

Now What?

By: Meagan McLaughlin

December 27, 2020. From the small snippet we have about the adolescent Jesus, we are assured that in Jesus, we have a God who knows exactly what it means to be human. Pastor Meagan's sermon today is on the good news of Christmas for us as Christians, that in Jesus we are never alone on our human journey, because God is there, in the tiniest details of our daily life.

Readings: [Luke 2:22-40](#)

*** Transcript ***

Christmas Day 2020 is over. We have gathered for Christmas Eve Worship, in the ways we could this season. We gathered in our households, Zoomed in our extended family to share Christmas greetings, opened presents, ate special meals with those closest to us. We probably haven't taken down the decorations yet, but we might be starting to think about it — even if there are still almost two weeks left until Epiphany arrives and Christmas is officially over. And in this pandemic time, we may be feeling extra lonely, missing those we couldn't be with this year. We may be feeling tired, from working hard to find new ways to celebrate Christmas. We may be feeling discouraged, wanting this pandemic to be over and feeling like Christmas just wasn't what we hoped for, and wondering when we will finally be able to celebrate together. We may be joyful, having been surprised by the new and creative things that happened this year. Or peaceful, knowing that God is present in this messy world after all.

And however we are feeling, Jesus was born. God is among us. And the Spirit is at work in this world of ours, just like she has been since creation. So, now what? What happens next? Because the birth of Christ, we know, was just the beginning of the story.

We don't know much about Jesus' childhood, really. Luke provides us with a detailed story of Jesus' birth — where he was born, who was there, the shepherds visiting after the angel came to them. We are told in Matthew of the visit of the wise people, and the Holy Family leaving soon after for Egypt, when Jesus was probably no more than a couple of years old. Then, there are just two stories of Jesus' childhood, before the story continues with Jesus as an adult.

In today's Gospel, Mary and Joseph, faithful Jewish parents, bring their son Jesus to the temple to fulfill the rites of dedication, and once again the prophets speak. Anna had been in the temple much of her adult life, waiting for the arrival of the one she knew God would send. She tells everyone there that Jesus, this little babe-in-arms, is the one for whom they had all been waiting for so long. Simeon sings one of the most beloved prayers of our scriptures, proclaiming that in Christ all that God has promised has been fulfilled.

Then, in the verses following today's gospel, we have a story of Jesus around the age of 12, leaving his parents and going to the temple, where they finally find him. And then, nothing, until Jesus is somewhere around 30 years old, and he begins his public ministry.

One can imagine Jesus' baby book, the first several pages full of pictures from his early days, a note stuck in the back about how Mary and Joseph found him in the temple when he was 12, and then, blank pages until he was a grown man and the world around him started to really take notice of what he was saying and doing. So parents, if you ever feel guilty about not having a complete baby book for each of

your children, don't worry, you aren't the only one.

But let's go back for a moment to that scene at the temple, and Jesus wandering away from his parents. Luke tells us that Mary and Joseph searched for Jesus for three days. It reminds me of when I was young, and my grandmother was visiting us and babysitting while my parents were out of town. All of a sudden, my younger brother Phil was nowhere to be found. Panic ensued, as my grandmother started looking for him anywhere she could think, enlisted the neighbors to help, and we all went around yelling his name.

They were just on the verge of calling the police when someone finally thought to look in the boat, which sat in the driveway with a cover on it to keep rain from getting in. Sure enough, my younger brother, who loved (and still loves) boats, had managed to undo enough snaps on the cover to slip inside, and he had climbed in and taken a nap. Found at last. It probably felt like forever to my poor grandmother, who was dreading the thought of having to call my parents to let them know she had lost their child. But really, it was likely only about 20 minutes or so.

Mary and Joseph searched for Jesus for three days! Three days of walking, asking everyone they encountered if they had seen Jesus, trying to come up with more ideas of where to look, imagining the worst. If my grandmother dreaded calling my parents, Mary must have been horrified at the thought of having to account to God for losing track of His son!

And then, after all of that, there he was: confidently and clearly explaining the scriptures to the temple teachers, while they asked him questions and were astounded at his wisdom, and the young Jesus seemingly unconcerned about how desperately his parents must have been searching for him. It is no wonder then that Mary is at once flooded with relief, shocked at finding him in the temple, where she and Joseph hadn't thought to look until then, and angry at seeing him so calm when they had been so worried about him.

This is not a peaceful, serene Mary, but one as frantic as my grandmother was at losing my brother, as panicked as any of us would be if we could not find a child in our care. And so, Mary calls Jesus, the 12 year old Son of the living God, to account. "How could you do this to us? Wander away for so long? Did you not ever once think about how terrified we would be, searching for you all this time?"

Jesus' answer doesn't really satisfy his parents, as they don't understand it. But as we listen today to Jesus' words we notice that at the age of 12 Jesus already related to God as his father, and knew he belonged in his father's house — an unusual thought at the time. It's as if Simeon and Anna's inspired words had seeped into his heart and spirit, and he knew God in a surprising way. Luke also tells us that, having wandered away from his parents so disrespectfully, Jesus went home with them and obeyed them, and grew up and learned and gained wisdom, as we hopefully all do. And the next we hear of Jesus, he is an adult and preparing to enter public life, after so many quiet years of living the seemingly ordinary life of a young Jewish boy/man in first century Palestine.

And so, we know that Jesus did not just go straight from innocent baby to preacher who was known to everyone around, including the Roman leaders, with nothing in between. And Mary and Joseph raised Jesus just as all Jewish children around them were being raised: loving him, teaching him, bringing him to the synagogue, and yes, freaking out when they thought he was in danger. Jesus lived, as we do, with parents, family, friends, work, synagogue life, school, and everything else that went along with being human, just like we do. He upset his parents, as all children do. He grew up, as we all do. From the small snippet we have about the adolescent Jesus, we are assured again that in Jesus, we have a God

who knows exactly what it means to be human.

In the midst of this ordinary life we lead, knowing Jesus means that God is right here with us — not just in the big things, but in all of the ordinary, everyday things that go along with being human. Jesus, Immanuel, God with us, shows us that there is no place and no thing where God is not. And this is the good news of Christmas for us as Christians — in Jesus, we are never alone in our human journey, because God is there, in the tiniest details of our daily life.

With Anna and Simeon we can rest, knowing that in Christ, God has broken into this world of ours. We can rejoice, knowing that God's promises have been, and are being fulfilled. With Mary and Joseph, we can ponder all of these things in our hearts, and grow in our awareness of God in our midst.

Christmas Day is just the beginning of the story. The Spirit of God that created all that is, and came to earth in human form in Christ, comes to heal, transform, redeem, and create today. On this first Sunday of Christmas, 2020, I leave you with these words from Howard Thurman:

“When the song of the angels is stilled, when the star in the sky is gone,
when the kings and princes are home,
when the shepherds are back with their flocks, the work of Christmas begins: to find the lost,
to heal the broken,
to feed the hungry,
to release the prisoner,
to rebuild the nations,
to bring peace among the people, to make music in the heart.”

And now let us sing, as Simeon did, of the trust and the hope that we have in Christ.

*** Keywords ***

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