

First Sunday after the Epiphany: Luke 2:41–51

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Wisdom. We usually associate “wisdom” with people who are older. The young are quick with the facts but tend to be a bit short on experience, knowledge, and general common sense.

Wisdom comes with experience, gray hair, the school of “hard knocks.” The last thing you expect is wisdom from a twelve year old. And that’s what this morning’s Gospel delivers to us – the Wisdom of the universe, Holy Wisdom, packaged in the form of a twelve year old kid from Nazareth who is in the temple to be examined by the teachers on the eve of His becoming a man.

That’s how Mary and Joseph lost Him. You see, up until the age of twelve, a child walked with the women on their pilgrimages to Israel. At twelve, a boy could walk with either the men or the women. So it was one of those cases where, “I thought he was with you” and “I thought he was with you.” Where He was was with the temple teachers who were there to question Him to see what He had learned from His parents and from the teachers in the home synagogue. Had they done their job with the boy? Was He ready to take His place with the men of Israel?

This is also why Luke includes this story here to wrap up the infancy and childhood chapter of Jesus’ life. It’s the end of Jesus’ childhood. From this point on, He would have been considered a young man and no longer a child. In Jesus’ day, they had no concept of “adolescence” or of “being a teenager.” You were either a child or an adult, and twelve was the border line.

This was no ordinary twelve year old who was dropped off at the temple by His parents. This is the wisdom of God in the flesh. Holy Wisdom. The Wisdom who orders the universe, who sets the sun, moon and stars in their course, who orders and governs all things so that we perceive Him in the laws of nature. There was more wisdom in the tip of that Child’s little finger than in all the teachers of Israel and the world. And yet He deigns to sit among them as a student, answering their questions, and impressing them. And being obedient to His parents as any Child. But He is not any Child. He is God’s Child, His elect Son come to save the world from Sin, Death, and Hell. You wouldn’t know that to look at Him there in the temple, or for that matter in the manger, or on the flight to Egypt, or working in the carpenter’s shop in

Nazareth. He just simply blends in as one of us because He is literally one of us, Immanuel, God with us.

Today is the 2nd Sunday after Christmas, a kind of liturgical no man's land. We don't really know what to do with it. It's the twelfth and final day of the 12 days of Christmas, in case you're counting. And it's about the time when Christmas has pretty much run out of steam. Tomorrow is Epiphany, the "Gentiles' Christmas" and the visit of the Magi guided by a star to the young Child Jesus. We don't always get two Sundays to reflect on the Mystery of Christmas, and this closing episode of Jesus' childhood gives us occasion to look back on the whole sweep of how the Son of God came to be with us.

There is the visit of the angel Gabriel, first to Zechariah in the temple to announce the coming of John. Then the visit of the same angel to the Virgin Mary to announce that the Word was about to take on flesh in her womb as her Child. The birth in Bethlehem. The night in the manger. Adoring shepherds and angelic hosts praising God from heaven over Bethlehem's fields. There is the 8th day, the day when He is circumcised as a son of the covenant, where He sheds His first blood under the Law of Moses and receives His name Jesus. There is the 40th day, when He is presented by His parents in the temple as the firstborn to be redeemed by sacrifice and for the "purification" of His parents who really have nothing for which to be purified. But He does this under the Law for us. And there is this episode when He is twelve, sitting among the Torah teachers in the temple, amazing them with His insight and answers. He amazes even Mary and Joseph, who seem to forget for a moment just who He is, and chew Him out like some kid who got lost at the mall. But He had to be in His Father's house. The temple was His place, God's dwelling place on earth. He had to be there because He is the Son of the Father who came to be with us.

All of this He does "for us and for our salvation." To save you. He does our humanity and doesn't leave out a step. The womb, the manger, the home, the workshop, the cross, the tomb. He does it all. He does our humanity to death and in dying rescues our humanity from Death.

There is something hidden going on here, "in, with and under" this humble yet deeply wise Child. The eternal wisdom of the ages has come to earth to dwell. The plan of God from all eternity to bring all things together under one Head and to redeem the fallen creation from its bondage to decay was happening. This Child in the manger and the temple is the One who would do it. The Spirit of wisdom is upon Him. There would be hints to come, little glimpses of what lay hidden under Jesus' humanity – the miracles, the Baptism, the Transfiguration,

and ultimately His death, resurrection, and ascension. But like that one last Christmas gift waiting to be opened on the 12th day of Christmas, the gift of Jesus lay largely hidden, a Mystery to be revealed over the course of time in the fullness of time.

Christ is Wisdom, a wisdom we do not have but long for, a Wisdom we seek to gain but cannot, a Wisdom that no amount of study or experience can acquire, a wisdom that comes to us freely as a gift of God's grace by the Spirit working through the Word, making us "wise unto salvation through faith in Christ Jesus."

Solomon prayed for wisdom. He could have asked for wealth or power, and God ultimately gave him those too. But he sought wisdom. Solomon, the son of David, prayed for wisdom. Jesus, the Son of David, is Wisdom come in the flesh.

Adam and Eve sought wisdom in the Garden. They sought wisdom in knowing good and evil, something God didn't want them to mess with. Good and evil. To know the creation as good and evil is to stand in judgment over the work of God and call something good or evil. But God doesn't make evil. He makes good. Evil is the corruption of the good, using the good against God. And so we become the judge and we become our own gods, deciding for ourselves what is right and what is wrong based on our discernment of good and evil. We've become gods in our own eyes, rather shabby self-centered gods who exercise our dominion to enrich ourselves and gain an advantage over others. We've traded in the image of God to join the animals, following our own instincts and inclinations rather than the Word to which we owe our existence. We have become increasingly "wise" in the ways of the world and fools in the ways of God.

"The foolishness of God is wiser than man's wisdom, and the weakness of God is stronger than man's strength." God sent a boy to do a God's job. God sent His Son, born of the Virgin, cradled in a manger, raised in a household, obedient to father and mother, to save this world from the chaos, darkness, and decay of Sin. We smile a bit at this Gospel reading this morning. The Torah teachers, so wise and learned, being astonished by this seemingly precocious twelve year old who knows all the answers better than they know the questions. We chuckle and say to ourselves, "If only they knew to whom they were talking." We know better. We laugh over the fact that Mary and Joseph seem to have lost the Son of God for a day or so, and wonder "How could this have possibly happened? He's your son. He's God's Son! How do you lose God's Son? What kind of parents were Mary and Joseph that they couldn't even keep track of God's Son on a family trip?"

But that's the nature of divinity hidden in humanity, the Word become Flesh. It's so easy to forget and overlook what God is up to in His hidden and foolish ways. We'll rush the baby to the doctors for his shots, but are we as urgent about Baptism, the washing of regeneration and renewal? We're quick to call 911 in an emergency, but do we call upon the Lord in the day of trouble? We're always in search of our next meal and literally complain of "starving to death" if we miss lunch, but do we experience the same pangs of hunger and thirst for righteousness when we miss the Lord's Supper?

That's why all these self-congratulatory notions of "how I found Jesus" fall flat on their pious faces. We'd never find Jesus. He's too deeply hidden for our reason and senses to notice Him. We're so Sin-addled we look in all the wrong places. Mary and Joseph searched high and low to find Jesus, when the one logical place is the place where He has to be, in His Father's house, where the Word and Sacrament are. That's where you find Him because that's where He finds you in your lostness. You see, He wasn't lost. He's the Lord. We're the ones who are lost. And He comes to us in deep humility to find us.

Wisdom has come to you in Baptism. You've been washed in the Wisdom of God, the Wisdom for which Solomon longed, the Wisdom the wise men sought in their travels from the East, the Wisdom that brings light and life and order to the universe and to your life. Baptized and believing, you are wise to salvation through faith in Jesus. And that's a Wisdom that will bring you to life with God forever.

In the Name of Jesus,

Amen.

SOURCE

Holy Trinity Lutheran Church, Hacienda Heights, CA (htlcms.org), "Luke 2:41-51 / 5 January 2014 (Christmas 2)", posted 2014-01-05 (<https://htlcms.org/2014/01/luke-241-51-5-january-2014-christmas-2/>).