

Grace, mercy, and peace be to you from God our Father and from our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ! Amen! Dear brothers and sisters in Christ:

"[Jesus] said to [Mary and Joseph], 'Why were you looking for Me? Did you not know that I must be in My Father's house?'" (Luke 2:49).

If you are like me, when you heard today's Gospel text, you may have thought about the 1990 movie "Home Alone." In that movie, Peter and Kate McCallister accidentally left their son Kevin at home as they traveled with their extended family to Florida for Christmas break. But, while in a hurry one morning to get out the door in order to get to O'Hare on time, they forgot to check upstairs for their son Kevin. It was only later, while flying the friendly skies that Kevin's mother realizes that her son was missing. Frantically, Kevin's parents – *and especially his mom* – immediately begin looking for ways to get back home to find their lost son.

In a similar fashion, Mary and Joseph search frantically for their lost Son. Except, their Son was not lost. For Jesus remained at the temple in Jerusalem for a purpose.

"Now [Christ's] parents went to Jerusalem every year at the Feast of the Passover. And when He was twelve years old, they went up according to custom" (Luke 2:41-42).

If you thought driving to the airport was stressful, the trip from Nazareth to Jerusalem was a grueling one of about 80 miles, which lasted three to four days. Thankfully, Mary, Joseph, and young Jesus did not travel alone, but with a large company of people in a caravan. And this caravan served multi-purposes. First, it offered an opportunity for fellowship among family and local townsfolk. Second, any large group provided for protection from the threat of highway robbers.

And when the Holy Family arrived in Jerusalem, they would have found the city teeming with hundreds of thousands of fellow pilgrims, who would have been trying to find lodging and a place to celebrate the Passover meal, along with purchasing their sacrificial animals. The Holy Family would have witnessed a city filled with the noise of hundreds of thousands of sheep, which the priests would have been busy butchering. Beggars would have been in full force. Roman soldiers would have been on patrol, jostling the crowds and trying to keep some semblance of order.

Joseph, too, would have taken their family's lamb to be sacrificed, and one can only guess what was going through his mind. The scene in Jerusalem would have been frantic.

And although the Holy Family traveled to Jerusalem every year for the Passover festival – *to celebrate the redemption of the people of Israel from Egypt*, this year would mark something different. Luke tells us that Jesus was 12 years old. Being a boy at 12 or 13 years of age was especially significant, for this would be when Jesus would be considered a man at His Bar Mitzvah ceremony. At the Bar Mitzvah, Jesus would now be under the full obligation of the Law.

“And when the feast was ended, as they were returning, the boy Jesus stayed behind in Jerusalem. His parents did not know it, but supposing Him to be in the group they went a day's journey, but then they began to search for Him among their relatives and acquaintances” (Luke 2:43-44).

At first, being in a large caravan, Mary and Joseph never suspected that Jesus was not among the group. But when they stopped at nightfall, they noticed that Jesus was nowhere to be found. Like the McCallister parents in search for Kevin, Mary and Joseph began their search. They searched everywhere! Until as it often is, they found Jesus at the last place they looked, the place that should have been obvious from the start: the temple in Jerusalem.

And when Mary and Joseph located Jesus at the temple courts, they were astonished at what they witnessed. Jesus wasn't battling home invaders. Jesus was not playing with the boys. Instead, He was sitting among the teachers, listening to them and asking them questions. There was twelve-year-old Jesus, sitting cross-legged on the floor sitting among the rabbis. ***“And all who heard [Jesus] were amazed at His understanding and His answers”*** (Luke 2:47).

Jesus, who is fully and completely God, was being filled with human wisdom. He was not only asking questions, but He was listening to their answers. And Jesus' questions displayed the depth of His understanding of Scripture truth. And His answers to the teachers' questions likewise revealed how far advanced Jesus was in His grasp of divine truth. Now, Jesus wasn't a child prodigy. He wasn't a “Doogie Howser.” This was the divine wisdom which was imparted to His human nature. Jesus through these conversations was receiving more confirmation on why He took upon human flesh.

You see, God demands perfect obedience to the Law. And all of the descendants of Adam share in Adam's disobedience to the Word of God. Our sinful nature that we inherited from Adam manifests itself in our daily lives and in our daily vocations: Instead of using God's name to pray and give thanks, sinful man is more inclined to use God's name to curse and lie. Instead of holding God's Word sacred and gladly hearing and learning it, sinful man would rather grumble and complain if the sermon or Divine Service goes too long, or if I would preach a truth of God that sinful man does not want to hear. Instead of speaking well of our neighbor, sinful man would rather tell lies about our neighbor.

All the descendants of Adam share in Adam's condemnation and judgment. And what was Adam's condemnation and judgment? It's death. ***"The wages of sin is death"*** (Romans 6:23a). And ***"For as in Adam all die"*** (1 Corinthians 15:22a). All we can do is beg God for mercy as we confess our sins to Him.

But Jesus is the perfectly obedient Son of God.

On that day in the temple, as Jesus was listening to the teachers and asking them questions, He knew His mission. He, along with the thousands in attendance at the Passover festival were there to remember God's grace as the angel of death killed all the firstborn of the Egyptians, but "passed over" the firstborn of the Israelites, because of the blood of a lamb on their lintels and door posts.

And now, God the Father has shown even more grace and mercy in giving us His Son, His only-begotten Son, who is God of God, Light of Light, very God of very God, ... who for us men and for our salvation has come down from heaven and was incarnate by the Holy Spirit of the Virgin Mary and was made man.

The Word became flesh, our own flesh, by taking the form of a servant, so that He could keep the Law of God in the place of sinful man. The Son of God obeyed His Father's will for us!

Now, what Jesus did that day in the temple was not an act of rebellion against His parents. For Jesus remained perfectly obedient to His parents as demonstrated on their return to Nazareth. But there could be more here. Luke tells us that Mary ***"treasured up all these things in her heart"*** (Luke 2:51b). What could this be?

This event could have served as a further reminder that Jesus was not just an ordinary son, but the Son of God. For the last time Luke used that phrase, Mary was reminded what the shepherds said concerning her Child from the angel that her very Son is the Christ, the One who has come to save His people from their sins.

Jesus would remain obedient to His parents just as the Fourth Commandment requires. And Jesus would identify Himself fully and completely with sinners. Finally, Jesus, as the always obedient Son, would suffer an agonizing death as He would drink the cup of His Father's wrath for us as He would be crucified to bring atonement for yours and my sins.

Jesus, who at twelve years old upheld His Bar Mitzvah as He perfectly kept the Law for us.

So, through Christ's obedience, by repentance and faith in Him, our disobedience is forgiven through His blood and merit. For ***"in Him we have redemption through His blood, the forgiveness of our trespasses, according to the riches of His grace"*** (Ephesians 1:7). By faith in Christ alone, we now stand before God the Father as righteous and obedient children, covered by the robe of Christ's perfect righteousness and obedience.

Through our adoption through Christ in Holy Baptism, we now put off the old man, the old sinful Adam, with His disobedience and have now put on Christ. And with the help of the Holy Spirit, we follow Christ's example of humility before God and our neighbor as we keep His Word and obey His commandments.

Instead of fearing, loving, and trusting in other things, we begin in faith to fear, love and trust in God above all things. We learn to trust Him as our only hope and refuge. We resist the temptation to use God's name to lie and deceive and instead call upon His name in every trouble as we pray, praise, and give thanks. We begin to hold God's Word sacred as we gladly hear and learn it. And we resist the sinful urge tell lies and instead defend and speak well of our neighbor.

We do all of this out of love for God, and not out of fear of punishment or condemnation, but joyfully and gladly because of Christ's perfect obedience that has been credited to us. In Christ alone, we are counted as righteous and obedient before God through our faith in His obedient Son. Amen.

*The peace of God, which surpasses all understanding,
keep your hearts and minds in Christ Jesus, our Lord. Amen.*

+ SOLI DEO GLORIA +