

Sunday December 26,2021:10:45 only

First Lesson: Psalm 148

Gospel Lesson: Luke 2:41-52

Sermon title: "Things you probably didn't know about Christmas."

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- **One of the most joyous times of the year and the most stressful times of the year for me is Christmas.**
- For aside from it being one of the most anticipated services for most churches, where depending on the church's tradition, hundreds of people throughout the community will come out to attend one of at least 2-3 Christmas Eve service opportunities; as a parent of four children now ages 18, almost 17, 13, and 10; it never fails...I am gripped with this question of what is it I am supposed to get them for Christmas!
- And yes I know, I know....Christmas is not supposed to be about gifts; as it is supposed to be

a time of spending time with family and friends, or depending on where one stands spiritually; it is supposed to be about celebrating the birth of Jesus who represents love for all people;

- However, I must admit that I still value bringing smiles to my children's faces, by having gifts under the tree...even though I am a terrible wrapper....
- I guess what I am naming is that in our household when it comes to Christmas, we are all still trying to get on the same page as to what Christmas really represents for us....for there is still this internalized pressure for us as parents to produce gifts;
- Looking at our gospel of Luke this morning, it would appear that even Jesus's birth parents and Jesus were not on the same page...
- For every adult male Jew was required to attend **the feast of the passover** each year.

- It was held in March or April, as Easter is celebrated today, because the Jewish months always began at the time of a new moon.
- And so as we zone into verse 42 of our lesson, this is exactly what Jesus family was doing for it says *And when he was twelve years old, they went up as usual for the festival. When the festival was ended, they started to return, but the boy Jesus stayed behind in Jerusalem, but his parents did not know it.*
- So as I engage this passage of scripture, I am beginning to wonder where did the wires get crossed for this family? Where did the miscommunication or misunderstanding occur?
- For our text gives us a clue in verse 44 **that they assumed** that Jesus was in the group of travelers that basically consisted of their family and friends.

- But we will soon learn that this was not the case at all.
- For as biblical scholars would weigh in on this discussion; that what was occurring in our text was perhaps Jesus Bar Mitzvah; for every Jewish boy at the age of thirteen is supposed to go through a solemn ceremony by which he becomes *Bar Mitzvah*;
- Which means that at this ceremony, a Jewish boy would become a member of the congregation of Israel; giving the boy the full rite and authority to worship with the men in the synagogue, instead of having to be with his mother, in the secluded, curtained space assigned to the women.
- So in our text, maybe what was being represented, was a time of Jesus life, where he was no longer called “little” but “grown up.”

- So perhaps this is why Jesus and his parents were not on the same page as to what exactly they were there to do.
- For typically at the conclusion of the prayers, guests generally regroup in the social hall, where they enjoy a festive reception.
- For a reception will typically not include formal prayers. Instead you can expect to hear the bar mitzvah celebrant, his parents and others share words of inspiration on the significance of the milestone, while they munch on tasty food; not to mention in bar mitzvahs and bat mitzvahs of today, gifts were customary to give as well;
- The most common is **giving money toward college or studies abroad in Israel.**
- Many families end up donating a portion of cash to a charity. This custom is known as "tzedekah." You may also choose to make a direct donation to a charity in honor of the bar or bat mitzvah.

- So perhaps this is what Jesus's parents were hoping to do; have Jesus at this reception; celebrating his achievement in a similar way.
- **So as I step out of this passage for a moment to make some personal connections with this story, somehow at this realization, I am beginning to understand my and Stephen's concern with making sure our children has gifts as well....**
- For it is not consumerism that is driving us at all, but it is this awareness of how much our own family traditions matter to us; for in both of our families, having this type of celebration with gifts was the norm for us.
- However, in all honesty when I think of all of the gifts we have gotten our children together in the past; polaroid cameras when they became a thing again, robot dogs, furbies (that still scare the living daylights out of me and one of our children once its programmed voice turned demonic on us out of no

where...I swear) , fire trucks and more; our children seemed to only entertain them for a short time for various reasons....

- However, when we packed them all up to drive to Florida a few months ago, our four children seemed to value this time together so much, that our son Ashton keeps asking us when we will have a family trip together again!
- In fact one of Steve's friends mentioned how they have made the decision as a family not to do gifts on Christmas, but to focus on taking similar trips together; for those types of gifts of being together as a family are experiences that both the children and parents never seem to forget. I think these parents are on to something for sure!
- For these are the types of gifts that keep on giving, spending quality time and creating experiences and memories that last a lifetime!

- **So hearing this story of our gospel and reflecting on our own Christmas story; along with hearing other stories from our friends on how they celebrate Christmas; all of this began to peak my curiosity of how others might approach this celebration of Christmas around the world; and what I discovered is that there was a lot I really didn't know or consider;**
- For instance during the early days of Christianity; different parts of the world celebrated Christmas on different dates. In fact if you traveled widely in the Roman world, you could enjoy six different Christmases in the span of a single year!
- So it was Pope Julius I in the mid-fourth century who appointed a monk named Dionysius to set up a calendar standardizing a universal date, which came to be December 25.
- Another thing I didn't know and perhaps you may not know, is that Christmas was outlawed in

England by the Puritans under Oliver Cromwell (1599-1658) who thought of it as a “Heathen celebration.”

- In fact, a law was passed in Massachusetts in 1659 that said, “whoever shall be found observing any such day as Christmas and the like, either by forbearing labor, feasting or any other way, shall pay for any such offense five shillings as a fine to the country.” Not to mention this law remained in the books for 22 years....Jiminy Crickets!!!!
- In Spain, Christmas gifts were not exchanged until January 6—for a very good reason. For this was the date commemorating the visit of the Magi, who offered Christmas gifts—gold, frankincense and myrrh. On that night, children set their shoes outside on the doorstep, filling them with straw to feed their camels and in return fill the shoes with gifts and candy. I personally love the discovery of

this tradition...I wonder if our children will go for this!

- The custom of Christmas cards began in 1843 when a wealthy Englishman, Sir Henry Cole, ran out of time to write personal letters to his friends at Christmas. His solution was to commission an artist, John Calcott Horsely, to design a card instead. Horsley drew a picture of a group of merry-wishers raising their glass in a toast. Underneath were the words, "A Merry Christmas and a Happy New Year to you." But wait for the scandal.....the card created so much controversy, as critics complained it encouraged holiday drinking, but the custom of sending cards at Christmas caught on nonetheless.
- The Poinsettia is a Christmas tradition harking from Mexico. According to the legend, a boy named Pablo was headed to his village church to see its nativity scene. Realizing he had no gift for the

Christchild, he hurriedly gathered some branches and weeds from the roadside. When he laid them before the manger, the other children laughed at him. But suddenly there appeared on each branch the brilliant, star-shaped flower of the Poinsettia.

- Finally candy canes were reportedly developed by a Christian candy maker in Indiana who built the story of Christmas into each piece. The hardness of the candy represents the solid rock of the Christian faith. The white represents the sinlessness of Christ, and the red stripes symbolize the wounds caused by his flogging. The shape of the candy is that of a shepherd's staff, representing Christ as our Good Shepherd. Turned upside down, it forms the letter "J"—for Jesus.
- And folks there is so much more I could share; but what started this personal quest into the traditions that surround a holiday in which most of us really value, is because of this recognition that no matter

how meaningful our traditions have become for most of us; my personal truth is that I still strive yearly for this season to become less chaotic in my soul.

- In fact, I am disturbed that such a beautiful time of celebration has become such an anxious time for me, for I suspect I am still missing the bigger picture....in fact I know I am.
- The reality I suspect, is that we all can relate to Mary and Joseph frantically searching for Jesus in a crowd; only discovering that he was not where he was supposed to be.
- In fact Mary is a whole mood where she said to Jesus in verse 48; *Child, why have you treated us like this? Look, your father and I have been searching for you in great anxiety.*”
- As a mom, I relate to Mary so much...perhaps you can too.

- Jesus tries to give his mother an explanation to ease this anxiety, that our gospel reveals did not quite connect; Jesus said in verse 49, “ Why were you searching for me? Did you not know that I must be in my Father’s house?”
- verse 50 says; “But they did not understand what he said to them.”
- Nevertheless vs 51 reveals that “He (Jesus) went down with them and came to Nazareth, and was obedient to them. Causing his mother to treasure all these things in her heart.”
- A rather mysterious way to end this pericope of scripture; leaving all of us an opportunity to keep striving to understand the true meaning of Christmas through our personal traditions.
- But sometimes perhaps we all need to take the time to slow down in the midst of it all to really hear from our children; for they seem to possess an

awareness that we may not know or have forgotten....

- So I leave us all with this video from one of the toddlers of TikTok, who can further help this anxious momma and all who may resonate with what I have been naming; to help us get onto the same page.....
- Merry Christmas and a Happy New Year!