

Luke 2:41-52

[Jesus] asked, “Didn’t you know I had to be in my Father’s house?”

"I'll be home for Christmas." So go the words of the popular Christmas song. How about you? Did you get home for Christmas? Or did family members travel to spend the holidays with you?

If you were able to go home, I pray you had a blessed celebration. But if you were unable to get home, or if you had other plans this year, you don't have to feel like you missed out on something. There is still time for you to get home before the Christmas season is over. No, not to your hometown. Not to the house where you grew up. Today we have the opportunity to go home with Jesus for Christmas.

Let me explain. In the text before us today, Jesus was not in the place that he called home. He was in Jerusalem, not Nazareth. And he made the journey with his parents to celebrate the Passover, not Christmas. But Jesus felt very much at home because he was in his Father's house. And so, on this 1st Sunday after Christmas, as we celebrate the Christmas season, let's go home with Jesus. And as we do...

Every Christmas movie has them – holiday homecomings filled with strong emotions. And Jesus' homecoming was no exception. There is amazement of the people gathered in the temple courts. There is astonishment on the part of Mary and Joseph. And most miraculous of all, there is divine awareness on the part of the Christ child.

Take a listen: Luke reports that Joseph and Mary and Jesus had gone up *to Jerusalem* to celebrate *the Passover* – that yearly remembrance of when the Lord had delivered his people from slavery in Egypt. Even fifteen hundred years later, pious Jews traveled great distances to participate in the festival and worship. No doubt Joseph and Mary had made the trip to Jerusalem before,

but this trip was special. Jesus was twelve years old, and he went along with them for the very first time.

You can just imagine the sights and sounds of the festival season and the impact they would have had on a 12-year-old child. They would have joined with a growing number of pilgrims and they made their way closer and closer to the Holy City: dozens, then hundreds, then thousands of pilgrims, their voices raised in song, singing out the psalms of ascent as they travelled.

As they approached the city, the buzz would have been palpable. They would have seen the great temple of Herod towering over the landscape high atop Mount Moriah, its hillside stained rust and crimson with the blood of sacrificed lambs. There was the smell of hundreds of thousands of pilgrims jammed within Jerusalem's city walls. The sounds of thousands of animals led to the sacrificial slaughter. There were the shouts of shrewd haggling and the clinking of coins as street merchants hawked their wares. There was the joy and celebration of the Lord's one-time deliverance from Egypt in anticipation of the final deliverance by מֹשֶׁה - the Messiah. All of it would have made an indelible impression on anyone, but especially on the young Jesus, the actual, sacrificial Lamb of God...but more on that in a moment.

When the week-long Feast was over, Mary and Joseph packed up and headed for home along with all of their friends and relatives who lived in Galilee. There was only one problem. Jesus wasn't with them, and his parents didn't know about it. Maybe there was some miscommunication: Mary thought that Jesus was with Joseph or Joseph thought that Jesus was with Mary. Or maybe they didn't see him at first but, rather than hold up the whole group headed back to Nazareth, they figured that they'd catch up with him on the road. It is possible that they assumed Jesus was with the rest of the 12 year old boys buzzing with excitement following their first trip to Jerusalem for Passover.

But whatever the reason, they immediately realize that Jesus wasn't with them. He was in the temple, "**sitting among the teachers, listening to them and asking them questions**" (46). And if that surprises you, you aren't the only one. The people who were listening to Jesus were amazed, too. In the New Testament, the word for "amazed" is often used to express a reaction to a miracle. Jesus healed a paralytic (Mk 2), and the people were amazed. Jesus raised a girl from the dead (Lk 8), and her parents were amazed. Jesus walked on the water (Mk 6), and the disciples were amazed. The people in the temple that day were amazed too, but for a different reason. They were "**amazed at his understanding and his answers**" (47) - a depth of understanding far beyond his years.

And it is an amazement that continues to this day. Someone asks: "Lord, I am a sinner. Every day I sin. Every day I fail. I know that I don't deserve your love. Instead, I deserve your punishment. What possible hope can there be for someone like me?" Listen to Jesus' answer: "**I am the resurrection and the life. He who believes in me will live even though he dies; and whoever lives and believes in me will never die**" (John 11:25).

Another person is confused and asks: "Dear God, there are so many religions in the world. How do I know if I am on the right path? How can I be sure that I am going to heaven?" Jesus' answer is clear: "**I am the way and the truth and the life. No one comes to the Father except through me**" (John 14:6).

Someone out there is hurting. They want to know: "Lord, I try. I try so hard. But it just doesn't seem to do any good. I am tired. I am alone. Where can I turn for help?" Jesus answers with this promise: "**Come to me, all you who are weary and burdened, and I will give you rest**" (Matthew 11:28).

Yes, we hear him speak to us and we are more than just *amazed*. We are forgiven and guided and comforted and strengthened by his answers.

But where we last left Joseph and Mary, they're not feeling so *amazed* by Jesus. They're feeling *frazzled* by him. About a day into their journey, Mary and Joseph realized that an entire day had passed, and they had not seen their son. They had probably been looking for Jesus among their friends and relatives. You know it might have gone: "Say, have you seen Yeshua (as he probably would have been called)?" "No, haven't seen him, but if I do, I'll send him your way." "OK, thanks." But as the day wore on, no Yeshua. Jesus was nowhere to be found. And by the end of the day it became clear: Jesus was still in Jerusalem.

Now we know how the story turned out, but at the time, Mary and Joseph didn't. If you are a parent, maybe you have your own lost child stories. But even if you don't have kids, you can probably relate to losing *someone* or *something* of value at some time in your life. Not a good feeling. Only, Mary and Joseph hadn't misplaced their keys. They had lost their son. And if that wasn't enough to frazzle them, they had lost their son who also happened to be the promised Messiah, the *Savior of the world*, the one hope for a world lost in sin.

Well, after a frazzled three days of worrying and waiting, pleading and praying, sobbing and searching, - literally we're told, they were "beside themselves", they finally found Jesus in the temple. It explains Mary's state of mind when she asks: "**Son, why have you treated us like this? Your father and I have been anxiously searching for you**" (48). Mary and Joseph didn't understand why Jesus had done this to them. And at that point, she probably didn't care. She was just happy to be able to hold him in her arms again.

But the truth is they should have known where Jesus was. They should have known that Jesus was in no real danger. Hadn't the angel Gabriel told Mary that her child would be "**the Son of God**" (Lk 1:35)? Hadn't an angel appeared to Joseph in a dream, instructing Joseph to give the child the name Jesus "**because he will save his people from their sins**" (Mt 1:21)? Wasn't it obvious

that this was no ordinary, 12-year-old boy? He had a divine mission yet to be fulfilled!

But, oh, how easy it is to forget the promises of God, huh? We might be tempted to condemn Mary and Joseph for missing it. After all, we know how the story ends. But we know how our story ends, too, don't we...with forgiveness of sins and a life spent in eternity with our gracious and loving Lord? And still we question God...when we don't understand why the Lord allows hardships to enter our lives...when we go to God in prayer and don't get what we want...when we think we know what is best for us and are astonished when God doesn't follow our direction.

Thankfully, Jesus does not treat us the way we often treat him. Even when we are faithless, he remains faithful. You can see it already in these, his first recorded words during his earthly ministry: "***Why were you searching for me? Didn't you know I had to be in my Father's house?***"

Maybe you remember the King James translation of this verse. Jesus told Mary that he had to be "***about his Father's business.***" Literally ***about the thing of his Father.*** You see, Jesus was born into this world for a specific purpose. Nothing could stop him. Even now, God was preparing him for his divine mission.

Later in Luke, Jesus used *similar* words to describe this mission. Listen to Jesus' resolve as he spoke to his disciples: "***The Son of Man must suffer many things and be rejected by the elders, chief priests and teachers of the law, and he must be killed and on the third day be raised to life***" (Lk 9:22).

And so, in keeping with his mission, Jesus was obedient to his parents and returned to Nazareth. But he knew that he would be in his Father's house again. As he sat and talked with the rabbis in the temple, he knew that the religious leaders of Israel would plot to kill him some twenty years later. As he walked the streets of Jerusalem, he knew that he would walk that way again...carrying his own cross. As he travelled back to Nazareth, Jesus was aware

of the difficult road that lay before him, but he traveled it anyway. He walked the way of the cross for you. He lived a perfect life for you. He suffered for you. He died for you. And on the third day, he was raised to life for you, so that *you* could go *home*...not just for Christmas, but for eternity.

Bing Crosby first recorded, "I'll be home for Christmas (If Only in My Dreams)" in October of 1943. It deeply touched the hearts of Americans, both soldiers and civilians, quickly becoming the number one requested song at USO shows throughout the world. The GI magazine, *Yank*, said that Crosby "accomplished more for military morale than anyone else of that era." One can only imagine the longing so many had to be *home* with family and loved ones, during those years of war and separation, and so many other years like them ever since.

As we sit here today, we also find ourselves separated from loved ones, longing to be with them again, knowing that they are home, with Jesus, already. May *our* journey *home* with Jesus this Christmas give *us* renewed hope and confidence while we await *our* final homecoming with Jesus at our heavenly Father's house, a homecoming prepared for you in heaven. Amen.

*O Savior, Child of Mary,
Who felt our human woes,
O Savior, King of glory,
Who conquered all our foes,
Bring us at last, we pray,
To the bright courts of heaven
And to the endless day. Amen.*