

## “One Very Special Young Person”

### Luke 2:41-52

We have only one glimpse of Jesus between the time he was a baby and the time he was an adult. Jesus was growing and changing.

Have you ever wondered how Jesus felt as he was growing up? What he liked to do? What he worried about? Who his friends were? What they did together? If he was ever afraid? If he got bored with chores he was expected to do? Do you think he ever spent time daydreaming as we do? What were his hopes for the future? What might have helped him know that he was maturing as a person and as God’s child?

“Hurry, Son”! called Joseph from the doorway of the carpenter’s shop. “The caravan will be leaving Nazareth soon. Come help load supplies on the donkeys”.

A short time later, Jesus and his parents, together with other Jewish pilgrims, started south toward Jerusalem. Yes, they had been making this annual Passover journey for years, but this time it would be different. Mary and Joseph had been thinking about, talking about, and planning this trip since the day Jesus was born. Though at twelve he still had lots of growing to do, Jesus was now considered an adult according to Jewish tradition – a *bar mitzvah* – “son of command” or “son of the law”. Jesus would have new responsibilities and new privileges. He was expected to make wise choices. This visit to the Temple would be a celebration of his growing up.

The caravan was accompanied by the jingle of camel bells, the bray of donkeys, and the laughter of children. The days went by quickly. Soon the company of pilgrims began to make its way along the narrow, twisting road from Jericho to Jerusalem.

Midway between the cities they made camp near an inn. While the adults exchanged news and stories around the campfires, the children chattered on about the beautiful Temple and the marvelous city they would be visiting.

“I was born in Bethlehem – just a few miles from Jerusalem,” Jesus told his friends, “When I was eight days old, my parents took me to the Temple and dedicated me to God”. The others joined in with stories that had been told about *their* dedications, shared memories of earlier trips to Jerusalem, and told of their plans for this Passover adventure.

At first light, they broke camp and started out on the last leg of their journey. Rounding a bend in the road, Jesus looked up at the massive walls and great watchtowers of Jerusalem that overlooked the road and valleys below. His heart pounded with anticipation. He and Joseph had talked many times about this trip. The pictures in his mind were clear. He knew that the experience would be an unforgettable one. Eagerly, Jesus and his friends ran ahead, reaching the city gate before the others. Dancing impatiently, they awaited the arrival of the rest of the caravan.

For the next several days, Jesus explored the city. Every day he visited the Temple, where he watched the sacrifices being offered to God – one of the privileges of being considered an adult. A full participant now in the Temple worship, he listened eagerly as the teachers read and explained the meaning of God’s Law. Though he had often heard many of the words before, he found that he was able to understand them in new and exciting ways

The days in Jerusalem were full, and all too soon the Passover came to a close. On the day they left to return to Nazareth, the women, and children, generally moving more slowly, departed earlier than the men.

As Mary made one last check to be sure that everything had been packed on the donkeys, she wondered why Jesus wasn't there to help. With a smile she remembered; and as the caravan began to move, she sighed and said to herself, "How quickly things change! Last year Jesus was here at my side. Now he is a bar mitzvah and travels with his father and the rest of the men. I'm sure that my grown-up son will have many stories to tell at the fire this evening!"

As Joseph and the other men prepared to leave the city, he assumed that Jesus was traveling with his mother, just as he had always done. "My son," he chuckled to himself, "an adult!" Joseph knew the tradition of his people, but he also knew that Jesus was at that awkward age – no longer a child and not yet an adult.

As evening came, the men caught up with the women and together they began to prepare the campsite. Mary and Joseph realized for the first time that Jesus was not with either of them. Anxiously they moved through the caravan, stopping at the tents and cooking fires of friends and family to ask if anyone had seen Jesus. Convinced that Jesus was not with the caravan, they hurriedly collected their things and headed back toward Jerusalem.

For three days they searched the city. Jesus was nowhere to be found. On the fourth day they thought to look in the Temple. There he was! Seated at the feet of the teachers, Jesus was listening carefully to their words. There was so much to absorb – how would he ever take it all in? The teachers were amazed by the understanding reflected in the questions he asked.

Feelings of relief flooded over Joseph and Mary as they realized that Jesus was safe – feelings that quickly turned to bewilderment as to why Jesus would do such a thing. Jesus saw the worry on his parents' faces and heard the fear in their voices. "Didn't you know that I had to be in my Father's house?"

Jesus asked, sounding surprised that his parents didn't know where he would be. They *hadn't* known, and they *didn't* understand all of the changes that were taking place in their son. This was not the last time that they would be puzzled by Jesus' behavior. For now, Mary would tuck this incident away in her mind. Someday, perhaps, she would understand.

Joseph, Mary, and Jesus made the journey back to Nazareth together. At times they talked and at times they were silent – unable to find words to express the feelings they had about the changes that affected not only Jesus but their whole family. The story ends with these words: “Jesus grew both in body and in wisdom, gaining favor with God and others” (Luke 2:41-52, adapted).

Jesus was traveling through **adolescence** – the period between childhood and adulthood. He was growing, wondering, testing, and discovering. While his family remained important to him, he was developing relationships outside his family. Where once he contented himself to play on the floor of his father's carpenter shop, drawing pictures in the sawdust and building towers with scraps of wood, he now worked and learned at his father's side – lifting, measuring, sawing, and carving. He no longer had the body of a child. New muscles and new coordination helped Jesus take on new responsibilities.

Jesus was growing wiser. We might wonder, *Does that mean he didn't know everything from the very beginning?* No, he didn't. He grew up just like we did. As his body matured, so did his mind. He grew in his ability to make choices based on what he knew and on how his decisions would affect others. He was learning to live responsibly.

Growing up can't be rushed. It takes time for bodies to grow and develop. It takes time for us to learn through study and experience to make responsible decisions. It takes time for us to learn how to live with others in Christlike love and respect.

Sometimes nature points us to answers. Outside my office window is a large oak tree. Each autumn, as cool winds begin to blow and nights turn chilly, the acorns fall. The deer gather outside my window to eat the acorns before the squirrels hide all of them.

One of earth's precious gems is the diamond. A diamond is a piece of carbon – the same principle element found in a piece of coal. This chunk of carbon doesn't start out beautiful. The original stone, taken from the ground, doesn't sparkle. It takes the skilled eye of the miner to see the potential beauty in the stone. It takes the skilled hands of the cutter to give it its many surfaces. These surfaces or facets catch and reflect the light, giving the diamond its beauty and value.

In some ways, you are like that diamond. You are interesting, special, and valuable because there are many facets to who you are. Your unique combination of qualities makes you different and distinct from all other people. Some of your facets are . . .

- Your age;
- Your size and shape;
- Your skin, eye, and hair colors;
- Your gender;
- Your interests and abilities;
- Your likes and dislikes;

- Your relationships; and
- Your place within the family.

One day, in confirmation class I asked them, “What is a family?” Some of their answers were:

- A family is a group of people who are related to one another.
- A family cares about one another.
- A family helps one another.
- A family laughs with you when you’re happy and cries with you when you’re sad.
- A family usually lives together – then again, they don’t always.

The confirmands answers sometimes described how their families look. We discovered that families are as different as individual persons. Some families had two parents; some had one. Some families had one child; others had more. Some were blended families with children who had been born to one of the parents but not to both. Some were “birth” families; others were adopted families. There were families with grandparents, cousins, aunts, and uncles living together. One lived in a foster family – a family that cares for children who are not related to that family by birth or by legal adoption. All were families, regardless of how well they fit the traditional idea of what it takes to be a family.

All of us have one thing in common. We were each created in the image of God. You’ve heard people say something like, “Jessie is the spitting *image* of her mother!” They are saying that either in her appearance or in her actions, Jessie is much like her mother. You and I were created by *God*. We were created in the *image* of God – created like God (Genesis 1:26-27).

What is there about us that identifies us as belonging to God’s family and therefore being like God?

Like God, we have a hand in the creation of something new – the new person we are becoming. Many of the changes we are experiencing and will experience are factors over which we have no control. Others will call for decisions on our part. Most of these decisions involve our relationships with other people. The decisions we make will, in part, help to shape the person we will become. Ourselves, God, our family, and the other significant people in our life share that important task.

“Jesus grew both in body and in wisdom, gaining favor with God and others”. The same thing is happening to us. We are growing, changing, children of God no matter our age.

May the peace of God . . .

#640 – Our Father, By Whose Name