

St. David's Episcopal Church, Second Sunday of Christmas, 1/2/2021, Luke 2:41-52 (*Elizabeth Felicetti*)

So now it's the second, the holidays are over, and it's time to take down any lingering decorations and start dieting and exercising. Right?

Well, no. Not here in church. Here it is still Christmas: the ninth day of Christmas. Three more days of Christmas are left after today, and then we celebrate the Feast of the Epiphany on the sixth, when the wise ones finally made it to the manger with their gifts. So you all can give each other gifts again on the 6<sup>th</sup>.

Unfortunately, some of you may be sick of Christmas by now. The local radio station that started playing all-Christmas-music-all-the-time in November has stopped. Many Christmas lights are now back in boxes in the garage, or they will be after today. Dry trees are piled up on the curb, stripped of their finery, waiting to be made into mulch.

But these are still the twelve days when we as Christians are called to reflect on Emmanuel, God-with-us. The Incarnation, God taking on flesh and becoming one of us. What are Christmas themes we can still tolerate this late in the twelve days?

This morning's gospel features Jesus at age 12, the only such story in the Bible between his infancy and adult baptism. Many modern parents detest this story because Jesus comes across as a mouthy adolescent, but that's not the point. One important part for us to dwell on during this season of Christmas is, "And Jesus increased in wisdom." Jesus increased in wisdom.

Now how is that possible, when "Away in the Manger" teaches us that "The little Lord Jesus no crying he makes?" This is *God*, right? So God wouldn't cause his parents any trouble. And how can God get smarter? Isn't God immutable—that is, unchanging?

God became one of us. The lyrics to "Away in the Manger" were wrong. Of course baby Jesus cried, and his parents taught him how to eat and how to walk and how to talk. Mary and Joseph taught Jesus about God and took him to temple. They taught him the stories of their faith: about Abraham and Sarah and Hagar, about Shiphrah and Puah and Moses, about the kings and the prophets and the exile.

Jesus didn't come out of the womb immediately knowing everything. He had to learn. And in today's reading, he learned that when you're twelve, you need to leave Jerusalem when your parents do, instead of hanging out in the temple sitting among the teachers, listening and asking them questions.

Jesus increased in wisdom. And he loved the Torah and the temple.

How do you feel about the Bible and the church? How important are they to your daily life? People seem to be abandoning institutional churches in droves, or at least that's what John Pavlovitz's latest book seems to encourage—and a disclaimer here: I have not read the actual book, only a review of it. I don't want to read the book, because I find church attendance depressing enough as it is. I know that people are unhappy with churches and have been for a long time. I used to be one of those people, back in my twenties.

I still understand the disenchantment with institutional religion. Becoming ordained did not mean that the church's warts went away. I really do get it, and I share a lot of the concern others do. But readings like today's remind me that I am not going to continue to grow as a Christian all by myself. I need to read the Bible and be in community with other Christians. I need to be in community with you. And you all need to be in community with other Christians. You aren't going to figure it all out by yourself, sleeping in and having brunch on Sunday mornings.

Jesus was the Messiah, and he needed time in the temple. He even got in trouble with his parents because he loved temple so much. When they found him he was there in community with others, reflecting on what it all meant.

One final point, as we continue toward the star that culminates in Epiphany: "They found him in the temple, sitting among the teachers, *listening* to them and *asking them questions*."

Jesus was listening to them, not saying "Hi, I'm God. I already know everything. Listen up!" Instead, he was listening to *them*. Jesus listened and learned. He learned by *asking them questions*. I emphasize to the kids in our congregation how important questions are, and this goes for you grown-ups, too. I do not have all the answers. Neither does some pastor or bishop you heard somewhere else. And you do not have all the answers. Back when Jesus was twelve, he didn't have all the answers either.

Questions are hugely important to people of faith. Questions are my favorite part of Bible study. Here at St. David's in our Wednesday Bible studies, we read the passages ahead of time, and then spend our hour reviewing questions together, questions that apply the stories to our own life.

What questions do you think Jesus asked in the temple that day?