

MINISTRY BY MAIL
Lutheran Conference of Confessional Fellowship
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Second Sunday after Epiphany, January 17, 2016

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(Hymns found in The Lutheran Hymnal, CPH, 1941)
Hymns: 342:129:1, 133, 356, 353:6-7.
Lessons: Psalm 122, Colossians 2:6-15, Luke 2:21-40.
Sermon Text: Luke 2:41-53.
Sermon by Pastor Robert Mehlretter

In the name of Jesus Christ, Dear Fellow Redeemed,

As parents, we sometimes think ‘wouldn’t we like to have obedient children?’ Well, here’s a history of an obedient child although he was really a very special child.

We have here the one authentic historical narrative from the life of Christ in the time between the flight into Egypt and the beginning of his public ministry. The time between the birth of Jesus and the beginning of his ministry is sometimes called ‘the silent years’ because Scripture gives only this one event. Today please pay attention as

JESUS VISITS JERUSALEM AT THE AGE OF 12

- 1. His parents – and he – obeyed the Old Testament Laws.**
- 2. What Scripture tells us about this event.**
- 3. The implications for us.**

“Every year his parents went to Jerusalem for the Feast of the Passover.” Mary and Joseph obeyed the ordinances and laws of God. Joseph would likely have gone to Jerusalem three times each year, for the festival of Pentecost, the Feast of Tabernacles, and the festival of Passover. The Law required that the men appear before the Lord three times in the year, and the celebration of the Passover was one of the festivals when such attendance was demanded. The women were not included in the command of the Lord, but Mary likely would have gone to celebrate the Passover since many women would have accompanied their husbands and older sons to the capital city.

When the boy Jesus was twelve years old, the parents followed the rule laid down by the elders that sons must be trained in the observance of all religious duties and must take part in the festivals with their elders. It was the age at which the Jewish boys entered the secondary school, of which the most important was located at Jerusalem and usually conducted in one of the temple-courts. These courts surrounded the temple sanctuary and were used as a place for instruction and study of God’s Word. The journey to Jerusalem for these great festivals was in itself a festival, especially for the younger members of the family. The people of the more remote parts of Palestine formed large groups for traveling together, most of them walking. From time to time some of the older members would begin to chant some of the short Psalms of Degrees, Psalms 120-134, including our Old Testament lesson, or some other hymns. These psalms were sung or chanted as people walked up the roads toward Jerusalem and the temple. As they came nearer to the city, and the festival spirit took hold of them, they would pluck flowers and branches from trees and wave them in unison with the cadence of their song. Jesus had been in the company of relatives and acquaintances from Nazareth and the surrounding country, and would have spent the week of the festival participating in Passover activities. Jesus and his parents had stayed all seven days of the feast. It was not a “vacation” but a religious observance.

At the end of the Passover feast Mary and Joseph started back to Nazareth thinking that Jesus was among the group of pilgrims who were traveling together. The roads would have been crowded on the first day after the feast.

But at nightfall the boy was nowhere to be found. ***“After the Feast was over, while his parents were returning home, the boy Jesus stayed behind in Jerusalem, but they were unaware of it. Thinking he was in their company, they traveled on for a day. Then they began looking for him among their relatives and friends.”*** His parents didn’t know where he was. Was he guilty of the sin of disobedience? No, for this is the sinless Son of God we are talking about. At first they weren’t worried.

But ***“When they did not find him, they went back to Jerusalem to look for him.”*** They became concerned, or worried. They feared their 12 year old son was lost in the large city.

They had believed him to be with some of the members of their group. But when there was no trace of him, they hurried back to Jerusalem and searched the city for three days. This search ended three days later when Jesus was discovered in the temple courts.

“After three days they found him in the temple courts, sitting among the teachers, listening to them and asking them questions. Everyone who heard him was amazed at his understanding and his answers.”

He was sitting in the midst of the learned teachers, in the place where the school-classes of the children of the Law were held, the school assembled for advanced instruction to learn the Old Testament. There he was sitting, outwardly in the role of a pupil, but in reality a position in which he almost assumed the role of a teacher. He was giving due attention to the explanations of the learned teachers of the Law, but he was also asking searching questions, to the amazement of all those that were present to hear him. His understanding, his ability to consider a given matter, and the answers which he gave, were of a kind to provoke astonishment.

If they knew where he was from, they probably did not know or recognize Jesus as the Messiah, since he was ‘from Nazareth’ and they did not know he had been born in Bethlehem.

He was not playing with the children but sitting with the teachers at the temple. He listened to them. He asked them questions. He gave them answers.

“Everyone who heard him was amazed at his understanding and his answers.” In Jesus’ actions here, we can see a Messianic fulfillment of these words from Psalm 119: ***“I have more insight than all my teachers, for I meditate on your statutes. I have more understanding than the elders, for I obey your precepts.*** (Psalm 119:99-100 NIV)

“When his parents saw him, they were astonished. His mother said to him, ‘Son, why have you treated us like this? Your father and I have been anxiously searching for you.’ ‘Why were you searching for me?’ he asked. ‘Didn’t you know I had to be in my Father’s house?’”

Where else should the Son of God be?

He was making quite an impression on the teachers. Here was no ordinary boy. His questions and answers showed superior knowledge and understanding. It seemed only natural that he should be involved in his heavenly Father’s work. The King James Version has him asking his parents ‘didn’t you realize that ***“I must be about my Father’s business?”***

Mary and Joseph were astonished and upset when they found him. Any parent who has suffered a missing child can well imagine what Mary and Joseph experienced.

Jesus answers his mother’s question with a double question: ***“‘Why were you searching for me?’ he asked. ‘Didn’t you know I had to be in my Father’s house?’”***

“But they did not understand what he was saying to them. Then he went down to Nazareth with them and was obedient to them. But his mother treasured all these things in her heart. And Jesus grew in wisdom and stature, and in favor with God and men.”

Then he returned home and was obedient to them. He grew in stature, that is, size, and increased in favor with God and man.

We have here a model of obedience to the Fourth Commandment. Despite the way Jesus’ answer might sound, there is no disrespect or disobedience in his answer. He was not rebelling against his parents. His complete obedience is shown in the words ***“And he went down with them, and came to Nazareth, and was subject unto them: but his mother kept all these sayings in her heart.”***

He was already being about his heavenly Father’s business. This is a remarkable lesson about the child who would be “the Servant of the Lord”.

He was obedient for us, so that God could impute his perfection to us and justify us.

Although he had given his parents evidence of a greater and higher calling, still he went with them as an obedient son. He was subject to them. In his active obedience and complete fulfillment of the Law for our sakes he willingly subjected himself to every commandment and yielded perfect obedience, in order to atone, also in this respect, for the sins of the children.

His mother Mary's way of keeping the words she could not immediately understand, of meditating upon them continually, and keeping them fresh in her memory is a good example for all of us. What better way to start a day than with Scripture passages so that we can continually think upon them, at a time when ideas like relying upon one's own 'inner self', or trying to find peace within oneself by some kind of meditation or even "transcendental meditation" is growing in popularity.

Scripture tells us that the growth of Jesus was normal, both mentally and physically. In his state of humiliation not only was his body subject to the general rule of nature, but also his mind. He continued his studies eagerly and gladly and stored up a large fund of knowledge. There was no 'sowing of wild oats' in the life of the sinless Christ. But his best and most excellent growth was that in spiritual matters. He grew in the favor, in the good will of both God and men. He lived his life in full agreement with the precepts which he learned as a human and knew from eternity as true God. He put his full trust in his heavenly Father and gave evidence of this in a life of love, the most perfect example for young men and women of all times.

And what can we learn for our lives from all this?

The Fourth Commandment teaches us with Luther that we are to honor, serve, and obey our parents and superiors. Children and young people should also grow in wisdom and in favor with God and man. Especially in matters of religion and the teachings of Law and Gospel from the Word of God our children should be taught regularly. Teaching about what God tells us should not be saved for the few hours in which we place our children into catechism instruction classes or Sunday School classes.

It is for the honor of Christ that children should attend public worship. I was present once when visitors asked the pastor of a large church where they could put their children during the worship service. The pastor wisely answered that we like to have our children with their parents. What greater way to learn respect and honor and gladly hear and learn the Word of God!

Not only can children learn from this history of Jesus being obedient to his parents and growing in knowledge of God's will. Parents too have responsibilities and can learn just as did Mary and Joseph to teach our children the Words and ways of God. All of us should attend to our heavenly Father's business and place everything else after it.

When Mark records the people in Nazareth, Jesus' home, town asking "*Isn't this the carpenter?*" (Mark 6:3 NIV) we also realize that he also learned secular life skills from Joseph, who was thought to be his father.

So in the history of Jesus visiting Jerusalem at age 12 we find lessons for us and for our children. May the Word and Work of our heavenly Father in Jesus Christ be foremost in our lives, too. Amen.