



Good Shepherd Lutheran Church & School  
1611 E Main St., Watertown, WI 53094

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**Epiphany**

**January 5, 2020**

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**“God’s Son as a Boy ”**  
*(Luke 2:52 )*  
Rev. David K. Groth

*Every day, Everywhere, By Everyone....sharing  
the grace of the Good Shepherd.*

**Collect:** Almighty God, You have poured into our hearts the true Light of Your incarnate Word. Grant that this Light may shine forth in our lives; through the same Jesus Christ, Your Son, our Lord, who lives and reigns with You and the Holy Spirit, one God, now and forever. **Amen**

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If you were a 12-year old, left alone in a huge city, where would you go? Mary and Joseph spent three frantic days trying to answer that question, as they searched for 12-year-old Jesus. Would they find him roaming through the market place, looking up at one of Herod the Great's three spectacular towers. Or would he be gazing at Herod's opulent palace on the north end of the city? Would they find him watching the Roman soldiers running their drills in the Antonia Fortress? Would he have snuck into the hippodrome to observe the chariot races?

The truth is none of these held the greatest attraction for Jesus. In fact, he was in the last place most of us would ever expect to find a pre-teen. They found him in the temple courts, asking questions of the theologians.

The text says Mary asked him "Why have you treated us so? Your father and I have been searching for you in great distress." That little interaction sounds so real, doesn't it, so human. When your child saunters into the house well after curfew, you're relieved, for sure, but just like that, soon that relief turns into anger and frustration. "Where have you been? What were you thinking? Why didn't you reach out?"

The answer of Jesus is curious: "Why were you looking for me?" he asks. "Did you not know that I must be in my Father's house?" It's interesting: the first words of Jesus in the Gospel of Luke convey disagreement and misunderstanding between parents and child. His first words also raise more questions than they answer. "I had to be in my Father's house." Joseph and Mary don't know what to make of these words. They don't understand. But in a way, it's intuitive. As God's Son, Jesus will not always conform to our expectations. He will always be obedient to the Father's will, but not always to ours. Sometimes we expect him to bend his will toward ours, to align his will with ours. Sometimes we don't even allow God to contradict us. But in this text, even as a twelve year old, Jesus demonstrates the words of Isaiah 55: "My thoughts are not your thoughts neither are your ways my ways" declares the Lord.

Sometimes we assume that if there is a God, he wouldn't dare have any views that would upset you. But does that assumption really make sense? Is it God's duty to agree with every individual on earth?

If a wife is not allowed to contradict her husband, what kind of a relationship is that? And if we don't allow God or his Word to challenge us and confront us and defy our modern sensitivities, how can we ever have a personal relationship with him? In any truly personal relationship, the other person must be able to contradict you.

Must the true God agree with you on everything all the time? Only if your God can say things you find outrageous and offensive, only if your God can do things that vex and confuse you and make you squirm with discomfort, only then will you know you have gotten hold of the real God.

Right from the start, (even as a twelve year old boy) we see that Jesus is not going to conform to our expectations of him. He will not always do what we want him to or think how we want him to think. He is not a God we can control.

This text also shows us how Jesus grew and flourished as a child under Joseph and Mary's nurture. Verse 52, "And Jesus increased in wisdom and in stature and in favor with God and man."

Jesus already has a high sense of calling. "I had to be in my Father's house." We know that calling was there from before the foundations of the earth. But clearly, Joseph and Mary also nurtured that sense of calling. They didn't get in the way of it. Joseph didn't demand that Jesus stay working with him as a carpenter. Nor did Joseph and Mary try to steer Jesus away from taking all this religious stuff too seriously. No, by their own instruction and example, Joseph and Mary encouraged a close relationship with the Father.

The text says the teachers in the temple were amazed by his understanding. Of course we know he is the Son of God, but that doesn't mean all this knowledge came instantaneously. Jesus was not born with the ability to speak right away, or read. He had to learn. And part of the mystery of the incarnation is that the Word Incarnate had to learn God's Word over time. It didn't come out of thin air. Most of what he knew came from his parents and teachers, as it does with us. It came from being dandled on their knees, hearing of the exploits of Jonah and

Noah and David. It came from sitting as a boy in the synagogue on the Lord's Day in Nazareth, trying to understand what was being read from the Torah, and asking his parents about it on the way home. It came from observing the faith life of his own parents, how they worshipped, how they prayed, how they gave their resources away and served others.

Parents and grandparents, your children/grandchildren are watching you, learning from you. Good, bad or indifferent, how are you teaching them Christian faith and life?

When the children express curiosity about things spiritual, things biblical, those are crucial conversations. Don't take them lightly and answer with a few careless words. Don't shoot from the hip. If you must, say you'll have to look it up in the Bible and get back to them. That tells them you take them and their questions seriously and the Bible seriously. Most of what your children will learn about the faith will not come from me. It will come from you. It's a huge responsibility and we dare not abdicate it.

Jesus increased in wisdom and stature and in favor with God and man. He grew physically, intellectually, spiritually. It sounds like Mary and Joseph provided a well rounded education, and it makes me wonder about the imbalance in the lives of many of our own youngsters. Sports, of course, can become all consuming. Coaches hold the trump cards today, not teachers. Today youngsters are hauled around to regional tournaments many miles away, tournaments that last the weekend and leave no room for worship or service. When will it reach the point when as parents we say "Enough already! Junior probably isn't going to turn pro and make a long, satisfying career of it. And there are more productive things we could be doing with all this time!" All things in moderation, including athletics!

Of course, it also makes me think of all the time our youngsters spend in front of the screens. The LA Times published a report saying young people ages 8 to 18 now devote an average of seven hours and 38 minutes a day playing video games, watching TV, and using a computer for entertainment. Seven and a half hours a day marinating in that. Do you think that has an impact on who our children turn out to be? Do you think a child grows to be all he can be physically, intellectually and spiritually? Young people, what might you achieve if just a

portion of that time went towards going for the A rather than being satisfied with a B, or spending an hour of that time practicing a musical instrument? How about reading a good book, or learning to grow your own food, or taking the dog for a run, or serving meals at Bread and Roses?

When I remember my own childhood and set it up against the boyhood of Jesus, I fell well short. And when I think about my own job of parenting and stand that up against the example of Joseph and Mary, again, I've fallen well short.

What a good thing, then, that God sent us his Son Jesus to do his Father's will! What a good thing that he lived obediently through the childhood years, so that he could be the Lamb without blemish or fault and a right sacrifice for our sins. And what a good thing that Jesus already had this strong sense of calling. "Did you not know that I had to be in My Father's house?" He's claiming a personal relationship with God as his Father. (Note, he says "my Father" rather than "our Father".) He's also claiming divine necessity. Jesus has important work to do, and he knows it already. Everything is riding on it: his great mission and our eternal salvation. He has this singular focus. To open heaven to us, he must live a perfect life. He must also learn, understand and memorize God's Word. He must know it inside and out. This text shows us that, not just as an adult, but already as a twelve year old boy Jesus was the single-minded Son of God on a single-minded mission.

Again, he is not a God we can control. He won't always conform to our expectations of him. However, Jesus is always your Savior. He does his Father's will, and his Father's will is that you too should be cleansed with the blood of Christ, and raised to new and eternal life through him.

Already at twelve Jesus knows what his Father's will was for him, and he sets out to do it with a resolve that does not flinch. Hebrews 12 says, "Let us fix our eyes on Jesus who for the joy set before him endured the cross, scorning its shame" (v. 2). I could never understand the word "joy" in that context, until this idea of vocation came clear: We are most fulfilled when we are in our vocations. Going to the cross, Jesus was in his vocation. He was doing his Father's will. He was doing what he was born to do. He told his disciples, "It is for this reason that I came". It was his purpose, his calling. No one else was called to do this.

Many others were crucified by the Romans; but only one was crucified for you. Only one qualified as the Lamb of God without blemish or defect who could die for your sin and the sin of the world. So the Lenten hymn says, “Yet cheerful he To suffering goes That he his foes From thence might free”. He goes cheerfully because that’s his vocation.

And the mystery and miracle revealed in this text is that Jesus seems to know it already at the age of twelve. He is the Son of God on a single-minded mission. Thanks be to God. Amen.



