

Can you imagine losing the Son of God? It's bad enough losing your car keys, your wallet, some important papers. But losing the Son of God? Your parents know the anxiety all too well. You turn around at the grocery store, and your child has wandered off. Or your attention is diverted for just a moment at the mall, and you lose your kid in the crowd. Well, Mary and Joseph lost Jesus for an anxious three days in Jerusalem. That is one of several paradoxes in today's Gospel, and they all revolve around the great grand mystery of the eternal Son of God come in human Flesh to save us.

Today's Gospel reading from Luke deals with the only other childhood story of Jesus. Again, it happens in the temple in Jerusalem. This time when Jesus was twelve years old. The "custom" Luke is referring to is the custom of twelve year old boys appearing before the teachers of the Torah in the temple before they turn thirteen and are obligated to take their place with the men of Israel at the annual pilgrimages. Up until then, they were considered children and did not have to come to Jerusalem for the annual feasts. Age twelve was the turning point. This is God the junior higher.

The custom was for the teachers of the Torah to examine the young boy to see if he had learned his lessons well in the home and at the synagogue. A kind of "final exam" before he became a man of Israel. What they found utterly amazed them. His understanding, His answers, His grasp of the Torah. Who was this kid? Well, it turns out that this twelve year old is the Word of God in the flesh, the Torah enfleshed. He is the holy Wisdom of God come to dwell with us, here in the humble form of an almost teenager. Again we are confronted with the mystery and the humility. God takes on human flesh and appears before the teachers of the Torah as a student! If only they had known to whom they were speaking!

Mary and Joseph also are perplexed, and who could blame them? How many parents can claim to have the Son of God as their child? They were traveling with a large group of extended relatives, and you know how it goes, everyone assumes the kid is with someone else. Amazingly, they travel about a day's journey before taking head count and realizing that Jesus is nowhere to be seen. And after asking all the friends and relatives in their party, they rush back to Jerusalem to search for Him.

Now you might reflect for a moment that if they had believed that Jesus was actually the Son of God in the flesh, they wouldn't have had an anxious second. He's God of God, Light of Light, true God of true God, He can take care of Himself. Can God be lost? Not really.

They found Jesus in the most logical place to look for Him. The temple. Where else would you look for the Son of God but the dwelling place of God with men? He was in His Father's house, doing His Father's business, a fact that at least momentarily escaped His mother Mary. "Son, why have you treated us so? Behold, your father

and I have been searching for you in great distress.” She seems to have forgotten, at least for the panicked moment, who her Son was. And who could really blame her? Who thinks of God in terms of a junior high kid?

This aspect of Luke’s Gospel paints a very realistic picture for us, a very historical picture. In an ideal mythical world, Mary and Joseph would always be marveling at Jesus’ divinity, and Jesus would always be a perfect chubby cherub with a glowing nimbus floating over His head. But the reality is different. The glory of God is buried, hidden from sight. Jesus appears as any other twelve year old, except that His wisdom amazes His teachers. And Mary and Joseph are prone, as we are, to forget who Jesus really is and trip over the seeming weakness of His humanity.

The same is true of Jesus’ sacramental presence among us. We see the water of Baptism and forget the Word that makes this a washing of rebirth and renewal. We see the humanity of the Scriptures and forget that it is the very Word of God. We see the bread and the wine of the Supper and forget the fact that it is, by the Lord’s own words, His very Body and Blood. In the same way, we too trip over the ordinariness, the humility, the mundaneness of the Word in the Flesh.

The mystery of the Incarnation, the reason for the season of Christmas, truly does boggle the mind. How can the Creator of all things become a creature? How can the God become Man? How can the infinity and holy become the finite and the lowly? And whether we ponder the baby in the manger, the 40 day old child in the arms of Simeon, the 12 year old in the temple among the teachers of Israel, or the man on the cross bearing the sin of the world, we are confronted with this same wondrous mystery - the eternal Son of God has come into our human flesh to save you.

Jesus had to be in His Father’s house. This was His place. The temple and Jesus run together. The building was the old temple, the dwelling of God with Man. Jesus is the new temple, He is the Word made flesh dwelling among us. His place was to be the Head under which heaven and earth come together as one. His work was to reconcile the creation with the Creator, to bring all things together in His all-embracing death on the cross. This was His eternal destiny, a plan established in the Godhead from before the foundations of the world.

Jesus is the obedient Child for all of us rebel children. Where Adam rebelled, and where we his children rebel, Jesus was obedient. Think of it. The Lord of all became subject to his parents. Lived under their authority. Obeyed them. When they said, “clean your room,” He did it. When they said, “Take out the trash,” He took out the trash. With love and honor and respect. He honored the authority of the temple rabbis, though He Himself was the Wisdom of God.

Christ humbled Himself and become obedient even to death on a cross. Christ as Lord of all became the servant of all, and humbled himself in obedience to His own Law even to taking the punishments of the Law on Himself and dying on a cross for you who cannot keep the law, for your forgiveness.

The focus is on the 4th commandment here. Honoring father and mother, and in so doing, honoring God. In this commandment our Lord gives honor to His deputies, to father, mother, and other authorities. We do not obey, love, honor, and cherish those over us as we ought. We do not see them as gifts from God. We bridle against restrictions to our liberty, we rage against those who would say “no” to us. From our birth, we are natural born rebels. And when we rebel against father and mother, we are rebelling against our Father in heaven who is the Source of all authority in heaven and on earth.

So when Jesus comes as the perfect Child, He doesn't do so as an example for you to follow. You don't need an example. You have the 4th commandment. The problem is that you and I can't do the 4th commandment, and as soon as the commandment comes into view, we become worse than ever. This is our condition as rebellious children. And no matter how many rules you throw in our face, it's not going to make us any better.

The most amazing verse of this whole incident is this one: “And He went down with them and came to Nazareth and was submissive to them.” He goes from His Father's house back to His father's house to be ordered under, subordinate to His parents. Born under the Law, to redeem those who were under the Law. Becoming obedient even unto death on a cross. In order to fulfill all righteousness.

Jesus' perfect obedience is given to you and for you. Your sin forgiven through him. His righteousness is yours, you are holy. He who is without sin, becomes your sin and takes your death upon himself. You who cannot keep even one commandment, take heart, for our Lord has humbled himself, he was born under the law to redeem you and free you from sin and death. Your disobedience washed away. His death and life is your death and you have life. In him you have redemption through his blood, the forgiveness of sins, and receive the lavish riches of his grace.

Even this little episode when Jesus is twelve demonstrates this. This is what Jesus came to do. To keep the Law perfectly for you and to receive our punishments under the Law in His own perfect innocence. Your sins atoned for, risen from the grave he gives you life. He clothes you with righteousness, innocence and blessedness. The eternal Son became a child who grew in wisdom and stature so that you, baptized into Him and believing His promises, are sealed with the promise, your inheritance, united with him forever.

Amen.