

‘To Be About Our Father’s Business’
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based on Luke 2:41-52

A few months ago I preached about how people are uncomfortable with mystery. As a human race, we like questions answered; the unknown made known; mysteries solved.

Today we read a story from the Gospel of Luke that tries to ‘fill-in-the-blank’ and solve the mystery about what Jesus’ childhood might have been like...or at least a portion of it.

This story is the only story of Jesus’ childhood and it is one rich in symbolism and foreshadowing...which is probably why Luke included it.

Luke was a historian...and historians don’t like unanswered questions. They like to fill-in-the-blanks...not walk away from mystery, but try and resolve it.

Historians are like detectives – always searching for the missing puzzle pieces.

So for Luke, it was important that’s Jesus’ birth was recorded in such a way as to validate over and over he was the Son of God; born of a virgin; heralded by heavenly angels; worshipped by shepherds keeping their flocks by night; presented at the Temple; purified and blessed by the Temple priest Simeon and the prophet Anna.

...all this done according to the Law and fulfillment of prophecy...only then the family could return to Nazareth where the child would grow and become strong, filled with wisdom, and the favor of God would be upon him.

Then...this story of when Jesus is 12 years old he distances himself from his parents to sit with the Temple elders...who are astonished at his understanding and answers.

For Luke, this is the story that bridges the birth narrative to Jesus’ teaching ... healing... salvation ministry.

It’s tempting to dissect this isolated story of Jesus’ childhood and get distracted by asking even more questions like “how did Mary and Joseph get so far into their journey home before realizing Jesus wasn’t there? Weren’t they paying attention?”

...but what is more important is to use this story as a lens for how we understand this season of Christmas.

Most of us are recovering from weeks of preparation for about an hour and a half of gift exchanging and opening...sharing a meal together...spending the day with family or friends.

Santa Claus has returned to the North Pole; the Red Kettle campaign has ended; the Elf-on-the-Shelf has been stored away for another year.

If you bought a live tree I imagine you’re tempted to take it down soon so the needles stop falling into the carpet.

Even our own altar will be dismantled after today and most of the flowers will go to their forever homes.

Christmas of 2015 has ended as far as many are concerned. The 12 days of Christmas surely must refer to the 12 days *prior* to Dec. 25, not the following 12 days.

The Christmas hype is over and the sales are on... and we here at church are left with a peculiar story about the boy Jesus who embarrasses and worries his parents and says some strange thing about being in his Father's house.

What do we make of that?

This is one of those stories we need to read with a kind of double-vision.

One story tells us the basics about Jesus' childhood. We learn he loved his parents despite being what could be described as 'disrespectful'; was wise beyond his years; and already had a firm grip on his purpose in this life.

The other story tells us symbolically there are some important clues that foreshadow Jesus' life and death...

- three days his parents searched; symbolizing the three days of death and darkness before the light of resurrection
- then there's the interaction with the Temple elders...those who this day were amazed at Jesus' answers and many years to come would revile his answers
- here Jesus is already laying claim that the Temple was his Father's house, not a den of thieves

Did Jesus know this would be the same place it would all end... where he was to be tried and sentenced to death? Luke doesn't say, but certainly he knew!

It's as though the birth narrative of heralding angels, worshipping shepherds, and wonder needed a transitioning story from joy and wonder to Jesus' life work of justice and salvation.

This story of Luke's helps us not only make the transition as well, but to focus our attention on what's next. Are we ready to move from the stable and be about our Father's business?

Part of my sermon preparation process is to not just read scholarly commentaries but also some blogs...(you know, these days everyone has an opinion for just about anything)...but I'm careful about what I internalize when reading the blogs. Some of it isn't worth using...and some of it I find helpful.

A man named Dennis Bratcher summed it all up for me. Typically I don't appreciate this kind of candor, but Dennis' honesty struck a chord with me.

He wrote,

"I often tire of the same old whining from some Christians about the commercialization of Christmas. It is understandable that non-Christians want to secularize this celebration. They do not follow the Christ! Let them have their secular holiday. We are about something different. After Christmas, What? There is an easy answer for Christians. Let us be about our Father's business! For we who are in our Father's house, Christmas is not over this Sunday! It has only begun."

As we move from the stable into our Father's house and out into the world, may we too be all about our Father's business!

Thanks be to God!

Let us pray:

Holy and loving God, guide us this day into a greater understanding of what it means to be about your business. Help us to see that this house of worship is more than a building; more than a sanctuary; but a place of something different: a place where we find joy in the midst of sadness; peace in the midst of angst; and love in the midst of an often unloving world.

Lay claim to us as we prepare our hearts and minds to enter into the new year ready to do your business.

Bless our time together on New Year's Day as we share a meal together with our friends and neighbors.

Bless our children as we endeavor to teach them what it means to be about our Father's business.

Bless this congregation as we continue to strive to be a fully loving and welcoming faith community for as many people as we can.

We pray for those in need of healing; who need peace in times of conflict; and who need your comforting Spirit to lift the burdens of life.

Trusting in the power of your grace alone, we lift to you the prayers we list on our prayer page; the prayers we named out loud; and the tender prayers we keep locked deep in our hearts.

In Jesus' loving name we pray. Amen.