

Luke 2: 41-52  
Creekside COB  
December 31, 2006

**“What Are We Supposed To Do Now?”**

Twelve years had passed since the birth. Bethlehem was still Bethlehem. The stable behind the inn was holding livestock just as it had long before Mary had delivered her baby in it. No one considered designating it as a religious shrine or putting it on the National Register of Historic Places.

The shepherds left Bethlehem and never looked back. Twelve years later they were still herding sheep, as they would continue to do until the day they died. After they offered their gifts, the Magi returned to Persia without telling Herod where the new king could be found. Twelve years later they were still at their trade--reading palms, consulting the stars, and telling people who sought their services things like, *“Avoid all travel and doing business with strangers when the moon is in the seventh house, and Jupiter aligns with Mars.”*

Twelve years later, Jesus went to Jerusalem with Joseph and Mary to observe Passover, as they did every year. Only the men were required to go, but Joseph made it a family ritual. This is the only story in the gospels of an event from Jesus' life that happened between his birth and the beginning of his public ministry. We can only presume what transpired during those years. But the story before us provides a glimpse into the challenges of raising the Son of God.

Events that take place in Jerusalem are important in Luke. When Jesus was only days old he was presented at the temple in Jerusalem. Thirty-three years later he would die in Jerusalem. In today's text we find him doing something that foreshadows what is to be expected from Jesus.

First, let me tell you about the time I felt pure panic. Lisa was four and John was two. I was outside watching them on a summer afternoon when the phone rang. Those were pre-cell phone days, and I had to walk at least twenty feet to get the phone. The call lasted no more than a minute, but when I returned, they were gone. I ran around the house and didn't see them. I called their names. No response. I dashed back into the house and checked every room. They weren't there. I ran next door to the church and around the building, hollering their names. No response.

Of course, I imagined the worst. What if they had been abducted? I couldn't think straight, so I raced down a side street to the next block. I looked left. Nothing. I looked right, down a cul-de-sac and there they were, walking hand in hand without a care in the world. When I caught up to them, they were smiling and Lisa told me what fun they had had, and I, being the sensitive father I was (and still am), said, "Don't you ever, EVER pull a stunt like that again!!!"

Mary, Joseph, and Jesus were returning from the Passover. They *thought* Jesus was with them, but he had remained in Jerusalem and his parents didn't know it until they had been gone an entire day!

It's tempting to wonder how it could have happened. What kind of parents wouldn't know their son was missing for such a long time? What sort of son would knowingly let his parents leave *without him*? If something like this happened today, we would report Joseph and Mary to Child Protective Services and assign Jesus to parole officer from the Juvenile Justice System.

When Joseph and Mary realized he wasn't with the friends and relatives who traveled with them, they hurried back to Jerusalem to look for him. This was in pre-Amber Alert days. There was no one to help them. Three days passed before they found him, sitting in the temple, listening to the theologians and asking big questions for his age. His parents could have cared less about the amazing impression he was making. They had a more pressing concern. "Young man, where have you been? We've

been worried sick, running all over this city looking for you. Your father and I don't deserve to be treated this way." Sympathetic parents might say, "You tell him, Mary. Give the lad something to think about." But Mary and Joseph were the ones who had something to think about.

Jesus said, "You should have looked for me first right here. Didn't you know I'm supposed to be in my Father's house and be about by Father's business?" Joseph and Mary were sick from worry, and now their twelve-year son was talking back to them. Family relationship issues go through our heads when we hear this story. But Luke isn't concerned about how careless Jesus' parents were or what a brat Jesus was. He sets the stage for much a broader purpose.

Then I wonder—could Mary have forgotten the visit from the angel Gabriel and the promise of what her child would become? Had she forgotten about the shepherds and wise men? Did she think that something terrible would happen to the boy upon whom the future of the world depended? What about all that she had seen and heard and pondered in her heart? It is tempting to raise such questions, but Luke wasn't concerned about how careless Jesus' parents were or what a brat Jesus was. Luke sets the stage for much a broader purpose.

This incident between Jesus and his parents was a preview of the tensions that Jesus would create throughout his life. Who was Jesus' father? Mary said, "*Your father and I have been looking for you.*" She used "father" to mean an earthly, legal father. It assumed that Jesus was obliged to follow the rules established by Joseph for their home. But when Jesus said, "Didn't you know I must be in my Father's house?" he uses the term that means "heavenly father." Following this father meant more than following the rules of the house. It meant fulfilling the mission that God had given Jesus.

Early in his ministry Mary and Jesus' brothers were concerned that Jesus had lost his marbles. They sent someone to tell him, "Your mother and brothers are here to see you." Jesus replied, "Who are my mother and brothers?" By saying this he didn't

disparage his family, but he taught that family was something much bigger. “My mother and brothers are those who follow me and abide in my Father’s love.” He said that following him would create conflict in families. When caught between competing loyalties, Jesus said to follow the narrow way, thought it would lead to difficulty and hardship. He said that all the things the world considers charming are rubbish compared to seeking God’s kingdom.

This text raises questions for us. We are given a glimpse of what happened twelve years after Jesus had come. What are we supposed to do now that another Christmas has come and gone? The manger has been empty for 2,000 years now. The shepherds and the magi left Bethlehem and lived out their days in the light of what they saw and heard.

If you haven’t done so already, you will soon be back to what you were doing *before Christmas*. Have you asked yourselves if you are you returning with the gifts that God has given in the birth of His son? Twelve-year old Jesus asked his parents, “Didn’t you know I must be about my father’s business?” All these centuries later Jesus asks us, “Don’t you know that you are supposed to be about my Father’s business?” What is the business we are to be about?

This is the end of the written portion of the sermon.