

**West Epping Uniting Church  
Sunday 30<sup>th</sup> December 2018  
Luke 2:41-52**

**Rev John Barr**

Just five days ago we celebrated the birth of Jesus. Sometime after Jesus' birth, wise men from the east visited the holy family and paid homage to the new baby. Then Bethlehem fell under a reign of terror as King Herod ruled every child aged two years or under must be slaughtered. On hearing this Joseph, Mary, together with the baby Jesus, fled to Egypt where they sought asylum. After Herod's death they travelled to Nazareth where Jesus grew up.

Meanwhile, at the age of twelve Jesus would have experienced his bar mitzvah. This marked a Jewish boy's transition from childhood to manhood. It was an important rite of passage and today we witness Jesus bearing witness to this important event as he visits the temple in Jerusalem.

The story today reveals Jesus absences himself from his family as they return to Nazareth. Deeply disturbed with the discovery that Jesus is not with them, Jesus' parents anxiously return to Jerusalem in search of him.

They find him in the temple "sitting among the teachers, listening to them and asking them questions". His parents are "astonished" to find Jesus there and they question him: "why have you treated us like this? Look, your father and I have been searching for you in great anxiety". Jesus responds with another question: "Why were you searching for me? Did you not know that I must be in my Father's house?".

Now, in the midst of such parental anxiety and concern, such a response by Jesus may suggest he is a somewhat precocious child, even some kind of 'smart Alec'. After all, the teachers in the temple were "amazed at his understanding and his answers".

But for Jesus his transition from childhood to manhood meant a whole lot more than simply making the move from being a boy to becoming a young man.

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For you see, in making this transition from childhood to manhood, Jesus becomes aware he belongs to a different father.

No longer is his earthly father part of the picture. No longer is his biological family the centre of his universe. We discover that Jesus' true father is God. Jesus' true family is humanity. And in acknowledging this, Jesus now separates himself from his father, his mother and his siblings.

This is reinforced as the story we read today begins with Jesus' parents taking him to Jerusalem. In this this sense the parents are in charge of the journey. But, as the story concludes, we find Jesus is no longer taken back to Nazareth. Rather, Jesus elects to go with his parents. Here, the parents no longer call the tune. It's a subtle shift in the story. But it's an important one.

Friends, today we encounter no typical young man. What we do encounter is a young Jewish man who has a special relationship with God. And, as his life unfolds, we learn this young man, Jesus, embodies the very face of God. This young man, Jesus, manifests the very character of God. This young man, Jesus, is revealed as one with God.

With this in mind, it's important to understand the story presented to us in Luke's Gospel does not attempt to provide a 'how to' guide in child raising. Luke's story does not pretend to be some kind of morality tale illustrating the proper behaviour of young people. This is, clearly, not the intent of the story. Rather, the point of the story is that Jesus is no ordinary young man!

This is reinforced in the text. For example, when questioned by his parents about his absence from them, Jesus replies: "Why are your searching for me? Did you not know that I must be in my Father's house?"

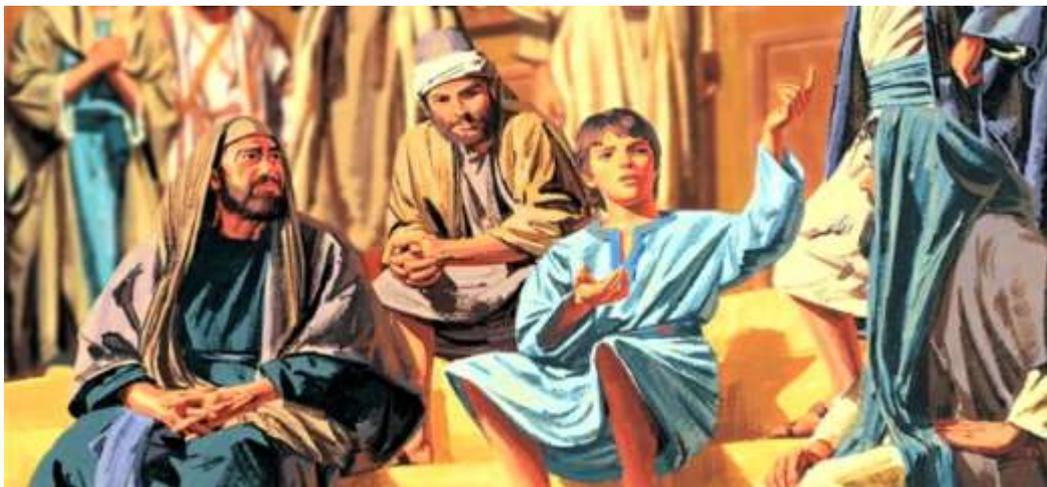
Some translations of the Bible put it this way: "Did you not know that I must be about my Father's business?" In other words, this young man, Jesus, is no ordinary guy as he declares he is the one who will embody God-in-action. He is the one who will carry out the "business" or the "affairs" of God in the world.

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Now, this leads onto my second point. Note Jesus is missing for three days. This all points to another event – Easter. At Easter Jesus dies on the cross, Jesus is buried in the tomb and then, on the third day, Jesus is raised to life. Here, as the young man Jesus is found in the temple on the third day, there is a hint of Easter. There is a whisper of resurrection hope.

Friends, this is no ordinary young man. For, this Jesus will live our life, this Jesus will die our death, and this Jesus will be raised to new life. It's all part of God's 'business' here on earth!

As we are on the cusp of a new year, remember that this young Jewish man, found in the temple today by his anguished parents, comes to make a real impact in our lives. This young man interacting with the teachers in the temple comes to make a real impact in the lives of everyone across this world.



Be aware that this lad, who engaged deeply with the temple hierarchy, was born to live, to die and to be raised to new life for our sakes. He was born to live, to die and to be raised to new life for the sake of the whole world.

And, friends, celebrate the truth that this child from Nazareth, who now becomes a young adult, is no-one less than God incarnate – God with us.

Moreover, this young adult found in the temple, makes God known to us through the very character of his life – a life that bears witness to grace, mercy and compassion. This young adult, who engages with the temple teachers, goes about 'God's business' by living a life that cares for others and brings about justice and peace. This young adult, who surprises and confounds so many, dies a death that demonstrates self-giving, unconditional, absolute love. This young adult, who claims God as his father, is raised to new life offering joy, hope and the promise of a future for each and every one of us.

Friends, as the New Year approaches, these are truths we need to claim. These are truths we need to cling to everyday!

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Just this week I was very saddened by the death of Penny Cook, a lovely Australian actress who died of cancer at the age of 61. Known to many of us 'oldish' folks as Vicky the vet who appeared in the endearing television series, A Country Practice, filmed during the 1980's, Penny's death is clearly an untimely one leaving behind a family and many friends.

But life is like that. As Jesus says, "no-one knows the day or hour". We don't know when tragedy or death will hit us. We don't know if life will mess up or when life will come undone.

However, we can be confident that, in all this, God is indeed with us. In that young man from Nazareth we can declare God comes to us. God reaches out to us. God profoundly touches us. God offers us hope – especially in the dark times.

Some of you may have been interested in the Higher School Certificate results that came out just before Christmas. Here, a young Christian lady living in south-western Sydney by the name of Domara Eskander achieved a first in two of her courses.

Three years ago Domara was living in the hell of north-eastern Syria. One freezing cold night Domara and her family fled their home on foot to end up in a refugee camp in Lebanon. Here Domara read novels and taught herself English. Recently she and her family arrived in Australia as refugees. Now Domara is poised to make a significant contribution as a very gifted young lady.

For me, this is a sign that Jesus is getting on with 'God's business' in the world as signs of hope and resurrection emerge.

This young man, Jesus, who we encounter in the temple today, is none other than Christ our Lord. In him we encounter love, grace, mercy and hope. In him we receive the assurance that God is always with us. In him we are assured that each one of us has a future - as all the things that haunt us, all the things that undermine and even threaten to destroy us - are dealt with by the one who comes to restore, redeem and renew.

As Jesus goes about 'God's business' know that he will travel with you in 2019. Know that this young man who appears today in the temple is the one in whom we can depend - in life, in death and in life beyond death.

Amen.

