

“WHERE IS JESUS?”

“Where is Jesus?” We will first ask and answer this question in the historical context of today’s text. But we will also ask and answer this question in the context of our society today. Our text for today is the account of 12 year old Jesus in the temple. From Luke 2 we listen again to verse 46:

After three days they found him in the temple courts, sitting among the teachers, listening to them and asking them questions.

Dear Friends in Christ,

Can there be anything scarier than a lost child? Even if it is only for a few minutes, is there anything that can terrify parents more or cause parents to panic more than the realization that their child, who moments ago was by their side, is now missing? Tragic news stories of lost or abducted children send chills up parents spines and cause parents to spring into action the instant a child’s whereabouts are unknown.

“Where is Jesus?” Mary and Joseph probably asked that question a hundred times or more during the three days that Jesus was missing. “Where is Jesus?” It’s a question that, sadly, is not asked very often these days. “Where is Jesus?” Not too many people are overly concerned about where to find Jesus today. And if someone does ask “Where is Jesus?” chances are the answer they receive will be misleading or maybe even wrong.

Our Gospel lesson records an event from the childhood of Jesus. This is the only event from the childhood of Jesus that is recorded in Scripture.

When Jesus was twelve years old, he traveled with his parents to Jerusalem for the Feast of the Passover. The men of Israel were required to attend festivals at the temple in Jerusalem. The women and children often accompanied the men. For the Feast of the Passover, the family was customarily in Jerusalem for a week.

It appears that Mary and Joseph and a group of families from Nazareth made the three day trip together that year. Back then, walking was the main mode of transportation. Often, people would travel in big groups because it was safer, and the time seemed to go by faster in the company of family, friends and neighbors. In groups like these, the adults would often walk together, and the children would separate into their own group to play and do other things, just as children do today.

After the Feast was over, Mary and Joseph began the trip back home with their traveling companions, the group of families from Nazareth. They walked the first day of the three day trip from Jerusalem to Nazareth confident that Jesus was traveling with the children of their companions just as he had on the trip from Nazareth to Jerusalem. On the first night Mary and Joseph set up camp and looked for Jesus among the group. But they couldn’t find him. “Where is Jesus?” He wasn’t with the other children. He wasn’t with their friends or relatives. Jesus was missing. He was gone without a trace. “Where is Jesus?”

If you were a parent, and you couldn't find your child, you would probably start to panic, after awhile, and rightly so. There are all kinds of bad reasons why children go missing. "Where is Jesus?" Mary and Joseph were obviously upset. The next morning, Mary and Joseph got up and began the one day walk back to Jerusalem. There they spent another day, the third day, in search of their son. "Where is Jesus?" All kinds of questions, I'm sure, were racing through their minds, questions like, "Is he lost? Has he been abducted? Is he alive? Is he hurt?" "Where is Jesus?" Finally, after three days, they found Jesus in the temple courts, the twelve year old boy sitting among the teachers, interacting with them, listening to them and asking them questions. He had probably collected a crowd around himself. Verse 47 tell us, *Everyone who heard him was amazed at his understanding and his answers.* He looked like a twelve year old but he spoke like one who had been a Biblical scholar for many years.

⁴⁸ *When his parents saw him, they were astonished.* Jesus had been a model child. He had never disobeyed them, never defied them, never even disappointed them. He had never pulled a stunt like this before. Filled with relief but also filled with frustration and anxiety, (Remember, this was the third day without him.) Mary scolded Jesus by saying, "Son, why have you treated us like this? Your father and I have been anxiously searching for you." But Jesus, didn't respond by saying, "I'm sorry." Instead, his reply showed his parents and us that he knew who he really was and he knew the importance of his mission. "Why were you searching for me?" he asked. "Didn't you know I had to be in my Father's house?"

At first, Mary and Joseph didn't really understand what Jesus was saying to them. What does Jesus mean when he said that he "had to be in his Father's house?" (Literally, "I must be in the things of my Father.") The answer to their question "Where is Jesus?" should have been obvious. "Where is Jesus?" Jesus is in his Father's house, involved in the things of his Father. In fact Jesus said he 'had to be' in his Father's house. There was no other place for him to be. This should have been the first place they looked. It was clear to Jesus, He had to be in his Father's house involved in the things of his Father.

You see, even at the young age of twelve, Jesus knew that he was not just the son of Mary. He was the Son of God. Eighteen years later, at his baptism, Jesus heard the voice of God the Father identifying Jesus as his Son. But even at the young age of twelve, Jesus knew that his purpose in life was not just to play and be a good son and grow up and learn a trade. He knew that he was on this earth for a greater purpose – he had a divine mission to fulfill, to be the Savior of all mankind. And preparation for that mission involved spending time in God's Word – listening to the teachers, asking them questions, filling himself with the words and promises of God that are found in the Scripture, teaching the teachers. That was why he had to be in his Father's house. That's what it meant to be involved in the things of his Father.

Ultimately, this twelve year old boy would grow up to become the greatest teacher the Jews had ever known. But even more importantly, his divine mission would involve Jesus dying on a cross. That was his ultimate mission in life – to be the Savior of all mankind. Yes, he was still a good son to his parents – the Bible says that Jesus returned home after that day and obeyed his mother and his step-father. He *grew in wisdom and stature, and in favor with God and men.* But he had a greater mission, a more important, divine mission, to be the Savior of the world, to be your Savior from sin. That was

his number one priority. This account of the 12 year old Jesus is important for us because it answers the question, 'Did Jesus know, even in his youth, that he was the Son of God and Savior of the world?' The answer is YES.

"Where is Jesus?" Not too many people are overly concerned about where to find Jesus today. "Where is Jesus?" It's a question that, sadly, is not asked very often these days. And if someone does ask "Where is Jesus?" chances are the answer he receives will be misleading or maybe even wrong.

Unfortunately, Jesus is generally not found in the Religious Studies Departments or the Biblical Theology Departments of this country's universities. There you will most likely find misinformation about the historical Jesus and rejection of his divinity, his virgin birth and his resurrection.

Unfortunately, Jesus is generally not found in the many educational television programs on the Discovery Channel, the History Channel, the Science Channel or the Learning Channel that profess to bring you modern insights into the life of Christ and the development of Christianity. Their seemingly scholarly works draw unsubstantiated conclusions from the Lost Gospels, the Gnostic Gospels and other sources that have been rejected by Christians as heresy for the past 2,000 years.

Let me give you a recent example. Two weeks ago, on the Science Channel, I watched a television program entitled "Biblical Conspiracies." Two noted scholars, Paul Tabor and Simcha Jacobovici, disclosed their "latest findings" on Jesus of Nazareth. It may surprise you to know that these learned men have discovered proof that Jesus was not born of a virgin. No, he was the child of a Jewish girl Mary and a Roman soldier named Panthera who was a Phoenician-Canaanite. Since Jesus was half Phoenician-Canaanite, he would not have been allowed to take a Jewish wife.

That's why, Tabor and Jacobovici conclude, Jesus was very comfortable marrying Mary Magdalene who was, in reality, a Phoenician-Canaanite priestess. Not only did Jesus and Mary Magdalene become the parents of two children, Mary Magdalene was the main disciple, the chief disciple of Christ and became the undisputed leader of the Christian church after Jesus' death. Yes, it's laughable scholarship but there are many who are being led astray and many who are being led away from the real Jesus by these falsehoods. "Where is Jesus?" He's certainly NOT to be found in academia or in educational television.

"Where is Jesus?" Jesus can be found right here in the pages of scripture. It is the very same scripture that the young boy Jesus read and studied and memorized. It is the very same scripture that Jesus was discussing with the teachers in the temple court as he amazed them with his understanding. In fact, that is the main reason why God has given us His Word. The Bible is all about Jesus, from the 1st chapter of Genesis to the 22nd chapter of Revelation. The Bible is all about Jesus. Jesus himself taught, *"These are the Scriptures that testify about me."* (John 5:39 NIV). As Jesus walked along the road to Emmaus, we read in Luke 24:27, *And beginning with Moses and all the Prophets, he explained to them what was said in all the Scriptures concerning himself.* If you're looking for Jesus, look no farther than the Bible. That's where Jesus can be found. That's where God's plan for your salvation is clearly explained. That's where Jesus speaks to you. He says, *"My sheep listen to my voice; I know them, and they follow me."* (John 10:27 NIV).

“Where is Jesus?” Here’s where that question gets really personal. The Bible tells us that Jesus is ruling over the Kingdom of God which can be found in the heart of each believer. Luke 17:20-21 . . . *Jesus replied, “The kingdom of God does not come with your careful observation,²¹ nor will people say, ‘Here it is,’ or ‘There it is,’ because the kingdom of God is within you.”*

“Where is Jesus?” Jesus is in the hearts of believers. Writing to the Ephesians the Apostle Paul said, *“I pray that out of his glorious riches he may strengthen you with power through his Spirit in your inner being, so that Christ may dwell in your hearts through faith.”* (Ephesians 3:16-17 NIV). Christ lives and rules in the heart of each believer through faith.

“Where is Jesus?” Jesus is in the hearts of believers. Jesus is in your heart.

Remember, how Jesus replied to his mother’s question. “. . . ***I had** to be in my Father’s house?*” I **must** be about the things of my Father. After his baptism, Jesus went out and involved himself in the things of his Father, teaching, healing, eventually dying on the cross of Calvary, then triumphing over death on Easter morning. The “things of my Father” embraced all that went into the redemption of the world and of these things Jesus said, “I **must** be about them.” All through Jesus’ ministry there runs this idea of necessity, this idea of “must do.”

Jesus expressed this compulsion when he healed an afflicted man and said, *“As long as it is day we must do the work of him who sent me.”* (John 9:4 NIV). Even about his upcoming death he said, *“The Son of Man must suffer many things . . . and be killed.”* The necessity of Christ being about the things of the Father becomes your necessity, too. The Apostle Paul writes, *“For Christ’s love compels us.”* There’s a sense of urgency. It is a necessity. Not a necessity that comes from a legal obligation to God, but a necessity that flows from a heart motivated by the very love of God in Christ. It is not a necessity that comes from being moral people, but a necessity that is driven and empowered by God’s grace, the same grace that made you God’s child to begin with.

What then are the “things of the Father” that become yours to do as Christ lives and rules in your heart? The indwelling of Christ will show itself in a loving and forgiving life, a life that reaches out to others with the message of salvation, a life that seeks to serve others, helping those in need, giving generously, teaching others, praying for all, friends and enemies alike, and sharing the most important thing you know, the knowledge that can save people from an eternity in hell.

“Where is Jesus?” Jesus in his Father’s house, involved in the things of his Father. “Where is Jesus?” Jesus is in the very word of God, the Holy Scriptures. “Where is Jesus?” Jesus is in the hearts of believers. Jesus is in your heart, does it show?

The story is told of a missionary team that entered a remote village with the goal of being the first to bring the Gospel message to these isolated and primitive people. After weeks of fighting their way through the dense, impenetrable jungle, they finally reached the village. Through an interpreter they began talking to the members of the tribe about a man named Jesus, their Savior. The villagers heard that Jesus had compassion for the sick, and healed them. He fed the hungry, attended to the hurt and lonely, helped those in need and taught people about God’s love.

After listening for a while, the native people insisted that not only did they know this “Jesus” but he had lived in their village for many years. The missionaries were a little confused by the villagers’ reaction and tried to explain that they were mistaken, but they insisted all the more, that this same Jesus of whom the missionaries spoke had not only lived with them but he was buried just outside the village.

They led the missionaries to well-tended grave that was marked with a cross. Lifting a large rock the natives uncovered a hand-crafted wooden box. Inside the box were a pair of glasses, an old stethoscope, and a German Bible. Obviously, a medical missionary had made his way to this village many years earlier. He had lived such a life that when the newly arrived workers started to tell the villagers about Jesus, they concluded that they had already met him. Through his life of Christian love, and through the outward evidence of the indwelling Christ, the old medical missionary was mistaken for Jesus. What a wonderful way to give glory to God.

So, “Where is Jesus?” Jesus is in his Father’s house, involved in the things of his Father. “Where is Jesus?” Jesus is in the very word of God, the Holy Scriptures. “Where is Jesus?” Jesus is in the hearts of believers. “Where is Jesus?” He’s here. He’s in you. Let it show. Amen.