

Sermon Preached on Second Sunday after Christmas (January 3, 2016)

Happy New Year again. You know, it's important to start the year right, isn't it? That's why we make resolutions each year - to start it off right! Nobody ever follows through, of course, but it's important to start right! Right?

One of the things I love about today's Gospel is that Jesus doesn't actually seem to be off to a good start.

Let me back up and say there are several things I really like about this passage in the gospel - and I think it gets sold short by most of us.

First, this is the first appearance of Jesus after his infancy. Twelve years have passed since the magi visited. Well, the magi don't appear at all in Luke, but that's beside the point. The point is, this is his earliest post-baby appearance - and it's one in which he gets in trouble.

Second, it is the only passage showing Jesus as a kid. Which makes you wonder why Luke went out of his way to write it. More on that later.

Third, this passage really shows how Jesus embraced the full range of humanity. I mean right at the onset of puberty! Complete with all the adolescent attitude. If we translated his response to a more modern expression, he might have said, "Where did you think I'd be? Duh!" Or "Seriously? You had to ask where I'd be?"

Fourth, this passage shows the saintliness of both Mary and Joseph, because if I had done anything like that, my parents would not have contented themselves with, "Child, why have you treated us like this?" And if I had answered the way Jesus did, I promise you my mother would not have treasured it in her heart!

But seriously, Luke had a reason for including this little slice of life that nobody else thought of.

I suspect it is precisely because Jesus' first appearance after the nativity is NOT of him performing a miracle or being baptized (where a miracle also happens when God speaks). It's of him giving his parents attitude.

Of course, Jesus is the Son of God, and it does make sense therefore to search for him in the temple, but they went to Jerusalem every year, and up to this point, Jesus had never pulled a stunt like this.

I would argue that it is precisely because Jesus is twelve that things change, and Luke wants us to see that change. Because he is hitting adolescence - that awkward period of life when the lights start popping on, and you start seeing the world in a new way. You start seeing yourself as a unique individual and begin the long process of separating from your parents.

For Jesus, this would mean a moment of clarity about who he is, and an awareness that he belongs at the temple - or wherever he can talk about and be in the presence of God.

On a practical level, this is also the age when your parents would trust you in a crowd more, so they're not watching over you as carefully as before, which gave Jesus a perfect opportunity to wander off and not be missed.

So, what's Luke saying with this little episode? That Jesus did not step out of nowhere as a fully formed adult, as Mark and John make it seem. He didn't just make an appearance as an infant and then disappear until adulthood as Matthew writes it.

These can give the impression that Jesus wasn't really truly human. Indeed, a lot of people thought exactly that. As God's Son, many thought he could just show up in human form whenever he wanted, skipping over the awkward or uninteresting or "unimportant" parts.

Luke says all of Jesus' life was important. Jesus was fully human, with all the hormonal changes that come with it. The cracking voice, the zits, and the attitude that are unavoidable in human beings.

Luke wants us to know that Jesus really and truly - as the collect for today proclaims - "humbled himself to share our humanity." And that, in my book, is a pretty good start. Amen.