

“Where’s Jesus?”

Liturgical Date: Christmas 2 (readings the same for A, B, and C)

Primary Text: St. Luke 2:40-52

Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who hath blessed us with all spiritual blessings in heavenly places in Christ (Ephesians 1:3). The primary text for today, the Second Sunday of Christmas, is the Gospel Lesson from St. Luke 2. The title of the sermon reflects a question that Jesus’ parents Joseph and Mary were asking during their frantic search for Him and a question that many throughout the ages have asked, “Where’s Jesus?”

A little boy was lost in a large shopping mall during the busy Christmas shopping season. He sobbed, “I want my mommy.” The mall security people took him under their wing. They treated him to some Christmas cookies, a mug of hot chocolate, and a teddy bear. They put on some Christmas cartoons for him to watch in the security office. Eventually, the phone rang and a security guard answered it, turning to the boy and saying, “Good news, kid, we have found your mother.” The little boy didn’t miss a beat: “Don’t tell here where I am, I like it here.”

Today in our Gospel reading we hear about a boy who is “lost”, but it turns out that it is his parents that are anxiously trying to find him and the child is right where he believes he should be. This is an interesting text in many ways. It is really the only specific narrative that we have from the youth of Jesus. Verse 49 contains the very first words of Jesus that are recorded.

The Bible does give a good many details about the birth of Jesus. The angelic visitation to the Virgin Mary informing her of the miraculous conception of a child, the incarnation of the Son of God. The journey to Bethlehem and wondrous true story of His birth. The visits of shepherds and Wisemen. Jesus' circumcision, presentation at the temple, the flight to Egypt to avoid murderous Herod, the return to Nazareth and Jesus being raised as the son of a small-town carpenter. But in this, Jesus is largely passive. Everything centers around Him, of course, but He doesn't really seem to doing or saying anything. Which makes sense, since He was a baby.

So from about the time when Jesus was two years old until He was in His early 30s and began His public ministry, the Bible is largely silent in terms of narratives about what He did. *Except* for this text from Luke 2. It begins in verse 40 with a fairly broad statement, "*And the child grew and became strong, filled with wisdom. And the favor of God was upon him.*" We are then given evidence in verse 41 of how Mary and Joseph raised Jesus in a devout and observant Jewish home because it tells them that they went to Jerusalem every year for the Feast of the Passover. Then we get something very specific. Verse 42 tells us about a particular Passover visit to the Holy City when Jesus was 12 years old. The custom of the time was that at around age 12 a transition was happening from childhood to young adulthood. Often times, this is when a child would first make a formal visit to the temple for Passover. So it is very possible that this was Jesus' first visit to Jerusalem-and almost certain to the temple-since his infancy. How proud and excited Joseph and Mary must have been!

But then something goes wrong, very wrong. As the Passover feast ended and Mary and Joseph head home to Nazareth, someone very important is not with them. It took them a day to realize that Jesus was not with them! Where's Jesus? Then they frantically begin searching for their lost son, eventually returning to look for Him in Jerusalem, realizing that He must have been left behind somehow. After three days they find Jesus.

Many of you remember that last Christmas season I did a sermon series tying in our Scripture lessons with illustrations from popular Christmas movies. So this sermon could be seen as an "addendum" to that series because this text immediately brings a Christmas movie to mind. This film involves not a 12 year old, but 8 year old boy, that is somehow forgotten by his family when they are departing for a long trip during the holiday season. Of course, this little boy is named Kevin McAllister and the movie is *Home Alone*.

The first obvious question that is asked in terms of both the plot of *Home Alone* and, if you will, "Jesus Alone" is how in the world do parents forget to take a child with them when they are going out of town?! Well, in the movie a perfect storm of events come together: they have a big group of family, Kevin gets in trouble is made to sleep in the extra bedroom in the attic, his plane ticket has mistakenly been thrown away cleaning when up a mess, the power goes out and in pre-cell phone days this meant alarm clocks didn't go off leading to a hasty departure, and a neighbor kid is counted in their "head count" before getting in the vans to the airport. It is not until mid-flight that Kevin's mother, Catherine, realizes they have forgotten Kevin. A main part of

the movie's plot from this point forward is her doing anything she can to get back to Kevin, while feeling guilty and wondering if she is a bad mother for leaving him behind. And of course Kevin, at first, is very happy and excited to be "home alone" without parents and siblings to tell him what to do or not to do.

In our text from St. Luke, we see a good explanation for why it took Joseph and Mary a day to realize that Jesus was not with them. Verse 44 says, "*but supposing him to be in the group*" and "*then they began searching for him among their relatives and acquaintances*". It is not as if the Holy Family made the trip to Jerusalem for the Passover alone. A large group of family and neighbors would travel together from Nazareth to Jerusalem and back again. And at 12, especially in the culture of the time, it would not be unusual for Jesus to not be at arms-length distance from Mary and Joseph at all times. But imagine the dread that set in when they realized that Jesus was not anywhere to be found in the traveling party. If you as a parent have ever gone any amount of time, even a relatively short period, without knowing where one of your children is you can certainly relate. And they knew this was a very special child-God Himself through His angels had told them so. Their whole life since they knew this had been about properly raising and protecting this child-even to the point of living in a foreign land for a time. Now they had lost Him. They had literally lost the Son of God! This puts Kevin's parent's shortcomings, as well as our own, in perspective, does it not? Where's Jesus?

In *Home Alone*, Kevin is unintentionally left by his family-but had actually wanted to be alone without a family as he had smarted off when

he got in trouble the night before. In Luke 2, Jesus is unknowingly left behind by Joseph and Mary-but on His part it is very intentional, see verse 43, *“the boy Jesus stayed behind in Jerusalem”*. Jesus had something intentional He needed to do and very specific as to where He needed to be. After three days of harried searching, where do His parents find Him? In the temple. He is sitting among the teachers of the law listening, asking questions, amazing them with the words that He spoke with wisdom and insight much beyond the typical 12 year old. Mary scolds him in verse 48, *“Son, why have you treated us so? Behold, your father and I have been searching for you in great distress.”* Jesus responds, *“Why were you looking for me?”* The Greek phrase that is the second part of Jesus’ response is somewhat difficult to translate into English. Literally it would be *“in the things of my Father”*. Most modern translations, such as the ESV we heard this morning translate it as *“I must be in my Father’s house”* and some like the King James translate *“I must be about my Father’s business.”* Both are acceptable translations and emphasize that Jesus is not in some strange place. Where’s Jesus? He is in His Father’s house, doing the things that the Father would have Him do. Our narrative ends in with verse 50-51 telling us that Jesus did submit to his parents and return to Nazareth, Mary would treasure this event in her heart, and that, *“Jesus increased in wisdom and in stature and in favor with God and man.”*

In this passage of the Bible, we have a preview of things to come. The temple is very important in Luke’s Gospel. Jesus, of course, is the literal presence of God among His people. He will return to Jerusalem at the culmination of His earthly ministry and what He would do would

show more wisdom and strength than all the teachers of the Law. He would in effect render the temple as obsolete as He would be the one perfect sacrifice as the temple sacrifices would no longer be needed nor would God's direct presence only be in the temple as the curtain was torn.

And there is irony here as that young Jesus who so impressed the learned teachers of the Law in the temple that day, would make a very different impression on them about 20 years later. They would largely oppose Him and His teaching. In fact, they would conspire to put Him to death, charging Him with blasphemy. In *Home Alone*, young Kevin would face danger from a pair of robbers known as the "wet bandits". He says, *"This is my house, I have to defend it."* He sets a series of hilariously elaborate "booby traps" and of course who could forget the convenient cuing of a old gangster movie to scare off intruders, *"I'm going to give you to the count of 10, to get your ugly, yella, no-good keister off my property, before I pump your guts full of lead! 1...2...10!...Keep the change, ya filthy animal"*. As I said, Jesus would face opposition. And behind this opposition was the devil himself, who wanted Jesus dead, who wants to lead people to oppose God and thus lead them straight to hell. But Jesus would defeat the devil and death by His own death. He would defend His Fathers house. He would not need a VCR, an old gangster movie, and booby traps. It would be a whip, nails, a crown of thorns, and a cross. But in this the devil, sin, death, and hell were defeated. Jesus rose from the dead. In this, we live. In this, we are brought home, not alone-but with God and all His people.

Joseph and Mary must have asked themselves countless times over the few days that were searching for him, “Where’s Jesus?” Their questions were answered when they discovered Him in the place that it made sense He would be: in the temple, in His Father’s House. And before the sermon closes I want to ask that question in another way. Because Mary and Joseph are by far not the only ones to ask it. So I ask you today, “Where’s Jesus”?

In a broad sense, it is a very easy question to answer with basic orthodox theology. Jesus is God. God is everywhere, He is omnipresent so that means Jesus is everywhere. But can that be true, without people even realizing it? Certainly. God is everywhere, whether one believes that He is or not. One may even know this fact, but still reject belief in Jesus.

So more specifically, how can Jesus be found in terms of salvation? How can one specifically partake of the grace that Jesus brings? Where would one find Jesus in that regard? First of all, the good news is that Jesus finds us. He comes to us. Remember the first words of Jesus that we have recorded, we heard them today, “*Why were you looking for me? Did you not know that I must be in my Father’s house?*” The New Testament tells us that Christians have God literally in us as Jesus is present with us by the power of the Holy Spirit. Our bodies have been made His temple.

Ok. But more specifically where does this happen? Where’s Jesus? He and His grace are found in the very places where He promises it will be. In *Home Alone*, when Kevin’s family returns his mother says they need to find a store that is open because they will need basic

groceries. Kevin calmly assures them it is OK because he already went shopping. They are surprised-if they only knew that so much more had happened! Many people are surprised at just how much Jesus has done for them and that He is found in what the world may see as “ordinary places”. We should not be surprised because all we have to do is open our Bibles and we see the promises of God. He is found in pulpit, font, and altar; in “ordinary” things like the printed page, water, bread, and wine. These are the Means of Grace. Jesus is the Word made flesh. Whenever you read or hear the Word of God, the Bible, Jesus is there. The Holy Spirit is at work bringing Jesus and His forgiveness. Romans 10:17, *“So then faith cometh by hearing, and hearing by the word of God.”* In Baptism, the Lord is there, washing us and claiming us as His child. Galatians 3:26-27, *“Ye are all the children of God by faith in Christ Jesus. For as many of you as have been baptized into Christ have put on Christ.”* In the Sacrament of the Altar, the Lord’s Supper, Jesus gives us His very body and blood in, with, and under the bread and wine. 1 Corinthians 10:16, *“The cup of blessing which we bless, is it not the communion of the blood of Christ? The bread which we bread, is it not the communion of the body of Christ?”*

After he springs some traps on the wet bandits, Kevin exclaims, *“You guys give up yet? Or are you thirsty for more?”* As we close this Christmas season and begin this new year of 2020, my prayer is that you will not give up no matter what challenges you face. My prayer is that you are thirsty for more. Return again and again and drink of the Living Water that Jesus has provided. Read your Bibles everyday, as Psalm 119:103 said, *“How sweet are your words to my taste, sweeter than honey*

to my mouth". Share Christ with others. Come to His House again and again to worship and receive His gifts, thirsty for more of the Word and Sacrament. Where's Jesus? Right where He is supposed to be. Right where He said He would be.

Amen.