“MY CHILD IS THE SON OF GOD”

Luke 2:40-52

Have you ever driven down the street and seen someone with a bumper sticker on their vehicle that looked like this one? [show first slide]

The fact is that parents are often proud of their children (as are grandparents of their grandchildren). They want to share with everyone just how smart or wonderful their kid is. Right? Totally understandable. But can you just imagine how Mary and Joseph must have felt raising literally the perfect son? They knew who their boy was. An angel, Zechariah and Elizabeth, the shepherds, the wise men, Simeon and Anna – all had born witness to Mary and Joseph who their son was. If they had put a bumper sticker on their donkey it would have read, [show opening slide] “My Child Is the Son of God.”

Today’s lesson is in a most unusual passage, Luke 2:40-52. Very little is recorded in the Bible about Jesus growing up. There is only one passage – this passage here – that shows us what Jesus was like as a boy. This is the only place in scripture that records the words of Jesus prior to age 30. For this reason this passage is very significant. It’s quite unique and as you will see it is most profound.

We just came out of the Christmas season where we focused on the events surrounding Jesus’ birth. Matthew and Luke tell us a lot about what happened when Jesus was born. Just to set the stage for our story today, the last thing we see about Jesus’ life chronologically after His birth is…

The wise men follow this very unusual star from Jerusalem. There they stop to consult with King Herod who tells them “Go and search diligently for the child, and when you have found him, bring me word, that I too may come and worship him” (Matt 2:8). They then make the short 7-mile journey and arrive at the “house” in Bethlehem where Joseph and Mary and the infant Jesus are now living. Jesus is no longer a newborn baby. He is probably about a year old, perhaps a little less than that. When the wise men see young Jesus, they worship Him and offer Him expensive gifts suitable for a king – gold, frankincense, and myrrh.

“And being warned in a dream not to return to Herod, they departed to their own country by another way” (Matt 2:12).

When Herod realizes the wise men have “tricked” him, he’s furious. He issues a decree that all male children under the age of two living in and around the city of Bethlehem are to be killed. Herod hopes to eliminate this new king of the Jews he had been told about. But Herod’s evil scheme to thwart God’s sovereign plan fails. Earlier that same day an angel had appeared to Joseph in a dream and warned him of Herod’s plan to kill Jesus. So Joseph, Mary and Jesus are already well on their way south of Bethlehem and headed for the safety of Egypt.

The family remains in Egypt until the death of Herod a few years later. Joseph may have considered settling in Judea where he has relatives. But when he finds out that Herod’s son is now the ruler of Judea, he reconsiders and heads back north to Nazareth in the region of Galilee.

All we are told about Jesus’ childhood in Nazareth over the next decade or so is where our passage begins. READ Luke 2:40.

Twelve years goes by. Jesus grows from being an infant, a toddler, a young child, a little boy to being 12 years old. He’s almost a man. In the Jewish culture age 13 was when a Jewish boy transitioned to manhood. So Jesus is now a twelve-year old boy. That’s where verse 41 picks up. READ Luke 2:41-52

The question many have asked is, at the age of 12 is Jesus aware of who He is? Yes. V 40 tells us that He, fully human Jesus possesses the wisdom of God. He has the mind of God. Hebrews 4:15 says that Jesus can relate to our human weaknesses and temptations by personal experience. He “was tempted as we are yet without sin.” Like we all did, Jesus has been going through the physical, mental and emotional developmental process that all humans go through. After all He is fully human. By the age of 12 Jesus has begun to think like God. Not only is He fully human but He, unlike us, is also fully God. So I believe based on our text this morning that Jesus understands who He is. I believe He is fully conscious of His identity and His mission even at age 12.

V 41-42, Jesus’ parents, Joseph and Mary are devout Jews. They travel from Nazareth to Jerusalem every year to celebrate Passover. We don’t know if Jesus went with them every year or not. The Bible doesn’t say. But we DO know that Jesus went with them when He was 12. So the three of them travel to Jerusalem in the safety of a large caravan of pilgrims. It takes several days to make the 80-mile journey on foot. Can you imagine when they get to Jerusalem what must be going through 12-year old Jesus’ mind as He watches the killing of the Passover lambs in the Temple complex? Assuming that Jesus knew fully His mission at this point, He understands that HE is the Lamb of God, that 20 years or so from now HE will be the one sacrificed for the sins of the world. It’s a fascinating thought!

V 43-45, After the weeklong celebration is over Mary and Joseph depart Jerusalem and head for home with their traveling party. The Passover itself is just one night. But it is celebrated in conjunction with the Feast of Unleavened Bread which is a weeklong event. So they would have been in Jerusalem for about 7-8 days. The boy Jesus stays behind in Jerusalem, but His parents don’t know this. Remember this is a large group they are traveling with. Mary and Joseph assume that their son is in their group of travelers. They’re not concerned. Jesus has always been where He is supposed to be. They have never had a problem with Him. Well, after a day’s journey down the mountain, thru Jericho and into the Jordan River valley, the travel group stops to rest late that afternoon. It is then that Mary and Joseph discover that Jesus isn’t with them. At first light the next morning they return to Jerusalem (alone? we don’t know for sure) and they immediately begin searching for Jesus around the city of Jerusalem. It’s a large city with a lot of people. You can just imagine how frantic they are.

V 46-47 After three days (most scholars see this as a day traveling out, a day traveling back and a day searching) they find Jesus in the temple. What’s He doing? He’s sitting among the teachers, listening to them and asking them questions. And all who heard Jesus were “amazed” at His understanding and His answers. Here we see Jesus at age 12 in the role of a student. He’s listening. He’s asking questions. He’s interacting with the various Jewish teachers. These educated men marvel at what Jesus knows.

Enter Mary and Joseph

V 48 Their astonished reaction – why were they astonished? After all, they already knew who He was. They also knew what His level of knowledge was. So why would they be astonished at the scene that was before them? The Bible doesn’t say. What I believe is that most 12 year olds left alone in a strange city for 3 days would probably be scared. Not this boy. He’s sitting their calmly talking to the teachers. But Mary and Joseph, they are not calm!

 Mary scolds Jesus, basically, for the distress she perceives that He has caused her and Joseph. “Son, why have you treated us like this – we’ve been frantically searching for you!” Mary took Jesus actions personally as though Jesus had been purposely hiding from them or disobeying them. But that is NOT the case at all and Jesus sets her straight.

V 49, These are the only words in the Bible that we have from Jesus as a child. He replies to His parents: “Why were you looking for Me? Didn’t you know that I must be in My father’s house?” The KJV says, “…about My Father’s business.” This difference in translation is easy to understand because in the original Greek construction it reads literally: “in my father’s…” No article attached. So the various translators have had some difficulty figuring out exactly what Jesus is saying here. What He’s saying is this: “Did you not know that I must be in the place where My Father wants Me to be, doing the thing He wants Me to do.” With this one profound statement Jesus lays out WHO He is and WHY He came. He is in the Temple. That’s God’s house. When Jesus says My Father’s house He’s saying that God is His Father. Which makes Jesus God’s Son. This is huge! And why did He come – to do His Father’s will. In our study of the Gospel of John over and over again Jesus claimed to be equal with God, that God is His Father and that is and must be doing His Father’s will – John Chapters 6, 8, 10 specifically are filled with these claims (and all through the Gospels). Jesus at age 12 fully understands WHO He is – the Son of God – and why He came – to do God’s will. This is a critical doctrine of Christianity. I think that it is the single most important claim that Jesus makes. And He makes it at age 12!

For now God’s will is for Jesus to be here in the Temple talking to these teachers. “Why were you looking for Me? You should have known where I would be! You know what is important to Me!” Given everything they knew about their son, certainly they should have known where Jesus would be and why. Time after time as you read through the Gospel narratives Jesus is expressing this same exasperation with people – “I don’t understand why you don’t get it. Come on, people, this is basic!”

V 50-51, His parents do not fully comprehend the significance of what Jesus just told them. In time they would understand. But right now they don’t. To her credit, Mary keeps all these things in her heart. The ESV says, “His mother treasured up all these things in her heart.”

Well, Jesus submits to His parents. He returns with them back to Nazareth where He continues to grow up. The remainder of Jesus’ youth and early adulthood, 18 years from age 12 to the beginning of His ministry at age 30 (where Luke 3 begins), is summarized in one verse, V 52 “And Jesus increased in wisdom and in stature, and in favor with God and man.”

In closing, what is the one takeaway from this lesson? The most important truth about Jesus is that He is the Son of God. There are a lot of different ideas out there about Jesus. But we Christians need to hold in front of us the most profound truth about Jesus, which He even expressed about Himself at age 12 – that He is the Son of God. Don’t let anybody ever try to convince you otherwise.