

**Holy Trinity Lutheran Church
Des Moines, WA
July 17, 2011**

Luke 2:41 - 52

A Week in Nazareth

1. Why the astonishment with the boy Jesus?

Hymns: 411 – 735 – 379 – 391

Closing: 260

All Scripture quotations from the NIV

This past week 70 children, a bunch of teens and a few adults had the opportunity to travel to Nazareth, the small town in northern Israel where Jesus was raised. We had a great time. Each day, we would gather around the town well to sing songs and talk about our lives, just as they did in Bible times. We travelled through the ancient town, to the marketplace, where we met the shopkeepers of Jesus' day. Most importantly, each day brought about a visit to Mary and Joseph's house, and it was there that the kids heard some amazing stories. One of those accounts comes from Luke 2, verses 41 to 52, and we'll take some time this morning to share in our children's amazement.

"Every year his parents went to Jerusalem for the Feast of the Passover. When he was twelve years old, they went up to the Feast, according to the custom. After the Feast was over, while his parents were returning home, the boy Jesus stayed behind in Jerusalem, but they were unaware of it. Thinking he was in their company, they traveled on for a day. Then they began looking for him among their relatives and friends. When they did not find him, they went back to Jerusalem to look for him. After three days they found him in the temple courts, sitting among the teachers, listening to them and asking them questions. Everyone who heard him was

amazed at his understanding and his answers. When his parents saw him, they were astonished. His mother said to him, "Son, why have you treated us like this? Your father and I have been anxiously searching for you."

"Why were you searching for me?" he asked. "Didn't you know I had to be in my Father's house?" But they did not understand what he was saying to them. Then he went down to Nazareth with them and was obedient to them. But his mother treasured all these things in her heart. And Jesus grew in wisdom and stature, and in favor with God and men."

Everyone who heard him was amazed, those words tell us. When his parents saw Jesus sitting there in the temple, they were astonished. It really is a remarkable story, isn't it? And whether you've heard that story 100 times or you've just now heard it for the first time, I'd like you to think about this question...Why? Why the amazement with the boy Jesus sitting in the temple?

As we think about that question this morning, let's first turn our attention to Luke, the author of this Gospel. Did you know that Luke wasn't one of the 12 main disciples of Jesus? He wasn't even one of the many thousands who followed Jesus during his life on earth, observing everything that he did. In fact, Luke wasn't even from Jesus' native country of Israel. He was a Gentile doctor, a convert to Christianity, and he tells us in the first couple verses of his gospel that these events that he wrote about were handed down to him by eye witnesses. He says in Luke 1:3, **"Since I myself have carefully investigated everything from the beginning, it seemed good also to me to write an orderly account for you."** When Luke was led by the Holy Spirit to write his Gospel, he was much like a journalist writing a story. And as he went around, interviewing the eyewitnesses and collecting the facts, Luke's work gives us something quite unique when it comes to accounts of Jesus' life.

As I waded through the countless ads that come in for VBS programs, this Hometown Nazareth program really stuck

out, and not just because it was absent of robots and pandas and cowboys. It stuck out because it turned the focus to a time in Jesus' life that is often forgotten. As we turn through the Gospels, (Matthew, Mark, Luke and John), we hear a lot about Jesus' birth, we hear a lot about his public ministry which started when he was 30 years old, and we hear a lot about his death and resurrection. And rightly so! But the time in between – from young toddler through the teenage years and into adulthood – we don't hear as much. And this week gave the kids an opportunity to focus on what Jesus was like as a kid. This account of Jesus in the temple is one of only a few stories from Jesus' adolescent years and it really is an incredible story. As Luke interviewed the people associated with this particular story, they probably reminisced just like grandparents telling their favorite stories from their youth.

When asked by Luke for his story, the teacher of the Law who was in the Jerusalem temple probably shared what he remembered of Jesus eagerly. Speaking to Luke, he marveled about the boy's eagerness to learn. Many times he had seen other Jewish boys filled with excitement and fervor during their first trip to Jerusalem for the Passover, but this boy was different. Three days after it ended, the boy was still there in the temple soaking it all up. He reflected on the questions asked by the boy, like those of a teacher, but asked with great respect. He remembered how the teachers had continued to talk about the answers that the boy had given, even after he had left. He recalled thinking that maybe this young student would grow to be an influential teacher of the Law in the temple. He made it clear that everyone in the Jerusalem temple was amazed.

When Luke approached Jesus' cousin to find out what he remembered, he spoke of Mary and Joseph. He remembered the look on their faces when they couldn't find Jesus anywhere in the group of travelers going back to Nazareth. His parents told him that Mary and Joseph scoured the city of Jerusalem, fretting every minute about their

son's safety in the large capital city. He talked about the shock that they had when they finally found Jesus, in the last place you would expect a 12-year-old to be. They had found him in the temple, soaking up the words of the teachers! It was such a remarkable story. Everyone who heard it was astonished!

And as you listen to the story, you are probably amazed as well, but why? The people who witnessed those things didn't yet know who Jesus truly was. The teachers in the temple didn't know that Jesus was the Son of God. Even Mary, Jesus' mother, probably didn't completely understand what her son was. Of course they would be amazed at a 12-year-old, left by himself in Jerusalem for 3 days, learning at the feet of the teachers of the Law. They were amazed by the boy Jesus in a purely worldly way. What they witnessed that day in the temple was uncommon. They marveled at Jesus the same way that we marvel when we see a young prodigy singing on TV or dazzling on the athletic field. But you and I know who this boy is. As we read this story 2000 years after the fact, we read with the knowledge that this young boy is the Son of God and the Savior of the world. With the blessing of having the entire span of Jesus' life laid out for us on paper, we know that this is the same person who would die on the cross and rise again.

With the knowledge that this boy Jesus is Christ the Lord, it shouldn't really amaze us that the Son of God would find such joy in the words of Scripture. It shouldn't surprise us that he would still be enthused, even after the many days of Passover worship. We shouldn't be astonished, and yet we are. Why?

Is it because the attitude we see in Christ is the exact opposite of what our attitude often is? We hear that Jesus, a 12-year-old boy, can't get enough of the Word; and then we can think back to what our attitudes were like as young teens to the word of God. In the temple, we see Jesus' obedience to the will of God the Father, this desire to love and honor his Word; and then we think about the struggle we had just to

make it here today. Is our amazement in this story simply in the truth that we don't compare to Jesus at all?

Let me tell you something. If we make it our habit to continually compare ourselves to Christ, we are going to be continually amazed/appalled at what we see. Where we see failure in ourselves, we will always see perfection in Christ. And that will always lead to a feeling of shame because of what we are not able to do. We will be astonished at how poor our attitudes often are. But Luke did not go through all that investigative work to give us this story so that we would be ashamed every time we hear it by what we see in ourselves. Instead, he wants us to focus on Jesus. And, so, we ask again, "Why the astonishment with the boy Jesus in the temple?"

We can be amazed by the boy Jesus because of his words spoken in response to his parents, **"Didn't you know that I had to be in my Father's house?"** The Greek that Luke wrote in is even clearer, "Don't you know that it is necessary for me?" Why is that response so amazing? Here is Jesus, a 12-year-old boy in the large city of Jerusalem all by himself, and he is LIVING as the Savior of the World. What he was doing for those 3 days in the temple was not just an example for how we should treat the Word of God. It was much more. It was an essential part of his saving work. He knew that it was necessary for him to obey every single one of God's commands. We call this the active obedience of Christ. It is something that we often forget, but as we hear this story, we are amazed by it. Jesus was showing respect for the Word of God just as it is expected in the 3rd commandment when God says, "Remember the Sabbath Day and keep it holy." He was loving the word of God in ways that we often fail. But he wasn't doing it so that we would one day hear this story and see our own faults. He was doing it so that we would hear this story and see his perfection. That is what is astonishing about the boy Jesus. He lived every single moment of every single day, from the time he was born to the

day he was crucified on the cross in perfect obedience to the law of God.

And we can be astonished every day at what that perfect life of obedience means for us. So often, our focus is all about Christ's death and what that means for us. In doing that, we fail to remember Christ's life and what that means for us. Yes, Christ came to die that ugly death on the cross for each one of us, but just as importantly, he came to live that perfect life of obedience for each of us. He came to live in perfect accordance to the demands of God, in our place. He came to live perfectly so that we can confidently share in his perfection. Despite what we know about ourselves, we can rely on what we know about our Savior. He lived perfectly and we can boast in his perfection, given to us. Because of his perfection, we have been set free from the demands of the Law that is upon us. God now sees us in a new light.

In that light, free from the burdens of our sin, and trusting and relying on Christ's perfection, we can live and take joy in following Christ's example. With the burdens of "Do this or else" lifted, we can treasure every opportunity we have to sit and listen and discuss the Word of God. Because of Jesus, the Word of God brings joy to our hearts and praise to our lips. We can gather each Sunday to listen in amazement to the story of the Savior, who came to this earth to live in obedience and die for us.

And because of Christ's saving work, we can be sure that the most amazing part of this story has yet to happen. That will happen when we are able to marvel at the feet of Jesus when he greets us in our heavenly home. That hasn't happened yet, but we can be confident that it will happen because of what we have seen the boy Jesus do. Amazing! Amen.