

**A Sermon Preached by
Fr. Edwin Smith for Christmas 1, Year C
December 27th, 2009 at St. Thomas, Menasha, Wisconsin**

William Barclay, author of the Daily Study Bible, Says about our Gospel lesson this morning, “This is a supremely important passage in the Gospel story.”

On the surface, that seems to be a rather strange statement about an account that appears only in the Gospel of Luke. But, Luke was the only gentile Gospel writer, writing especially for gentiles. In this passage he is trying to establish an understanding of Jesus for a people who did not seek the messiah.

In this passage, he is introducing a Jesus who had a special relationship with God the father. One can rightly surmise that Jesus’ awareness of his earthly mission began in this incident.

I grew up in a neighborhood of many Jewish families and had many Jewish friends. The age of twelve was very important for them. At that point in their lives, they attained adulthood (spiritual adulthood). It had been true throughout history, and Jesus was observing that tradition, just as my friends did.

As an adult Jewish male, Jesus would have been expected to attend the Passover feast, since he lived within the prescribed distance from Jerusalem. So, he went with his parents and others to the temple in Jerusalem.

Imagine the excitement he must have experienced on this, his first Passover in the temple, surrounded by the historical aura of the holy city. All the pilgrims milling about, worshipping, acknowledging their faith in a special way.

It came time for the pilgrims to return home. Joseph and Mary left with their family and friends, assuming Jesus to be among the pilgrim band.

At the end of the day’s travels, they begin to look for Jesus. He is no where to be found.

Imagine their panic. Having had a similar experience with my son, I can easily imagine how they felt.

They rush back to Jerusalem to search for him. On the third day, they finally find him in the temple.

What is more, he is “sitting among the teachers, listening to them and asking them questions.”

Naturally, Mary and Joseph must have experienced mixed emotions – a feelings of relief that he is safe, astonishment at what he is doing, and parental concern (perhaps a bit of anger) that he has seen fit to do this to them.

His answer reveals much: “Why were you searching for me? Did you not know that I must be in my father’s house?” Then, he returned to Nazareth with them, and was obedient to them.

The episode reveals several important things about the young Jesus. First, it tells us something about growth toward spiritual maturity beginning with an inquiring mind. A nascent spirituality was stirring in Jesus. His childhood was over. He was taking responsibility to learn more. Whether or not he knew why is open to never ending debate.

The important point is that he was seeking to learn.

Secondly he was slowly awakening to what would be his true vocation. The vision of that vocation is found in his reply to his parents. He did not intend to be disrespectful to them – far from it.

Rather, he was giving voice to the divine claim awakening within him, and the growing sense of the uniqueness of his relationship with his heavenly father – a relationship which would continue to grow and to which he would give voice on many occasions to come.

Lastly, the passage shows that his sense of that relationship – his divine consciousness -- did not prevent him from accepting human responsibilities.

He accepts his relationship with his earthly father and mother and remains obedient to them. And he grew in favor with people, as well as with God, echoing the story of the boy Samuel in our Old Testament lesson.

There are messages in the Gospel lesson for us.

Growth toward spiritual maturity is continuous. It requires us to have inquiring minds – minds which seek to know more and more of God – of the father – of the son – of the Holy Spirit.

It is an unfortunate truth that many who come to faith in Christ do not put their minds to learning more and more. They are content with a childish faith. As we consciously grow in our faith, it becomes ever more unassailable. We can own it, defend it, and rely upon it.

Likewise, we need to seek a vision of what vocation God has in mind for us. Each of us has been given gifts for the building up of each other and the body of Christ. We can ignore those gifts, or we can seize them, nurture them, and put them to God's purposes.

Finally, as deep as our faith may become, as important as our religious life might grow to be, we must accept our human existence and the responsibilities which accompany it. There is an old saying that some people become so heavenly minded that they are of no earthly use. It is certainly a state to be avoided.

Rather, we are to use our faith and our religious life as a basis for carrying out responsibly those tasks set before us.

In the words of our epistle lesson, "and whatever you do, in word or deed, do everything in the name of the lord Jesus, giving thanks to God the father through him."