

We have now left the season of Christmas, but this particular text reminds me of a particular Christmas movie - Home Alone. This movie tells the story of Kevin, an eight-year old boy who in the midst of the hustle and bustle of his large family getting ready to leave for the holidays to go to Paris, gets left behind in his home.

About halfway to Paris, on the flight, Kevin's mom has the realization that while everyone thought that Kevin was with someone else in the large family, really he was left behind. Then they find out that they cannot get a return ticket to be reunited with him for several days, so she does everything she can to return home as quickly as possible.

Home Alone, and the sequels that followed, seem fantastical in some ways. How in the world could you accidentally leave an eight year old boy behind? Yet, isn't that very similar to the situation that Mary and Joseph found themselves in with Luke, chapter 2.

Part of the Jewish custom in the region was to travel to Jerusalem, the holy city, at particular times of the year for holy days. In this text, they had traveled from their home to Jerusalem, with a large group of people. Maybe it was family members. Maybe it was other people from their town. Everything was going as it usually did - until all of a sudden it wasn't.

The large group had been traveling back home together and Mary and Joseph probably just assumed he was with other people - other children his age. But about a day into the trip they started to ask around and no one had seen Jesus. It dawned on them that he must still be in Jerusalem, to look for him there.

It took three days to find Jesus, but when they did, the twelve year old was in the temple, asking the religious leaders questions and listening intently to what he had to say. While other children his age may have considered their instruction tedious, he seemed to soak it up.

However, while the religious leaders were amazed, his family wasn't. They wondered why in the world they had caused them so much grief and anxiety by staying behind. To which Jesus's answer probably gave them little comfort - you should have known that I would be in my Father's house. And they started the journey back to Nazareth together.

Last year around this time we started our journey together through the Gospel of Mark, where everything moved quickly. This year, we are looking at the Gospel of Luke. Though in full transparency, we have been jumping around a bit in it. At the end of last year, during the Christmas season, we heard of the proclamation to the shepherds of Jesus's birth. We heard of the strange circumstances surrounding his birth. And the blessing that was bestowed upon him at the temple by Anna and Simeon. Then last week, we jumped ahead to Jesus's baptism, which propelled his call to ministry.

This week we are stepping back to the text that really links together the other two. This is the only real glimpse we have in scripture of Jesus as a child or adolescent. In fact, the only real comment that Luke makes outside of this is found one verse earlier (2:40), which says The child grew and became strong, filled with wisdom; and the favor of God was upon him. What follows is this event between his presentation and dedication as an infant and going out in ministry. And it tells us a lot about Jesus's heart, even at this tender age.

Jesus is right around the age of accountability, which is seemingly different in every culture. Here in America we talk about that being around eighteen years old, when you are considered an adult. When I was studying abroad in Australia, I turned 21, and was told that this is the age when you are given the keys to your own life. In Biblical times, it would have been around the age of thirteen. Remember that Mary was probably a teenager when she bore Jesus

into the world. It would be around this time that some people got married and learned trades. Yet, even though he is nearing this important age, the religious teachers were still amazed by him and the wisdom he showed.

In other words, Jesus wasn't like the other kids his age. He wasn't like the other boys who came for religious schooling out of obligation. There was something in his heart that drew him to this particular place, and made him stay there for days, even though he had to also have the wisdom to realize what it would do to his parents.

And like any parents, of course they were gutted. They were worried. But there is an extra layer on top of all of this - Mary and Joseph know that this is the Messiah, even if they don't fully know what that means. So while their child is lost, they also lost the Messiah. Let the weight of that statement settle over you for a minute. The Messiah, who was entrusted into their care, is lost.

Or maybe that extra layer is more universal than we think. For all of those of us who love children, have a sinking fear from time to time, do we not? Maybe not the fear that we physically lost the child, but fear of them losing their way? Or losing their faith? Or losing the values we instilled in them? Maybe we can relate to Mary and Joseph a whole lot more than we ever imagined.

And out of all of that fear and anxiety, grief and concern, they weren't able to hear what Jesus was saying about being in his Father's house. Sometimes, I admit, that I too, do not understand the most profound things that come out of the mouths of the children around me. But when we finally catch on, we too, treasure them in our heart like Mary.

This is our first inkling of what it could look like for Jesus to be the Messiah. For him to be a wise, teacher. But also for him to be intimately connected with the Father. For him to be, yes, the one who has come to fulfill the word, but also as we will see in the weeks to come, the one who interprets *and* enacts the word, as well.

I keep finding myself going back to two groups of people in this text. The first is the religious leaders. They know the teachings of the Messiah, but they don't realize that the Messiah is right in front of them, because they don't expect it. They are amazed by this young boy, they see that he is superior, but beyond that, they don't have a clue what is to come. Maybe at best, they hoped that he could be among their ranks some day. But they do not see him, fully as he is - as the salvation of the world.

And I think of Mary and Joseph. All that they felt. How this was an experience that they would never forget. How this is among the growing list of things that Mary treasures in her heart - though it certainly didn't feel like something to treasure as they were living through it. I wonder if they recognized how this event was linked to Jesus's purpose, his truth, his wisdom.

Maybe the truth is we are both like the religious leaders and Mary and Joseph. Sometimes we cannot see that which is right in front of us and other times we recognize the mystery of faith, but cannot fully articulate it. Maybe we have lived in the fear of what will come of those entrusted into our care just as much as we are brought to our knees in amazement for the truth that comes out of the mouths of children. Maybe, we too, can start to catch glimpses of the Messiah, Jesus Christ, God with Us. Amen.