be amazed at what he has in store for us. For we are not only the inheritors of a tradition of worship and learning and discovery, but also Christ's chosen vessel to share his message of love and grace for all. May we, Christ's chosen home, be a place that all will choose to make their home, too. Amen.

