

In the name of ✠ Jesus.

There is little that we know of Jesus' childhood. In recent days, we have just heard again of His conception and birth. We just heard how He was circumcised on the 8th day and presented at the temple at 40 days. In a week we'll hear about the visit of the wise men. We know that the Holy Family had to escape to Egypt to avoid Herod's wrath, and that they later returned to their hometown of Nazareth.

After these things, there is nothing until Jesus is twelve years old. Some Gnostic gospels and later writings try to expand on Jesus' childhood with fantastic stories of miracles: healing a sick child and raising another from the dead, fashioning birds out of clay and giving them life, stretching a board cut too short, but neither the sources nor their stories are credible.

Today we have the account of twelve-year-old Jesus in the temple with the teachers. The story focuses a lot on Jesus' parents: their faithful attendance at the Jewish festival, their losing track of Jesus, their frantic search for Him, their surprising incredulity when they found Jesus, Mary's sharp words to Jesus and His response, their lack of understanding, and Mary's treasuring these things up in her heart.

But what does this text tell us about Jesus? For as interesting as the details about the parents are, Jesus remains our Savior, and the Holy Spirit includes this text to tell us about Him. Let me offer a few observations.

First, even as a child, Jesus is a faithful Jew. His parents kept the Lord's command to celebrate the three great feasts, including the Passover: "*Three times in the year you shall keep a feast to me. ... Three times in the year shall all your males appear before the Lord GOD*" (Ex. 23:14, 17). In Jesus' case, Mary also went, not just Joseph, and so Jesus would also have accompanied them. Through His parents, God's favor was upon Jesus, and so He was faithful.

But faithfulness means more than just making a pilgrimage to Jerusalem a few days a year. The Lord commanded: "*You shall love the LORD your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your might*" (Deut. 6:5). Begotten of His Father's heart, Jesus kept this commandment, too, honoring the Father by doing His will, ultimately drinking the cup of the Father's wrath for our sins.

Second, Jesus knew as a child who He was and what His purpose was. While in Jerusalem at the Passover feast, Jesus was not out running around with the other boys while His parents took care of their religious obligations. No, Jesus went to the temple to be with the teachers. Already at twelve, Jesus was about His Father's business, listening to the teachers and learning from them as they taught the Word

of God, asking them penetrating questions, and amazing the people who heard Him by His own understanding.

The Son, being God, knew the Father's business from before the beginning for Paul says, God the Father "*chose us in [Christ] before the foundation of the world.*" Indeed, this is the Father's will for us, that "*all people ... be saved and ... come to the knowledge of the truth*" (1 Tim. 2:4). And so, the Son became one with our flesh in the little baby Jesus, announced by the angels as our Savior and proclaimed in His name as the Lord who saves. Our Savior continued in the flesh with the Father's business, coming to the place of sacrifice to engage with the teachers, but one day soon coming to Mount Zion to offer His own blameless life as the propitiation for our sins.

Third, Jesus, fully God yet fully accepting also His humiliation, for His time had not yet come, Jesus submitted Himself to His earthly parents' authority. Moreover, showing Himself truly to be one with us, Luke tells us that "*Jesus increased in wisdom and in stature and in favor with God and man.*" God's mediator between us and Him is truly one of us (1 Tim. 2:5).

From Jesus' example, let us understand that God commands our faithfulness, and for us, too, He is not talking just about making a pilgrimage to Zion a few days a year. God wants the ongoing faith of our hearts that manifests in the confession of our lips and the fruit of our repentance.

God wants us to come to His house also where His Word is proclaimed and His business is transacted in the holy things He has given His church. "Remember the Sabbath day by keeping it holy," God commands, and we know this means "We should fear and love God so that we do not despise preaching and His Word, but hold it sacred and gladly hear and learn it (Luther, Small Catechism, 3rd Commandment).

This Gospel also highlights the important role of parents in the faithfulness of their children. Following the example of Jesus' parents, our own parents are encouraged in their own faithfulness and, in so doing, contributing to the faithfulness of their children.

All this may sound rather legalistic, and God's law is certainly in view. But God commands this for our good, so that we might receive the grace needed for our salvation, to create and nourish our faith. For we know that we are saved not by our works but by God's grace through faith. And we know that here in the Father's house is where Jesus may be found, doing His Father's business, distributing the things of the Father—forgiveness, life and salvation, received

through faith. Yes, we know that where we are gathered in Jesus' name, there will He be with His gifts.

Therefore, God grant you faithfulness as you continue to seek Jesus where He is found.

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