



Southwestern Minnesota Synod
Evangelical Lutheran Church in America

Sermon by Synod Minister Heather Culuris

December 29, 2024

Second Reading: Colossians 3:12-17

Just as newly baptized Christians in the early church were clothed with new garments upon arising from the baptismal waters, so all who have received God's gift of life in Jesus Christ are covered with the character of Christ.

¹²As God's chosen ones, holy and beloved, clothe yourselves with compassion, kindness, humility, meekness, and patience. ¹³Bear with one another and, if anyone has a complaint against another, forgive each other; just as the Lord has forgiven you, so you also must forgive. ¹⁴Above all, clothe yourselves with love, which binds everything together in perfect harmony. ¹⁵And let the peace of Christ rule in your hearts, to which indeed you were called in the one body. And be thankful. ¹⁶Let the word of Christ dwell in you richly; teach and admonish one another in all wisdom; and with gratitude in your hearts sing psalms, hymns, and spiritual songs to God. ¹⁷And whatever you do, in word or deed, do everything in the name of the Lord Jesus, giving thanks to God the Father through him.

Gospel: Luke 2:41-52

Jesus grew up in a family that went to the Passover festival each year. It was in this environment of faithful adherence to the law that Jesus grew into spiritual maturity and an understanding of his identity and mission.

⁴¹Now every year [Jesus'] parents went to Jerusalem for the festival of the Passover. ⁴²And when he was twelve years old, they went up as usual for the festival. ⁴³When the festival was ended and they started to return, the boy Jesus stayed behind in Jerusalem, but his parents did not know it. ⁴⁴Assuming that he was in the group of travelers, they went a day's journey. Then they started to look for him among their relatives and friends. ⁴⁵When they did not find him, they returned to Jerusalem to search for him. ⁴⁶After three days they found him in the temple, sitting among the teachers, listening to them and asking them questions. ⁴⁷And all who heard him were amazed at his understanding and his answers. ⁴⁸When his parents saw him they were astonished; and his mother said to him, "Child, why have you treated us like this? Look, your father and I have been searching for you in great anxiety." ⁴⁹He said to them, "Why were you searching for me? Did you not know that I must be in my Father's house?" ⁵⁰But they did not understand what he said to them. ⁵¹Then he went down with them and came to Nazareth, and was obedient to them. His mother treasured all these things in her heart.

⁵²And Jesus increased in wisdom and in years, and in divine and human favor.

Over the last 19 years now, I've been listening to parents around me comment to one another how fast the time goes when you are raising children, from when our children are babies to when they start driving, to when they head

off to college, to the time they may have children of their own. Often you hear parents say things like: “The days are long, but the years are short.” Or “It feels like I just blinked and here we are.” Or I’ve even found myself posting on Facebook looking at my friends children that I still remember as tiny babies saying things like: How did they grow up so fast?

And today, as I read this passage from Luke’s Gospel, with Jesus there as a young person in the Temple, I find myself saying all these things: How did he grow up so fast? Just 4 days ago we celebrated Jesus’ birth. We heard about how his parents could find no room in an inn for him to be born. We heard about shepherds coming to see him and angels singing in the heavens. And now we come back just a few days later, to celebrate this first Sunday of Christmas and our Gospel lesson has us jumping ahead to a story about Jesus as a teenager in the Temple. We might feel like we’d like to bask in Jesus’ infancy days for a while longer. We might feel like we want to soak in the glory and the wonder of Jesus born as a baby among us. But Luke’s Gospel moves us forward today to a time in Jesus’ teenage years. Where did all those years go? Where are all those stories that Mary might have treasured in her heart or recorded into a baby book?

To be fair, once the Gospels tell us about Jesus' birth, they give us very few other details about his infancy and childhood. Matthew's Gospel tells us about the visit of the 3 kings or Magi and then about how the Holy Family is forced to flee to Egypt. Luke's Gospel tells us about Jesus' visit to the Temple as an infant where he is greeted by the prophets Simeon and Anna. There's little else we know from the Gospels about Jesus' childhood. But there is so much we might want to know!

And so today, we jump ahead in our reading to Jesus as a teenager, in the Temple, teaching the elders. This young man, not so long ago a tiny baby greeted by angels, is now in the Temple, teaching the religious elders. His parents had lost him, so they thought, as they journeyed back home from Jerusalem after Passover. His parents worried and worried and searched and searched for him in their group of traveling companions. Can you imagine their conversations with each other? How did we lose the Son of God? Did you lose him? But he was supposed to be with you? Ultimately Mary and Joseph return to Jerusalem and find Jesus in the Temple, teaching the elders.

Luke's Gospel tells us this: After three long and anxious days Mary and Joseph finally found Jesus in the temple, sitting among the teachers, listening to them and asking them questions. Three days. Imagine, 3 days, searching for your

child, a child that has grown up in a small town, not a big city like Jerusalem. And when they find him, they see that all who were listening to Jesus were amazed at his understanding and his answers. When his parents saw him they were astonished too. Perhaps you could say his parents were stunned or in disbelief. But his mother was not speechless and Mary said to him, “Child, why have you treated us like this? Look, your father and I have been searching for you in great anxiety.” Jesus said to them, “Why were you searching for me? Did you not know that I must be in my Father’s house?” Jesus seemed to have a sense of belonging and purpose, as if his Father’s house was obviously where he was meant to be. It is a bit like listening to a teenage trumpet player talking about how making music is what he’s meant to do and that band is where he is most at home. It’s like hearing from an athlete that they feel most alive on the volleyball court. Jesus has found his place. He has found his deep sense of purpose and belonging. And the Gospel tells us that his parents did not understand what he said to them. Then Luke’s Gospel tells us that Jesus went down with them and came home to Nazareth, and was obedient to his parents. His mother treasured all these things in her heart.

This account of Jesus in the Temple and his deep sense of belonging there speaks to me about our own life of faith. Jesus knows where he belongs. He has a

deep sense that he belongs in God's house, his Father's house. Jesus is at home in the Temple from his teenage years to his adult years, worshipping and teaching. We too have a place we belong. We belong in God's house. We belong among God's people. We belong in worship. Through the waters of baptism, we belong to each other.

Yet, let's think for a moment about how we help other people know they belong in God's house and in God's family. When a new neighbor moves into town, how do we reach out so that they know that they too can belong here in God's family? Whether it is a visitor, or a member who has been distant for a while who has returned, how do we help others know that they belong in God's house and to God's family? Perhaps it is a child just learning about church or a co-worker who has struggled with faith, how can we extend an invitation and a welcome so that they know they have a place that will welcome them, a place that will care about them, a place they can be at home?

This week as we continue to celebrate Christmas, I ask you to reflect on Jesus, so at home in the Temple, so comfortable belonging in his Father's house. Ponder as well how we can help others know that deep sense of belonging as they come to worship and learn and encounter God's grace. Amen.