

Sermon for Sunday, December 29, 2024 - The first Sunday after Christmas

Luke 2:41–52 EHV

Theme: Jesus Did His Father's Business ...

- 1) By Maturing in God's Word as a Human Child,
- 2) By Living His Identity as our Saviour.

⁴¹Every year his parents traveled to Jerusalem for the Passover Festival. ⁴²When he was twelve years old, they went up according to the custom of the Festival. ⁴³When the days had ended, as they were returning, the boy Jesus stayed behind in Jerusalem. His parents did not know it. ⁴⁴Since they thought he was in their group, they went a day's journey. Then they began to look for him among their relatives and friends. ⁴⁵When they did not find him, they returned to Jerusalem, searching for him.

⁴⁶After three days they found him in the temple courts, 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. His mother said to him, "Son, why have you treated us this way? See, your father and I have been anxiously looking for you."

⁴⁹He said to them, "Why were you looking for me? Did you not know that I must be taking care of my Father's business?" ⁵⁰They did not understand what he was telling them.

⁵¹He went down with them and came to Nazareth. He was always obedient to them. And his mother treasured up all these things in her heart. ⁵²Jesus grew in wisdom and stature, and in favor with God and with people.

Understanding who you are has a significant impact on how you live. Teens often experience this truth as they awkwardly try to figure out who they are and how they fit in. However, teens are not the only ones who struggle with identity. We all do this at various stages in life. After all, what else is a "midlife crisis" but a struggle with identity?

As our sermon text for today demonstrates, even as a child, Jesus was keenly aware of his identity! Let us learn how that awareness affected Jesus' life and our own under the theme: **Jesus did His Father's Business ...** 1) By Maturing in God's Word as a Human Child, 2) By Living His Identity as our Saviour.

Part One: Jesus did His Father's Business by Maturing in God's Word as a Human Child.

Although our sermon text is the only account of Jesus' childhood recorded in the Bible, it contains everything we need to know about it. It teaches us that, even though Jesus knew His identity as God's Son, He lived in humility—faithfully fulfilling the duty that God places upon every human child to learn, grow, and be obedient to those in authority over them.

But before we proceed, I want to offer a word of caution regarding ancient legends about Jesus' youth that involve Him performing miracles. These stories are not true. Why do I say that? Because the Bible clearly states that Jesus' first miracle occurred after His Baptism when He changed water

into wine at the wedding at Cana.ⁱ Until that time, it was not God's will for Jesus to perform miracles. Instead, He wanted His Son to live as our substitute, experiencing the same growing and learning process that every human goes through, albeit without sin. This is exactly what our sermon text reveals Jesus doing.

We read: ⁴¹*Every year his parents traveled to Jerusalem for the Passover Festival.* ⁴²*When he was twelve years old, they went up according to the custom of the Festival.*

According to Jewish tradition, every male child became responsible for keeping God's Old Testament Laws at the age of twelve. This age marked a progression in maturity, bringing with it a greater responsibility to learn and apply God's Word to one's life.

“But if Jesus is truly God, wouldn't He already know everything and not need to learn anything?” Yes, Jesus was indeed God and possessed all knowledge. However, as our human substitute, He chose not to use that knowledge for His benefit. Instead, He took it upon Himself to be like us in every way. This means He had to learn and discover the truth about God and His will from His Word, just as we must do the same. He had to submit to God's law, something He willingly did because He constantly desired to learn more about His heavenly Father. Keeping this in mind helps us understand what happened next.

⁴³*When the days had ended, as they were returning, the boy Jesus stayed behind in Jerusalem. His parents did not know it.*

Don't assume that Jesus ignored His parents' call to leave, nor that Mary and Joseph were neglectful for not knowing where He was. The events that unfolded were God's will to allow Jesus' childhood statement about Himself to be recorded in the Bible for our benefit. Therefore, God the Father used Jesus' desire to learn more about Him and His parents' lack of communication regarding their departure to have Jesus remain in Jerusalem while His parents left without Him.

⁴⁴*Since they thought he was in their group, they went a day's journey. Then they began to look for him among their relatives and friends.* ⁴⁵*When they did not find him, they returned to Jerusalem, searching for him.*

You might wonder, “How could Mary and Joseph not notice Jesus' absence for an entire day?” People of that time typically travelled in caravans of family and friends. Just as my children often travel with their aunts, uncles, and cousins instead of with Laura and me during our visits with relatives, Mary and Joseph likely assumed Jesus was doing the same during their journey back to Nazareth. It was only after stopping for the night that they realized their mistake and needed to go back to find Him.

⁴⁶*After three days they found him in the temple courts, sitting among the teachers, listening to them and asking them questions.*

Many paintings depict Jesus teaching the scholars in the temple, but our text indicates otherwise. He was *listening to them and asking them questions*; that is to say, learning from them. It is important to note that the Jewish method of teaching wasn't purely lecture-based; it involved

posing questions and riddles to assess students' understanding and application. Jesus' ability to engage in this manner astonished the temple teachers, which is why our text adds that ⁴⁷... *all who heard him were amazed at his understanding and his answers.*

Jesus exhibited a great desire to both learn God's Word and apply it—much more than an ordinary child. That's because He wasn't just any child; He was the Messiah! As Jesus studied God's Word, He grew in His understanding of Himself, as the entire Scriptures testify about Him.ⁱⁱ He grew in His understanding of His purpose, even though He always knew what it was. This illustrates the mystery of Jesus being fully God and fully human. As God, He knows everything; as a human, He must learn and grow in understanding.

I want to pause here and draw a parallel between Jesus' growth in learning about the Father and Himself through God's Word and what God's will is for us. To be sure, we are not the same as Jesus. The entire Scriptures do not testify about us as they testify about Him! Nevertheless, God wants us to discover our identity in His Word as we learn about Him.

Who are you, and what is your purpose in life? You won't find the answer to these questions in what you or anyone else thinks or feels about you. Only your Creator can reveal your identity to you, and He does so through His Word. And what does the Bible tell you about yourself? It reveals that God created your first parents perfect and holy, in total harmony with Him. However, at the devil's prompting, your first parents rebelled against Him, desiring to become gods themselves. That rebellion separated them from God, corrupting human nature to where it became selfish and unable to recognize what is truly good and God-pleasing. This ruined humanity and made us all deserving of hell.

However, the Lord did not want you lost to hell. He loves you, which is why He sent His Son into the world to be your Saviour. As your substitute, Jesus did what no other human could do: He lived a sinless life in perfect obedience to God's law. Having accomplished this, He offered His life in payment for your sins. After rising from the dead and ascending into heaven to prove your forgiveness, He sent the Holy Spirit through the proclamation of His Word to call you to believe in Him for salvation. Through Holy Baptism, God declared you holy and new, adopting you as His child. Through His Word, He continues to instruct you as to what his declaration means. Regardless of your physical, mental, or spiritual struggles, your past sins, or anything else you think might prevent God from loving you, the Lord continues to love and forgive you as you turn to Him in repentance. He uses His Word to help you grow in faith, knowledge, wisdom, and love—transforming you by His grace into the likeness of His Son.

Yes, even if you were to see little value in yourself and question your purpose in life, God values you so greatly that He gave up His Son for you. He knows your identity and purpose in life and invites you to discover it in Christ as you study His Word. He wants you to use the stations in life He has given you to glorify Him. Even if these vocations seem unimportant to the world—like that of a child learning and being obedient to its parents—they are all significant to God.

Part Two: Jesus did His Father's Business by Living His Identity as our Saviour.

But let's get back to our text and how Jesus was engaged in His Father's business by fulfilling the role His Father assigned to Him at the time: to be a human child who needed to grow in knowledge and submit to those in authority over Him.

We read: ⁴⁸*When his parents saw him, they were astonished. His mother said to him, "Son, why have you treated us this way? See, your father and I have been anxiously looking for you."*

Who was Jesus? In Mary's eyes, He was a child who needed to be reprimanded for causing His parents to worry. However, Jesus respectfully reminds them of His true identity.

⁴⁹*He said to them, "Why were you looking for me? Did you not know that I must be taking care of my Father's business?"*

There was no reason for Mary and Joseph to be anxious if they remembered who He was: Christ, the Lord. The angels had announced this fact before His birth. Didn't they remember? Didn't they know Him well enough to realize they could always find Him fulfilling His God-given responsibility as the child Messiah—learning and growing in His understanding of His Father's will? He was exactly where they should have expected Him to be, doing what He needed to fulfill His purpose.

However, ⁵⁰*They did not understand what he was telling them. Why? Because they failed to recognize His full identity. When they looked at Jesus, they merely saw a child and not the Son of God who, in His humility, was already accomplishing His Father's will for our salvation.*

Do you fully grasp Jesus' identity? If you did, you would never be anxious about anything and would always trust in His promise to work in all things for your everlasting good. Sadly, we often worry and fret, don't we? Oh, what peace we often forfeit and what needless pain we bear—all because we do not fully trust that Jesus is who He claims to be and that He will do everything He promises! May the Lord forgive our lack of faith!

And forgive us He does as we turn to him in repentance. How so? When we look at 12-year-old Jesus, we don't just see an example for us to follow in studying God's Word and being obedient to those God places in authority over us; we see our Saviour living as our substitute: earning for us the righteousness we need to stand before God. As we look to Jesus in faith, God the Father credits to us His Son's perfect obedience as if it were our own. Through faith, Christ's identity becomes our identity, as the Bible declares: *you are all sons of God through faith in Christ Jesus.*ⁱⁱⁱ

Let's return to our text: after Jesus proclaimed his identity to his parents as God's Son who came to do His Father's will, ⁵¹*He went down with them and came to Nazareth. He was always obedient to them. And his mother treasured up all these things in her heart.* ⁵²*Jesus grew in wisdom and stature, and in favor with God and with people.*

It's important to note what God's will was for Jesus in His early years. It was not to showcase His identity by performing childish miracles, as some myths portray. No, His Father's will was for Jesus to embrace His station in life as a child, student, teen, young adult, brother, cousin, friend, and neighbour - growing in understanding, wisdom, and love. The works Jesus did during this time

were not what the world would deem great; yet, in the eyes of His heavenly Father, they were great as He lived His life in perfect submission to His Father's will to earn for us the righteousness we need to be saved.

May that wonderful truth inspire us to embrace our identities as God's forgiven children. How? By studying His Word, rejoicing in His forgiveness, and using our stations in life to glorify Jesus by living in obedience to His Word – all in grateful response to who Jesus is and everything He did to save us. Amen.

ⁱ Cf. John 1:1-12, especially verse 4 and 11.

ⁱⁱ Cf. John 5:39

ⁱⁱⁱ Galatians 3:26 EHV