

Sermon – Luke 2:41-52
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Grace Lutheran Church
1 Christmas Eve – Year C
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“Holding On to Christ(mas)”

Sisters and brothers in Christ, grace be unto you and peace in the name God the Father and our Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ. Amen.

1. Sitting in the glow of our Christmas tree in the early morning of Christmas Day, I was filled with joy, having just celebrated the birth of Jesus with well over a thousand people here at Grace. I was also filled with a holy exhaustion, knowing that in just a few hours, I'd be awake again, first to open presents, then to come to worship once more. Honestly, thinking about it made me excited. What a gift to celebrate all that God has done! But my tired brain did for a second hopefully wonder: Is next year one of those years when the calendar works out so that there's a day between Christmas Eve and Christmas Day? A second or two later, my brain turned back on. But time does get weird at Christmas. We live in a liminal space in which we worship in the dark, eat too much cheese, and forget what day it is. The world around us doesn't really help. By the time we get to Christmas, everyone else is ready to move on. On the 26th, Stephen's Feast, just the Second Day of Christmas, the radio station that had been playing non-stop Christmas music since what felt like early August was done, back to playing light adult hits. It's as if, having allowed itself to open just enough to catch a glimpse of God's glory, the world wants to us move along again. Time must keep moving on.
2. At first glance, our gospel reading doesn't help matters on this front. Wasn't Jesus just, you know, born? And now he's twelve, precocious as all get out, exasperating his parents with his growing independence? As the only story of

Jesus' adolescence recorded in the Bible, this episode raises as many questions as it answers. We confess the full humanity and the full divinity more than we understand it; what does it mean that Jesus grew in wisdom and divine favor? What did he know and when did he know it? While he remains in Jerusalem at the Temple following the Passover, his parents are frantic. Agonized and anxious, they spend three days looking for him, only to find him right where they left him, in the house of his heavenly Father, calm as can be. Luke's jump cut, from infancy to a boy on the edge of adulthood, speeds the story along. Can't we just have a bit more Christmas?

3. Reflecting on this text, the preacher Meda Stamper writes, "If we have struggled to hold onto the fullness of the Savior in the merriment or stress of celebrating Christmas, this text invites us to turn back with Mary and Joseph and to remember where he will always be found." And where is that? Well, that's actually a bit translationally tricky. In our text today, it is rendered, "in my Father's house." The Temple was for the people the place at which heaven and earth came closest, where the ever-present God was most present for the people. Jesus must be in the Temple, for Jesus himself will grow to become the new Temple. Then again, Luke could mean that Jesus must be among a group of people, in this case the teachers, opening up for them the true meaning of God's Word. After all, he is the Word made flesh, the wisdom from on high. Or, as you may remember if it's the King James Version that's baked into your brain, Jesus might also be saying, "Did you not know that I must be about My Father's business?" Jesus might be saying that where he can be found is less about location and more about activity. The great thing about translational mysteries is that they invite us to see things all at once. Where is Jesus? Well, why are you looking for him? He's exactly where he's supposed to be! In just the right place, for just the right people, to enact the divine purpose. Place, people and purpose. Jesus is everywhere, for everyone, doing God's will for our sake and salvation, bridging the chasm between heaven and earth.

4. In his first words spoken in scripture, Jesus the Word shows forth the whole story. This is not the last time he will go up to Jerusalem for the Passover. Not the last time he will find himself separated from his family and friends. Not the last time he will go missing for three days. For his Father's business, about which Jesus must be about, is to do all that is needed to save us and all creation from sin, evil, and death. Having turned over the Temple tables, Jesus will be taken outside the city to stark Golgotha and put to death. For three days he will be unfindable. But when the women go to look for him, they are greeted by messengers robed in dazzling light? "Why," they ask the women, "do you look for the living among the dead? He is not here, but has risen." Here, in his death and resurrection, is the curtain finally torn in two such that God's mercy and grace can flow freely into our world, our hearts.

5. We hear today once more of Mary, treasuring these things in her heart, just as she did after hearing the shepherds' words in Bethlehem. This is an invitation to us. The world is ready to move on. Time keeps marching. But Christ is born, and the beautiful mystery of God's grace lives, works, moves in and around us. We hold on to Christmas in ourselves, remembering that God in Christ is holding us close. And with Christ alive in our hearts, we become the people who enact God's purposes for the sake of the people around us. In the beloved poem "The Work of Christmas" by Howard Thurman, we are reminded that:

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 flock,
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 make peace among brothers,
To make music in the heart.

Yes, the radio stations and stores have moved on. Then again, it's not their job to keep Christmas alive. The song belongs now to us, and we sing it out both here in worship and through acts of peace and love every day of the year.

6. Friends, it's only the Fifth Day of Christmas. We're not even halfway through this season of joy and celebration. But we are just getting started, for the God who has come to us in Christ is present here today, too, feeding us that we might be strengthened to serve those around us. After three days gone, Jesus has been found, has found us, and is with us always. Let us be people who live out the purpose of Christmas in this place, for Jesus, Emmanuel, now lives in us. Amen.

And now may that peace that passes all understanding keep your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus, this day and forever. Amen.