

The Second Sunday after Christmas

Text: Luke 2:40 - 52 (NIV)

⁴⁰And the child grew and became strong; he was filled with wisdom, and the grace of God was upon him. ⁴¹Every year his parents went to Jerusalem for the Feast of the Passover. ⁴²When he was twelve years old, they went up to the Feast, according to the custom. ⁴³After the Feast was over, while his parents were returning home, the boy Jesus stayed behind in Jerusalem, but they were unaware of it. ⁴⁴Thinking he was in their company, they traveled on for a day. Then they began looking for him among their relatives and friends. ⁴⁵When they did not find him, they went back to Jerusalem to look for him. ⁴⁶After three days they found him in the temple courts, sitting among the teachers, listening to them and asking them questions. ⁴⁷Everyone who heard him was amazed at his understanding and his answers. ⁴⁸When his parents saw him, they were astonished. His mother said to him, "Son, why have you treated us like this? Your father and I have been anxiously searching for you." ⁴⁹"Why were you searching for me?" he asked. "Didn't you know I had to be in my Father's house?" ⁵⁰But they did not understand what he was saying to them. ⁵¹Then he went down to Nazareth with them and was obedient to them. But his mother treasured all these things in her heart. ⁵²And Jesus grew in wisdom and stature, and in favor with God and men.

Theme: An Example for both Parents and Children Today

This year marks the 200 anniversary of the birth of CFW Walther, the first president of the Lutheran Church - Missouri Synod. Over the years, I have grown to appreciate his pastoral heart as I have read many of his writings. I especially have enjoyed reading his books on pastoral theology and his sermons. In our elders' meeting we have been reading some of his writings on the social ministry within a congregation. With regard to his sermons, I have especially found a sermon on this text interesting.

In the beginning of the sermon writes that many of those who emigrated to America felt that they had to come to America for the spiritual sake of their children, but they came to realize that this country poses particularly great spiritual dangers for our youth. He cites especially three things. This sermon was written about 150 years ago, but I was amazed at how little things have changed. The first danger is that under the guise of religious liberty and freedom of conscience there are more horrible blasphemies uttered against God, His Word, and everything holy in our country than perhaps anyplace in the whole world. People feel that it is their right to do and say as they please, and no one can tell them that what they are doing is wrong. They feel free to say the vilest things against God and His ways. Is that still not the country that we are living in today? Secondly, and this is interesting, Walther notes that there are so many opportunities for the youth in this country to make money that they figure that they don't need their parents. He saw how the economy was breaking down the family structure and making each person independent of the other. Finally, he noticed that the religious freedom in our country has led to a multitude of religious sects. There were many very strange religious groups that sprang up during that time, such as the Shakers, the Oneidas, the Mormons, and many others. Today we are surrounded by many false religious groups that can also be very deceiving. The vehicles that the devil uses have changed over the years. Today we have the internet, but his basic temptations are still very much the same as they have always been. That is why stories from the Bible and the example of Christians who have gone before us are so important. They teach us how we can follow our Lord through this world until we reach His glory in heaven. Today I would like to look at this example of the Holy Family as they teach both parents and children today.

I. This text encourages parents to take special care in the spiritual nurture of their children.

It is very tempting to neglect this aspect of our children's upbringing. What do we find important today? Sports is often at the top of the list. We want our children to be the star athlete. Families are often willing to spend thousands of dollars for camps and club teams in the hope that their child will become a superstar. Big sacrifices are made. Everything revolves around that sport. Even the coach lets you know that this is the most important thing in your child's life. We might think that our children need to have the newest and best gadgets. They have cell phones, ipods, tv's, video games, expensive clothes, and many other things that their parents sometimes really can't afford, but we figure that they need to have these things. We push them hard, so that they will have a good job. We make them work hard in school, so that they will have a career that will make a lot of money. Sometimes children are even used as pawns, so that the parents can get money from the government or other people. But when any of these things are given precedence over the spiritual needs of our children, we are neglecting the responsibility that we have been given as parents. God will demand an accounting of us when we have been negligent in the spiritual needs of the children whom He has entrusted to us.

How can we care for our children spiritually?

1. Bring them to the baptismal font. In Luke's Gospel we read that when Jesus was 8 days old he was circumcised and presented at the temple. The Bible often compares baptism with circumcision in the Old Testament. Parents should look forward to the day when they bring their children to the baptismal font. It is a day of celebration. It is the means through which God gives them a rebirth as His children. It puts faith in Christ in their hearts. There is no greater gift that a parent can give their children.

2. Pray for them. It says that when the shepherds came and said that they were told that this child was the Savior, Mary pondered these things and treasured them in her heart. She kept this child in her heart and prayed for Him every day. Remember your children in your prayers, especially when they go astray. There is a famous story about the mother of St. Augustine. Monica prayed for her son for 20 years until he finally came to his senses. Ambrose once remarked about her, "It is not possible that a child of these tears should be lost."

3. Train them in God's Word right from the beginning. I do not think that Jesus was able to discuss with the teachers so well because He was divinely inspired. It was because His parents took Him to the synagogue every Sabbath since He was a small child. He listened to God's Word and took it to heart. He learned God's Word the same way that we do. It is important that children feel that God's house is their home right from the beginning. The people in this place are their brothers and sisters and maybe even grandpas and grandmas in Christ. It is important that we teach them to pray and read Bible stories to them even before they begin Sunday School. Parents who teach their children about their Savior from a young age give them a great treasure.

4. Give them a Christian example. It says that Mary and Joseph went to the Passover every year. This was something that Jesus looked forward to now that He was 12 years old. Your children need to see the example of your faith. They need to know how you prize the forgiveness of your sins. They need to see that God's Word, His Supper and prayer are things that shape your life. They need to see people who live their faith, not people whose motto is "Do as I say, not as I do." In the movie "A Christmas Story" Ralphie's parents are aghast when he says a word, which he had heard his father say several times a day. It should be your desire that your children see parents who are kind, compassionate, moral, and forgiving, parents who follow Jesus.

II. These verses also encourage children to be obedient.

Especially in spiritual matters. There will be times when other things will seem more fun and even more glorious than worshiping our Lord and growing in His Word, but don't fall into those temptations. The faith in Christ that your parents want to instill in your hearts is the greatest blessing that they can give to you. Thank God for parents who discipline you, and who teach you right from wrong. Especially thank God for parents who have pointed you to Jesus Christ as your Savior. Such parents are a marvelous gift of God.

Obey and respect them in all things. Colossians 3:20 says, "*Children obey your parents in everything for this pleases the Lord.*" Jesus was the Son of God, and He knew it already. Yet, He was obedient to sinners like Mary and Joseph. They messed up "big time" in our text. They walked for a whole day without knowing where Jesus was. What kind of parent does that? Mary and Joseph were no different than the parents in the movie, "Home Alone." How could they have lost track of their Son for a whole day? Yet, Jesus returned to Nazareth with them and submitted to them. This is a powerful example to us, no matter how old we are, that we respect the parents whom God has given to us, even when they have failed us. Proverbs 23:22 says, "*Listen to your father who gave you life, and do not despise your mother when she is old.*" If they tell us to do something that is ungodly, of course we have to respectfully refuse, but God promises His blessings to children to respect their parents as long as He gives them to us on this earth.

As we think of the Holy Family, they are a powerful example for both Christian parents and children. To be honest, their example shows us our own failings. That's why it's also such good news that Christ was obedient in our place. He was obedient to all of God's commandments including the 4th Commandment to honor His parents. But He was also obedient to His Heavenly Father, when He offered His perfect life on the cross as they payment for all of our sins. May God then give us the desire to follow His righteous example as both parents and children, and may He especially give us repentance when we see our failings, and faith to trust in His forgiving love which cleanses us from those sins. In His name,
Amen.

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