

## **Sermon 30<sup>th</sup> December 2018**

### **The boy Jesus in the temple – ‘Christmas is just the beginning’**

**Sermon by The Reverend Hannah Higginson at All Saints Parish Church Wokingham**

**Luke 2:41-52, Colossians 3:12-17**

Opening prayer – may the words of my mouth and the meditations of all of our hearts be now and always acceptable in your sight, o God our rock and redeemer.

Its only been 5 days since Christmas and yet already in our gospel passage we find Jesus is 12 years old! Time flies in the opening chapters of Luke! Jesus has been to Jerusalem with his parents to celebrate the Passover festival – they are on their way home when they find that he is missing from their group of family and friends.

Upon reading this passage, as a relatively new mother, I was struck by how poor Mary and Joseph must have felt upon this realisation. They search high and low and then return the day’s journey to Jerusalem to continue their search there. It took them 3 days to find their son. I can only imagine their panic, fear, desperation as they search for their first-born child. It reminds me of a tale recounted by my mother-in-law, fairly frequently because I think it still haunts her 20 odd years later, of when her son – my husband – went wandering off in John Lewis and was found by a kind lady wandering down the street. The panic and terror she felt wondering where her son had gone, its tangible as she recounts the story years later.

And yet, actually - would recounting Mary and Joseph’s traumatic parenting experiences really be a reason for Luke to include this account in his gospel? This surely is not a story about Mary and Joseph, it’s not a story for us parents to empathise with, it must be more than that. For Luke this is about a revelation, a revelation of who Jesus is.

Luke was writing probably about 30years after Jesus’ death and resurrection and he writes for a mainly Gentile audience – non-Jews. And what those gentiles of the C1st would have recognised straight away, which we don’t being born into a very different time and culture, is Luke’s use here of a very common Greco-Roman narrative structure. It was standard at this time to tell a story of a child doing something extraordinary age 12, that would foreshadow the eventual greatness of that same child. This standard narrative structure was made very popular and used across the Roman Empire to tell stories about the Emperor Caesar Augustus. In using this structure, then, Luke not only writes in a way that is familiar to his readers and speaks clearly to them that Jesus is a child who will grow into someone extraordinary, but also and crucially, Luke here places Jesus alongside the great Caesar Augustus and challenges the latter’s lordship and authority.

In Luke's account of Jesus there are a few key things to look out for, note the three days that it took Mary and Joseph to find Jesus – foreshadowing the three days from his death to resurrection. This passage reaches a real climax as Jesus' parents find him in the temple and we are offered a revelation of who he is. Firstly Jesus' humanity is highlighted in their words, 'your father and I have been searching for you' – Jesus has earthly parents, he is still a child and will grow up living a human life. And then in the next verse Jesus' divinity is highlighted in his own words, 'did you not know that I must be in my father's house?'. And in this juxtaposition the mystery of who Jesus is, is once again revealed. I say once again because although this passage comes in only the second chapter of Luke, already the gospel writer has made clear that Jesus is someone incredibly special, in fact he has made clear his unique nature of being both human and divine. If we take a quick recap, we've had the foretelling of Jesus' birth, the pregnant Mary's visit to her cousin Elizabeth when the unborn John the Baptist leaps in his mother's womb at the very presence of Jesus. We've had the angel's message to the shepherds and their visit, and we've had the presentation of the baby Jesus in the temple at which his extraordinary nature was recognised by Simeon and Anna. These first two chapters of Luke set us up nicely for Jesus' adult ministry beginning in chapter 3, confident that Jesus was - even from before his birth, -someone unique, someone from God, not just chosen but 'begotten' as we say in the creed.

What this story reminds us of then, just a few days after Christmas, as all the hype starts to drift away and the shops slash their prices and start to prepare for the next big thing – is that Christmas is not the end of the story, in fact it is just the beginning. The Christmas story, just like this morning's gospel, shows us who Jesus is, it reveals his extraordinary nature and role, and in doing so it prepares us for all that will follow, in his life, death and resurrection. This in fact leads us nicely into this morning's other reading, chapter 3 of Paul's letter to the Colossians, which tells us what all this means for our lives, how the reality of who Jesus is affects our every day living.

If you are looking for a new year's resolution, then I invite you to look no further than Colossians 3. This passage is packed full of what it means to be a Christian - clothe yourselves with compassion, kindness, humility, meekness, and patience; forgive each other; clothe yourselves with love; let the peace of Christ rule in your hearts; be thankful; let the word of Christ dwell in you richly; and – the best bit - whatever you do, in word or deed, do everything in the name of the Lord Jesus, giving thanks to God the Father through him. I feel like whole books could be written about this passage, but it is just such an inspiration for us as we consider what Jesus' incarnation means for us and our daily living. This is what living the faith looks like.

And just because we don't have all day and because I love it, I would like to spend a moment just on that final verse.

First of all, this is about doing everything in Jesus' name, I think it makes you examine your life and consider the way in which you use your time and how you lead your life. Is this how Jesus would like me to be living? Secondly, it is about cultivating a spirit of thankfulness, whatever you do, in word or deed, do everything in the name of the Lord Jesus, *giving thanks* to God the Father through him. As we begin a new year how can we be more thankful? One thought is the 365grateful movement which was started a couple of years ago by a young woman called Hailey. She was feeling down and struggling in life, and so she began each day intentionally noticing anything she was grateful for in her life, from the beauty of nature to the wonderful people around her. For Hailey she found it helpful to take a photo each day of her thankful moment, and keep a record of the year's good things, and with this she charted her personal journey from feeling miserable in life to an unhindered appreciation for the world and her life. Maybe that's something you could try in 2019?

This Christmas season let us be reminded of who Jesus is – it is there in the gospels for us to read about – his divinity and his humanity, distinct and yet perfectly united. And let that inspire us in our daily lives, that the God who created the heavens and the universe came down to live as one of us, amongst the earthiness of our humanity he lived, and showed us how to live. And so let us live our lives in his name and to his glory, being thankful for all his gifts - whatever you do, in word or deed, do everything in the name of the Lord Jesus, giving thanks to God the Father through him.