

“HAVE WE LOST SIGHT OF JESUS?”

Text: Luke 2:40-52; 1 Kings 3:4–15

Dear Brothers and Sisters in Christ Jesus,

Our knowledge of Jesus' childhood is surprisingly limited. Aside from his birth and this account before us in our Gospel, we know very little from Scripture about Jesus' growing up years. This is our only a glimpse into Jesus' childhood—the twelve-year-old Jesus in the Temple. We naturally wonder about his early life: What was he like as a child? What was life like in Joseph and Mary's home? What's it like to raise a perfect child? Did neighbors often say to their children, “**Why can't you be more like Jesus?**” We fallen creatures can only guess at these things!

However, the story we heard today reveals much about Jesus' character. His engagement with the teachers in the Temple demonstrates an eagerness to learn. We see Jesus as humanity was intended to be – with a mind untainted and unhindered by sin. He learns quickly and deeply.

Recognizing the Temple as his Father's house, he longs to be there. When his parents find him and urge him to return home, he doesn't resist or demand his own way. He submits to their authority. Though divine, he embraced the human experience, including the submission to his parents as a child. He perfectly illustrates his obedience to God's will, fulfilling the Fourth Commandment and foreshadowing his perfect fulfillment of all the Law on our behalf.

And we read in our text “**And Jesus increased in wisdom and in stature and in favor with God and man.**” Jesus continued to grow, both intellectually and physically and gained favor with both God and others. Untainted by sin, he was wise without becoming arrogant, obedient without being condescending, and good without being prideful.

We see a similar picture of this kind of person in King Solomon, in our Old Testament reading (at least at first). As a young man, Solomon ascended to the throne of Israel, and God granted him extraordinary wisdom. Solomon became famous throughout the world for his wisdom. People from all over sought him out, and he enjoyed the favor of both God and man, much like Jesus.

Yet, despite his initial wisdom and favor with God, Solomon ultimately gave in to the temptations of the world. Sin corrupted his gifts, leading him astray. He allowed his desires for power and worldly pleasures to consume him, leading to adultery and idolatry. Though initially admired for his wisdom, his downfall serves as a reminder of the dangers of unchecked and unrepented sin.

In contrast to Solomon, Jesus, untainted by sin, remained steadfast in his mission: to be **the Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world**, refusing to compromise his message to appease the expectations of others. His unwavering commitment to his holy mission ultimately alienated him from many people. While some embraced his teachings, others strongly opposed him, leading eventually to his crucifixion.

Now, let's consider our own lives. We, too, have been baptized into God's family and blessed with incredible gifts. We have the wisdom of God's Word, and most importantly, we have Jesus Christ himself as our guide.

Which path will we choose? Will we seek the approval of others, like King Solomon, or will we remain steadfast in our faith, like Jesus? The question we must ask ourselves is this: What truly matters most to you: the praise and admiration of the world, or the unwavering approval of God? Or maybe to ask

that question another way: What loss would you fear more deeply—losing the approval of others or losing the favor of God?

We all know what the right answer should be! We know what we want to say! But let's be honest, the "Solomon" (i.e. Old Adam) within us often gets the best of us, more often than not, does it not? We, too, can be tempted to seek the approval of the world instead of God's approval.

- We often remain silent when we should speak up for what's right.
- We often hide our faith to avoid offending others.
- We often follow the crowd instead of standing firm in our beliefs.
- Or we let the things of this world consume us, leaving little room for God.

It's true, isn't it? And if it happened to someone as wise as Solomon, it can certainly happen to any of us – new Christians, long-time believers, even pastors. We all face these temptations.

But here's where the story of Jesus in the Temple offers more than just teaching and example, but also great comfort. Imagine Joseph and Mary's fear and anguish. They believed Jesus was lost. He wasn't where they expected him to be. For **three agonizing days**, they searched for him.

I remember a time many years ago, when shopping at the Moline Walmart when my children were just toddlers. My son Justin was always fascinated with a lobster tank that they used to have in the meat department with live lobsters. While Karen filled the cart with groceries, Justin wanted to see the lobsters crawling around in the tank, so he and I, and my daughter Katie walked over to take a look. We had to visit the lobsters every time we went to Walmart! So Karen walks up with the full cart, and the first question out of her mouth is, Where's Katie? I swear I only diverted my attention for a second, and in that time she was gone. Thus began a frantic hunt for our daughter. I immediately headed to the doors hoping that nobody tried to snatch her away.

At that time, there used to be a McDonald's in the back of the Walmart. It's no longer there, but there was a bench outside with restaurant with a life-sized resin statue of Ronald McDonald seated on the bench. It turned out that Katie decided that she wanted to go see Ronald McDonald, but didn't bother to tell me where she was going. (Ronald held as much attention for Katie as the lobsters did for Justin.) That entire panicked search took maybe three minutes, but Mary and Joseph searched for three days. They checked all the places a 12 year old boy might be—the movie theatres, the arcades, the McDonald's—or wherever teens in Jerusalem hung out in those days—they were looking for Jesus in all the wrong places (as we often do). Finally, they found him in the Temple. And Mary says: **"Son, why have you treated us so? Behold, your father and I have been searching for you in great distress."**

Ah, yes! **"Your Father and I."** When ever I heard those words as a child I know I was in trouble! "Your father and I..." or "Wait until your father gets home..." Or even worse—when they bring our your use your full name including your middle name, you know you were in big trouble!

And what does Jesus say to his frantic and anxious parents? ***"I wasn't lost! Didn't you know I must be in my Father's house?"***

The truth is, it's we who are lost, not Jesus! We're the ones who have wandered away from God. But Jesus came ***to seek and save the lost***, as Luke's Gospel tells us.

The Gospels are full of stories of Jesus finding the lost, and we'll hear many of those accounts in this coming Epiphany season. He finds disciples and calls them to follow him. He forgives sinners. He heals the broken and restores the lost. He brings hope to the hopeless.

Make no mistake, you didn't find Jesus—He found you! Every religion other than Christianity thinks it's our responsibility to find God, to reach out to God, to please God... to make a decision to follow Him, but no! We were lost and unable to find our way to God. Spiritually blind—couldn't find Him if we wanted to! In fact, we were dead in our trespasses and sin... And dead people can't do anything.

Even after his crucifixion, when it seemed like Jesus was, indeed, truly lost to death and the grave, Mary Magdalene and the other women went to the tomb, expecting to find a dead Jesus—again looking for Jesus in all the wrong places. But it was the resurrected Jesus who found them! He found his disciples hiding in fear. He found the two disciples walking to Emmaus. He found his disciples struggling to catch fish on the Sea of Galilee. And in each encounter, he brought them back home – back to faith, back to forgiveness, back to a new life of resurrection.

And this good news applies to you too. Throughout this new year, we'll continually hear the incredible story of Jesus: how, although he was sinless and enjoyed the favor of God, he willingly endured God's wrath on the cross for our sins and our foolishness. He became the sinner so that we could become righteous.

After three days in the grave, he rose triumphantly and ascended to his Father's right hand, where he reigns eternally. He never leaves us, but constantly intercedes for us, providing the forgiveness, life, and wisdom we desperately need.

Just like Joseph and Mary, we may not always understand everything that happens in our lives. But like Mary, who carefully pondered and treasured all these things in her heart, we too can treasure the words and deeds of Jesus.

As we reflect on the truths in His Word, our faith will deepen, our wisdom will grow, and our hearts will overflow with mercy and love. This new life that Jesus offers us will flourish within us. And when we stumble and act foolishly, reflecting on His Word will also cultivate repentance in our hearts.

True wisdom, in the end, consists of *repenting of our sins and receiving our Lord's forgiveness*. It means placing our trust in Him, not in our own goodness, wisdom, faithfulness, strength, or works. He's the source of all we need, providing us with the grace and mercy we could never earn on our own. He nourishes us with his body and blood in the Holy Communion.

The fleeting approval of the world is ultimately meaningless. Only the enduring favor of God brings true and lasting joy.

Today, Jesus is still here in this very house of his Father, just as he promised. He is with us. And because of him, we too can have a home in our Father's house—for eternity. We are his beloved children, and this is where we belong. In the Name of Jesus, Amen.