

Day after Christmas

Luke 2: 41

Jesus in the Temple

Does it feel to you as though Christmas is hardly over before BAM we're catapulted into a new year? I swear, I saw Valentine's Day displays in the stores this week.

It seems too soon – I love the idea of the 12 days of Christmas, and a slow savouring of the season.

Luke, however, does not. It's his text we have today and here's how he structures his “Christmas chapter”.

Luke 2: 1-7 is the actual birth

8-20 the visit of the shepherds and angels

Then right away Mary and Joseph take him to the temple for circumcision. That would have been 8 days later, according to the law, and then again for Mary's purification. The rules in Leviticus about that are that women are considered unclean after childbirth. A rite of purification has to be done, and when the baby is a boy, she is unclean for 33 days. If the child is a girl – any guesses how long? 66 days.

This is a whole sermon in itself isn't it, but not today.

It's at the temple that they meet Simeon and Anna, then they go back to Nazareth and in the next verse he's 12 years old.

There is no Biblical account of Jesus as a child other than this.

As much as those of you who are parents can identify with the awe and wonder of a newborn I'm guessing that you can just as easily identify with that feeling – that “where did the time go?” he was just a baby and now he's 12????

and with all the soul searing pain that goes with parenting a child who is negotiating the transition into adulthood.

Can you picture that scene? Sure you can: they would have made that trip to Jerusalem at least once a year every year of his life. It was 17 hours on foot, I'm told, with no breaks, so most certainly they would have camped overnight, especially if there were little ones or old people in the company.

Probably Jesus, as he got older, would walk with the other boys rather than his parents.

At night, probably they'd gather him in – it was dangerous for pilgrims on the road. They were perfect picking for thieves and robbers. Remember the good Samaritan? Same situation. Going to Jerusalem for the festivals people would be carrying more money than normal, and maybe defenses would be down.

Most Jews travelling to Jerusalem from Nazareth would have made a detour so they wouldn't have to travel through Samaria. Otherwise they'd have been considered ritually unclean and unable to participate in the temple worship.

As a parent, you'd be protective, but as your child grew, you'd give him or her more and more freedom to be with friends instead of with you....

we don't know what happened while they were in the city. It was Passover, and they'd have celebrated as was the custom, but....

all we know is that they started home when it was over.

Assuming he was with the other boys, or other relatives, they travelled a full day. Probably it was at night that they begin making camp, tired after the day's journey, everyone is calling their kids....can you feel that in your gut? That growing panic as people keep saying "no, he's not here...haven't seen him...|

You keep looking, trying to stay calm. He's here. He's got to be here. Asking...did you see him? Did YOU?

And then, the trip back into the city. Did they walk through the night? I bet they did. You're not going to sleep anyway, Who went with them? Did they talk, or just walk in silence, letting the silence take them to places of parental nightmares?

Did Mary know somewhere in her gut that Jerusalem at Passover time meant the worst for that boy? Because you know – a few years later, it did.

Anyway, they arrive in the city. Had they narrowed it down, the last time anyone could remember seeing him....

they arrive, sick inside, no sleep, terrified and it takes them three more days and finally they go to the Temple. Maybe to ask for help there?

And there he is.

What did they feel?

Words cant' cut it, right? Relief, joy,
and then pretty quickly, Anger. Deep, parental rage.

There he sits, completely unaware that he's caused them pain, and like any 12 year old, unable to see what the problem was. HE knew he was ok. You worry too much mom.

Yea.

It doesn't go into detail but I bet that was QUITE a trip home. Luke is kind of funny. He says: "*Then he went down with them and came to Nazareth, and was obedient to them*". I'm guessing it involved the first century version of "grounded".

Of all the places we could take this text, I would like to hold up the vision of Jesus in transition. He's coming into his own, so to speak, he's moving from a child to a man into the next phase of his life. (a good textual note that illustrates that is that by the end of this passage, Jesus himself is the subject of the sentences whereas at the beginning he was the object. Luke is VERY good.)

This is a good text for a Sunday where we prepare to move to a new year.

We're told that in first century Palestine, children, boys and girls, stayed at home with parents, mostly with the mother, for the first years of their life. Then, boys were expected to take their place in the world as a man. It was often a hard switch to make. We see Jesus in that transition.

When is it, in our own age, that children leave the protection of the parents, begin thinking their own thoughts, begin the defiance that is almost the job of an adolescent? The process of breaking away and finding themselves?

Where does Jesus go to express that breaking away, that growing sense of who he is, where his real

home is, and to whom he truly belongs?

He finds that in the Temple.

Is it too simple a message for this morning to pray fervently that this place of worship will be for the young people in our midst such a place?

I know they often express their independence by breaking away from the church, especially if it's important to you. Unless they do as I did as a kid: expressed my independence by going to church, partly because it was a great way to tick my father off.

But I digress.

I pray with all my heart that as Jesus found himself in the Temple and it became for him a place of grounding and homecoming

so much so that he found it necessary to clean house, but I'm getting ahead of myself)

I pray that the youth among us who, for all their sophistication, are asking who am I and where is home and to whom do I belong

they will find here a place of safety, wise counsel and loving people who will simply love them and stand with themselves

as Eli did with Samuel - help them to hear and name the Voice when it comes in the night

and give them space and love to grow and discover their gifts

not because their parents are deficient in some way

but this is the way of things.

Because you are good parents

your children will break away.

And we, please God let it be,

we are here as part of the team.

To sit with them in the temple as they ask their questions and amaze us with their answers.

And now, for you yourself – where do you find yourself in this story? Even if you are an anxious and terrified parent

can you see, even for a moment

can you see yourself at this moment of transition

moving away from an old year into a new one

away as well from old ways of thinking, behaving, into more maturity, a way of living more thoughtful, grounded and whole?

I'm going to close with some thoughts taken from a theologian called William Danaher:

“We've come through a season that is at once family centred and often full of family tensions, from money problems to old hurts...those who love one another most, disappoint and hurt one another most deeply. The lovely image of shepherds and stars and angels give way a week later to anxious parents perplexed at their adolescent son's preoccupation with things they don't understand. Will life ever be the same for any of them? For us? Of course the answer is simply, no. Nothing, including our family or church lives will remain unchanged after the incarnation. And that is where the anguished, perplexed hearts of Mary and Joseph share common ground with our own.”

This story is not about a perfect family. Instead, here we see a human family where messy, painful times can be endured, precisely because Jesus knew those times too. God, in Jesus, has entered the mess, and redeems it from within.

On the edge of a new year there is something new, young, and growing in us. In our families. In our churches. In our world. There is a young boy receiving a coat from his mom, another young boy

breaking away from his family to find a home in God, and call us all to join him. There is a part of us all that sits in the temple, growing in wisdom and grace.

As we do, listen to the words of Colossians:

“As God's chosen ones, holy and beloved, clothe yourselves with compassion, kindness, humility, meekness, and patience. Bear with one another and if anyone has a complaint against another forgive each other, just as God has forgiven you, so you also must forgive. Above all, clothe yourselves with love, which binds everything together in perfect harmony. And let the peace of Christ rule in your hearts , to which indeed you were called in the one body. And be thankful.” Col 3: 12-15