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Christmas II
2 January 2011
Grace and Trinity Lutheran Churches, Wichita
Luke 2:40-52

In the name of the Father and of the ✠ Son and of the Holy Spirit

Today's Gospel reading is the only account we have of Jesus' boyhood in Scripture.

We don't hear from the Gospels what life was like for Jesus in school,
or whether He did well in His soccer games,
or if He had a girlfriend in high school.

Our imaginations love to run wild whenever given the opportunity.
And what better place to fill in the gaps, than His adolescence?

But as most things go, there's nothing new here.
Already in the 2nd and 3rd centuries stories like this started circulating:

*"Now after some days Jesus was playing on a roof in the upper story, and one of the children who was playing with him fell down from the roof and died. And when the other children saw it they fled, but Jesus remained alone. And the parents of him who died came and accused Jesus of having thrown him down. And Jesus replied: 'I did not throw him down.' But they continued to revile him. Then Jesus leaped down from the roof and stood by the body of the child, and cried with a loud voice: 'Zenon'—for that was his name—'arise and tell me, did I throw you down?' And he arose at once and said: 'No, Lord, you did not throw me down, but raised me up.'"*¹

And here's another:

*"And some days after, when Jesus was going through the city, a boy threw a stone at Him, and struck Him on the shoulder. And Jesus said to him: You shall not go on your way. And directly falling down, he died. And they that happened to be there were struck with astonishment, saying: 'Where does this child come from, that every word he says is certainly accomplished?' And they went and rebuked Joseph, saying: 'It is impossible for you to live with us in this city: but if you wish to do so, teach your child to bless, and not to curse: for he is killing our children, and everything that he says is certainly accomplished.'"*²

There are many more stories like these in a text called "The Infancy Gospel of Thomas."

It's not Holy Scripture,
but an old fictional tale about the boyhood of Jesus.

I tell you about it because,
if any of us were to write a story about the boyhood of Jesus, it'd look awfully similar.

When we think of the boyhood of Christ,
We think of how mischievous and adolescent He might have been with His *power*.
We consider all the trickery He might have caused,

¹ "The Infancy Story of Thomas" 9.1-3, trans. by Oscar Cullman, in *New Testament Apocrypha* 1:446.

² Ibid.

all the cheating He easily could've accomplished in a game of cards,
knowing all things and being everywhere.

But again, our imaginations run sinfully wild.

We're best to let Scripture give us the Jesus we need.

And in the one story of His boyhood,

His 12-year-old adolescence,

we're set in the context of the Feast of Passover
and His conversations with the Rabbis.

But before we get there, we hear that "Jesus grows, becomes strong, and is filled with wisdom and favor of God" (2:40).

How can that be?

How can *God* grow, get stronger, and gain wisdom?

Isn't God already full and powerful and all-wise?

Yes—

and here we learn of the humanity of this Jesus; remember, God took on *flesh*.

We get a glimpse into His humility—

laying aside His strength, and taking up weakness,

laying aside His glory, and taking up lowly humanity,

Jesus refuses to be known by His divinity alone.

Here the stage is already set for Jesus to suffer—

The fact that He grows, matures, and submits Himself under our own teaching,

Shows us that this Jesus is not like us.

Our ways are entirely opposite from the way of humility and lowliness—

we love to tell people what we know,

we love to boast about being right,

we hate letting others know that we've learned from them.

And here's Jesus,

The very "wisdom and power of God" (1 Cor 1:24) in the flesh,

declaring to all of us that He grows, matures, and *learns* from us.

His ways are *not* our ways.

And so we have this 12 year-old Jesus, humbly learning and growing in this world,

obediently going with pious Jewish parents to Jerusalem for the Passover (2:41).

No 12-year old goes to Jerusalem without a good fight—

and No 12-year old comes to church without an argument either!

But this boy Jesus is different.

Yes, He still has those good 12-year old tendencies and probably bickers with His parents about what is fair and unfair.

That's a big part of His humility,

He takes on *all* that it means to be human—

and that includes children bickering with their parents!

(Most humbling of all, is probably when Mary and Joseph give their,

“Because I said so,” or,

“Because Mom knows best—”

and Jesus goes right along with it; even though He remains sinless throughout.)

And so this 12-year old Jesus goes to Jerusalem with Mom and Dad,

but He doesn't go reluctantly like we would.

When Jesus goes to Jerusalem He gets a taste of where He's finally headed.

Jerusalem is a big deal in the life of Jesus—

even from His boyhood.

Jerusalem is where He'll meet palm branches,

loud Hosanna's,

and “**Blessed is He who comes in the Name of the Lord**” (Ps 118:26).

Jerusalem is where He'll be tried, beaten, mocked, stripped, scourged, and crucified.

The 12-year old boy isn't like all boys, here.

In fact, the word St. Luke uses for “boy” is a very unique and special word in Scripture—

it's the word Isaiah used to describe the suffering servant of God,

“Behold, my *servant* [my *boy*] shall act wisely;

He shall be high and lifted up, and shall be exalted...

He grew up like a young plant;

He had no form or majesty that we should look at Him,

and no beauty that we should desire Him.

He was despised and rejected by men;

a man of sorrows, and acquainted with grief...

Surely He [*the boy*] has borne our griefs and carried our sorrows;

yet we esteemed Him stricken, smitten by God, and afflicted.” (Isa 52:13; 53:2-4)

Jesus is this *boy* from Isaiah—

He's the boy who,

upon entering the Temple, sees His life flash before His eyes.

Jesus is the *Suffering Servant* of God—

even the 12-year old boy.

And to make sure you get all this, notice how Luke includes how long He stayed in the Temple—

without Mary and Joseph, family or friends,
forgotten—
“After three days they found Him in the Temple” (Lk 2:46).

Three Days—.

And what was He doing during that time?
 Sitting amongst the Rabbis, listening, learning, and asking questions (2:46).

Now what 12-year old boy spends 3 days alone in a big city, forgotten by his family, *in Church?*
 What 12-year old boy chats with the Rabbis, the teachers, the *Pastors* about God?

But more importantly,
 What *God* humbles Himself to listen to and learn from a bunch of men talk about His
 own Father and His own nature?

Now when they found Him, Mary and Joseph did the normal parent bit—
 “Where’ve you been, we’ve been worried sick!
 Don’t you go wondering off like that again!”

And Jesus, the 12-year old boy, reminds Mary that He is the *boy*,
 the *servant*,
 the *Suffering Servant of God!*

“Don’t you know I must be in my *Father’s* house?” (2:49)
 “Don’t you know I belong in Jerusalem, on a cross,
 ...*high and lifted up?*”

But they didn’t understand (2:50).
 They don’t understand because they know that their child is God in the flesh,
 and so they seek Jesus in the way of glory, power, and might—
 not in the way of the Cross.

And that’s where we go wrong, too.

We want the powerful, glorious, exalted God—
 we look for Jesus in Spiritual highs,
 in large gatherings of Christians—the more people the more Jesus, we think—
 we feel closer to Him when things in our life are going well,
 and when the music is just right.

But all of that is our way and not His way.

Jesus goes the way of the cross,
 the way of humility,
 the way of lowliness and suffering and weakness.

When Isaiah says that the *boy* will be “high and lifted up,”
 he doesn’t mean raised on a comfy pedestal, or decked out in gold—
 he means lifted high *on the cross!*
 That’s where Jesus’ glory is seen—glory in His suffering.

When left to ourselves,
 we come up with a Jesus that looks a lot like us,
 just better.

But the Jesus given in Scripture is just the opposite.

He’s nothing like us, and worse!

He’s God Himself,
 all-powerful,
 all-mighty,
 all-wise and knowing and perfect—

and yet becomes a little child,
 a 12-year old *boy*,
 a *servant, who suffers*
 for us.

He grows and learns, gets stronger and wiser,
 He gains favor with both God and men—
 He submits Himself to our rules, our laws, and our ways.

If it were any other way,
 there wouldn’t be a cross.
 And if there wasn’t a cross there’d be no shedding of blood.
 And without the shedding of blood,
 there’s no forgiveness of sin (Heb 9:22).

Thank God that His ways are not our ways and that His thoughts aren’t our thoughts.

Thank God, that He became a 12-year old *boy*,
 a servant,
 a *Suffering Servant*
 for us.

In the name of the Father and of the ✠ Son and of the Holy Spirit