



# Auburn Presbyterian Church

*Passionately loving the Lord Jesus Christ and radiating that love to everyone*

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## **“Pulling at the Apron Strings” Luke 2:41-52**

### **Video: Christmas Really Happened**

Christmas Day is over, though the season of Christmas goes on for another 9 days, making a total of 12, as we all know from the song. Our world will pick up again soon—jobs and kids and school.

Our kids grow up fast too, don't they? I see that in our children in our church. I may miss them for a few Sundays, but then when I get to see them again, and they have lengthened out, grown taller, started to take on a look that is all their own. I love that!

But kids have always grown up fast. Look at Jesus—he was born just two days ago, and already--in the account we read today--he's twelve years old! I hope that we can find not only God's Word on parenting from which to learn, but also to discover something about all the relationships in our lives that can transform the way we think about ourselves and others. That's what I'm after today. Let's go!

Find Luke's gospel in the New Testament, the end of chapter 2, starting at verse 41. This is Jesus at twelve, on a trip to Jerusalem with his parents. You heard the Scripture when I was sitting with our children. Hear it again, as if for the first time. *[text]*

There's a lot to unpack here. It seems as though Luke our gospel writer wanted to prepare us to appreciate the adult Jesus, by preserving this story that has so many clues in it. First, the family road trip. Jesus' parents raise him in Nazareth—not an area famous for orthodox observance of Jewish faith. But it says, “every year” they made the trip up to Jerusalem for Passover. The clue here? Joseph and Mary are raising Jesus to be orthodox. They have done all the ceremonies a devout family would do. It was eighty miles to Jerusalem, and eighty miles back—all on foot. You had to take care of yourselves during the trip and while in the Holy City. At Passover, especially, it got really crowded, and you could count on inflated prices for everything. One source said, an estimated 60,000–100,000 visitors packed themselves into a city whose normal population may have been no more than 25,000.<sup>1</sup> Imagine! This was a real effort for the family, and they did it every year. However, only Passover drew this kind of crowd, and by Jesus' time, Passover had been combined with the Festival of Unleavened Bread to make eight days of celebration that brought all these people in—including Mary and Joseph.

The family had made this trip every year, so *this* year, as they were heading home, the parents expected the same routine as before: Jesus would be wandering around in the caravan to Nazareth, with relatives or friends from his part of Galilee. On such a trip, the first day's travel was always the shortest. It took hours to get everyone “on board”, “headed up”, and finally ready to “move out”. They may have traveled only 8 miles the first day. In a way that was good, for in a big group, someone would inevitably have left something behind, and they could still

hustle back to Jerusalem to find it, or to buy a last souvenir of the journey. That's what happened with Mary and Joseph. After a while, they discovered that Jesus was not with the group, so they broke away and hustled back to the Holy City. They looked for him one full day, and then part of the next. It was "on the third day" that they found Jesus.

Their son is still at the Temple, but not in the worship center where they had gone as a family. Someone had invited him to spend time with the country's finest rabbis in discussions of the Law and its application to daily life. Jesus couldn't pass up a chance to spend time with these guys; this was his passion, and he wanted to learn all he could. It's a friendly exchange, but clearly, the rabbis are impressed with this kid from Nazareth—and so is everyone else in the room. That's where Joe and Mary finally discover him, as in this picture.

Notice what Mary says—it's all about she and Joseph: "How could you do this to us, son?" Well, Jesus wasn't trying to do something *to them*; he was just trying to know God better, and the Temple was THE place to do that. Jesus is sorry for their pain, but also puzzled—*you know me*, he was saying, *why wouldn't you look here first of all?* (When we go to Sears, Sharon knows to look for me in the hardware section; so Mary and Joe should have gone straight to the "teaching department" of the Temple, as Jesus sees it.)

But, clearly, it's time to go. Jesus has been discussing the Law, the Law of Moses begins with what we call the Ten Commandments, and Commandment #5 is, "Honor Your Father and Your Mother". If he's going to obey God, Jesus knows he needs to obey his parents. So the three of them return to the caravan, and then to Nazareth, where Jesus continues to grow up.

I noticed that phrase in the text, Mary stored up all these things in her heart. The same thing was said when the shepherds had come, at Jesus' birth, to tell about the angels' message from God about this baby. Mary had received her own angel message about Jesus' conception, too. It's like, all through these years, Mary is taking snapshots. She doesn't understand fully what is happening, but she is making a mental record of these telling moments. She keeps building a scrapbook about Jesus. At one point in his ministry, she and her younger children will show up and try to take Jesus home—they think he's gone off the rails, abandoning the family instead of taking his place as first-born provider. It won't be until after Jesus is murdered, raised from death, and the Holy Spirit comes to his disciples at Pentecost, that she will become a believer, herself. THEN, it will all "click"—all those snapshots will snap into place as a movie, and she will become a disciple, too. It's from Mary's snapshots, I believe, that much of the nativity material was constructed as we have it, today. Faith grows in spurts sometimes, and sometimes, faith comes all at once.

Well, what do you see here? I see both "obedience" and, "a real adolescent, pulling at the apron strings". This is the delicate dance of the teenage years, where the kids are becoming more and more their own persons, and the parents are pressed to adjust to their kids' growing capacities. This is not easy, and it changes daily—even hourly. Maybe my picture of the arm wrestling contest is a little extreme, but our kids do need to test themselves in the world. They need to test limits. Our kids are changing, and no one likes change—not them, not the parents. This continual shifting can be stressful and exhausting.

So there is a big point here for parents. As our kids get wiser, we have to let them try new things, and walk them through new subjects, new decisions, the application of values--and especially, emotions. We have to stay flexibly connected. On the one hand, we want our kids to grow up. On the other hand, we've always been protecting them. On the one hand, we want our kids to gain new skills and experience. On the other hand, they often are not ready, or the price of a mistake is too high. On the one hand, we want to be friends with our kids. On the other hand, we have to supply consistent structure and boundaries, and this is a pain in the neck with all our other demands we juggle—couldn't we put this off until WE'RE ready? Flexibly connected is the key.

The other big point to make is, Jesus introduces something the parents have not considered. They are not his only parents; he also has a Heavenly Father to Whom he is accountable. Jesus seems to have an ongoing relationship with God, and that makes all his other relationships “triangular”, as Lloyd Ogilvie says it. His relationship with Joseph his adopted father includes his Heavenly Father who is alive, here and now. His relationship with his mother Mary includes his Heavenly Father in an active way. This seems like a mystery to them now, so they don’t talk any more about it, apparently. Mary just “remembers”, and God will use that, later.

Do you live “triangularly”? Do you talk with God about your relationship with your spouse, and listen for what God says? Do you picture your child, and talk with God about him or her? And, have you introduced your child to “triangular relationships” that include God? Do you encourage your child to listen, to believe that God values him or her, and that they can expect to hear from God?

That is a huge shift in living, for most people—even for Christians. For parents, it has a tremendous benefit of knowing that you are not alone, left only to your own devices for decisions with your kids. Parenting can be a lonely occupation. You only learn how to parent, by parenting. So bring God into your awareness as you make choices for your kids.

God loves them, too. God wants the best for them—an expansion of their capacities, knowledge, wisdom, so they are ready to compete in the adult world. Communicate that to them. Let your daughter know she is beloved of God. Let your son know they are important to God, and God has a future and a hope for each one.

Here’s the last point. Jesus from Nazareth seems to be a prodigy. But how many people today think of Jesus as really brilliant? If Jesus is THAT smart, then we have much to learn from the adult Jesus who started as the humble baby born in Bethlehem, with miracles all around. Do YOU think Jesus was really brilliant? Would you want your child to follow him? How would that pull on your apron strings?

“Wise men and women still seek Him.” I want that to be me! I want that to be you! I want that for our children, too.

[This sermon preached to the congregation of Auburn Presbyterian Church, Auburn, California on December 27, 2009, by Rev. Kenneth B. Winter.]