

God Becoming...with Us

King of Glory Lutheran
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Year C: First Sunday of Christmas
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Every person has a journey to become the person God intended for them to be. Jesus is where He believes He needs to be, in the temple learning. As we celebrate Jesus' birth, who will God have us become? How can we grow into who God wants and needs us to be right now? In worship, we too, discover who we are and whose we are.

Luke 2:41-52 ⁴¹Now every year [Jesus'] parents went to Jerusalem for the festival of the Passover. ⁴²And when he was twelve years old, they went up as usual for the festival. ⁴³When the festival was ended and they started to return, the boy Jesus stayed behind in Jerusalem, but his parents did not know it. ⁴⁴Assuming that he was in the group of travelers, they went a day's journey. Then they started to look for him among their relatives and friends. ⁴⁵When they did not find him, they returned to Jerusalem to search for him. ⁴⁶After three days they found him in the temple, sitting among the teachers, listening to them and asking them questions. ⁴⁷And all who heard him were amazed at his understanding and his answers. ⁴⁸When his parents saw him they were astonished; and his mother said to him, "Child, why have you treated us like this? Look, your father and I have been searching for you in great anxiety." ⁴⁹He said to them, "Why were you searching for me? Did you not know that I must be in my Father's house?" ⁵⁰But they did not understand what he said to them. ⁵¹Then he went down with them and came to Nazareth, and was obedient to them. His mother treasured all these things in her heart.

⁵²And Jesus increased in wisdom and in years, and in divine and human favor.

Merry Christmas!

How good it is to see you here on this First Sunday of Christmas! I hope and pray you had a blessed Christmas yesterday. Christ is born for you, Christ is born for us, Christ is born for all.

Many of us have stood around the crib of a newborn baby. Or we've held a very young infant in our arms. At moments like those, thoughts might turn to the future.

"I wonder who this baby will grow up to be?" "What will she become?" "Will he follow in the line of work that his dad chose?"

We all have a path to take. Some believe that God has destined that path for us from the very moment we are born. Others believe that it is more of a give and take with God. With free will, God partners with us to make decisions as we grow.

Even in the four Gospels, the writers give Jesus full knowledge of the life ahead of Him, or He seems to discover it more along the way.

You noticed in our Gospel text, that in some 35 hours since we left on Christmas Eve, the baby Jesus is now 12 years old. My does time fly! I'm guessing, for some of you parents, there were moments during those teenage years, when you wished your child was either still a baby or could be 30 years old. Oh, what a blessing and a struggle to raise kids.

Jesus was in the temple. He was in dialog with the rabbi; asking questions, listening, speaking. By Jesus' age, most young boys would become a student of a rabbi. It appears from Luke's perspective that Jesus was not only in a learning position that day, but also displaying His wise understanding. What He seems not to care about is the departure of His parents.

In ancient times, caravans of people travelled together, so it wasn't unusual that the boy Jesus wasn't with his parents as they departed Jerusalem. But after not finding Him, Mary and Joseph retraced their path to look for their son. You can imagine how worried even panicked they might have been. No cell phones. No cell phone tracking. Three long days later, they discover Jesus in the temple; becoming who God intended Him to be.

When Mary and Joseph question the boy's actions, Jesus protests. "Why were you searching for me? Did you not know that I must be in my Fathers' house?"

How many of you ever heard these words coming from your teen? "How could you not know that?!" "Don't you get it?"

More than once I heard Rev. Paul Hill remind church youth workers that the frontal lobe where decisions and consequences are processed, isn't fully developed until the mid-20's! "Why exactly were you worried about me, Mom?"

But of course, Jesus needed to be in His Father's house. He was learning, He was pushing back on religious authority. He was, even in that early stage, perhaps even testing the waters for what was ahead. He was becoming who God needed Him to be. Where else would He have been?

On this day, just one day after Christmas, I'm asking the question, how does Jesus' birth change us? *Who will God have us become? How can we grow into who God wants and needs us to be right now?*

Yes, most of us are years away from the tender age of 12 when Jesus sat in the temple. But over those years we've developed new skills and maturity and wisdom. Well, some of us! But truly....if we're done growing then life is over. Who does God need you to be right now, in this chapter of your life? How might God be urging you to grow? Furthermore, who will God have this congregation become?

Do we need to grow in the area of hospitality? Or kindness, plain and simple love? What about advocacy? Is God pushing on our hearts to grow in prayer and contemplation? What about ministry with people on the streets?

Every year we hear the stories about Jesus and his life. But do they change us? Do we allow ourselves to be guided by the Holy Spirit, into who God is calling us to be? God gives us these scriptures to struggle with, just as Jesus was pushing on the adults around Him. In doing so, He learned and grew.

Many cultures – including ours – have ‘coming of age’ ceremonies. In the United States it is a drivers’ license and turning 18. In church, we have Affirmation of Baptism, or confirmation. Jewish youth go through their bar and bat mitzvah. In many Latin American cultures, girls celebrate their Quinceanera when they are 15. Not all rites of transformation are so kind. Perhaps it was the bully on the playground who made you stronger. Unfortunately, gangs insist on some bad behaviors to become part of the group. While in war-torn places, young boys are often recruited to the local terror group to become ‘men.’

You and I might be past the formal and informal coming of age ceremonies. But that doesn’t mean God is done with us yet. We have different skills than we did when we were 20 or 40. God can use them. What are you passionate about? What gives you energy every day? Pay attention to those activities that are life-giving....besides golfing...because God might just be calling you to something new.

We, too, benefit from being in our Lord’s house. Not only when we are baptized, but as children, youth, young adults, adults, and in our senior years. In this place, all of us, no matter our age, are reminded again and again of who we are and whose we are. We are children of God, and we belong to God who claims us and loves us and forgives us. As we inevitably experience all the world has to throw at us – those messages of who we are and whose we are, reinforce the foundation upon which we stand. A life of faith undergirds and gives meaning to everything else that happens. Not the other way around.

Many folks might think that church, faith and God are add-on’s. Go through the week and if we have time, we’ll catch the service on Sunday. You don’t think that, because you’re even here the day after Christmas! But really, it’s the opposite. Church on Saturday or Sunday gives us the strength and hope to enter the world for another week. After those six days, we return to hear God’s Holy Word and feast upon a Holy meal. Church isn’t an interruption upon our lives. Church defines our lives when we allow God to mold us and make us and push us!

The opportunities I’ve had to go on mission trips with youth are always incredible trips. Once you get a kid away from home, without their cell phone, it is as if another section of their brain just opens up! But even then, each youth has their own journey, their own maturity rate: physically, emotionally and spiritually. On one trip, we were painting houses on a Native American reservation. One student who was struggling with faith and advocacy asked me why the residents weren’t outside helping us paint their own homes. Another student kept flicking paint on others with a brush. That’s ok! But come evening worship, they all got focused on God. Each one of us grows into who God made us to be.

The older we get, the more perspective we have on that process. Life through the rear-view mirror makes a lot more sense than life through the front car window. We look backwards and can see where God intervened, where God moved, when God stood back and allowed us to decide.

On this Christmas Sunday, Jesus has been born anew in our hearts. Praise God for his coming – for we are reminded of the new life He brings. During His life, Jesus helped people find the life God created them to have. Remember the man living in the cemetery with all the demons? How about the woman bleeding all those years? It was a touch. It was a conversation. It was an exorcism. Over and over, Jesus looked into the souls of those He encountered to help them grow. Their lives were like plants to be watered and fed.

Jesus – at age 12 – was in the temple. He was preparing Himself. This morning, we find ourselves in our church. We can take courage, that even in our life journeys, Jesus showed us the way. Who is God needing you to be in this chapter of your life? How might God be urging us to grow this year?

Jesus was growing with God. He was coming of age. Of what age and wisdom in God are we coming to?

Amen. Merry Christmas!