

Christmas 1, 12.26.2021

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1 Samuel 2:8-20, 26; Psalm 148; Colossians 3:12-17; Luke 2:41-52

“Clothe yourselves in love”

*Grace and peace from God our Father and our Lord and Savior, Jesus the Christ. Amen.*

A Blessed Christmas to you all. *May the word of Christ dwell in you richly.* Jesus Christ is the greatest gift you will ever receive. Jesus is a friend who will never leave you. The reason for the season of Christmas is not really about the food and the decorations, though they are wonderful traditions. Christmas is about the good news of a Savior who will be with you through thick and thin. Christmas is about a Savior who will grow in and with you over a lifetime, helping you grow as a human being who shares the love of God.

We just sang “*Away in a Manger*” (ELW 277), and the words, “Be near me, Lord Jesus; I ask you to stay close by me forever and love me, I pray. Bless all the dear children in your tender care and fit us for heaven, to live with you there,” are words about Jesus’ friendship with us over our lifetimes. At Christmas we celebrate the gift of a friend and Savior who will help each of us grow throughout our lifetimes. We may grow out of our childhood, but we can never outgrow Jesus.

Today’s readings are about growing in faith; they are about how we grow in wisdom and stature in God’s grace. There is a reason the Word of God became human in Jesus: through Jesus, we see how we grow in faith and love over our lives.

Christmas has no meaning unless we are able to see that God wishes to dwell in us so that we might also incarnate Jesus by sharing his love and grace with our neighbor. This is the meaning of the Incarnation: the infinite God dwells in our finite humanity so that we might share the infinite love of God with our earthly neighbor.

Today’s gospel contains a story about Jesus at the age of twelve. Aside from Jesus’ birth and the flight into Egypt, there are very few stories about Jesus as a child. In today’s gospel, Jesus’ parents had traveled with their son, relatives and friends to Jerusalem for the Passover festival. This story makes it clear that Mary and Joseph were caring parents, helping their son grow in the Jewish faith. Jesus’ parents obviously took great care in helping him study and learn from the scriptures.

In today’s gospel we have a glimpse into Jesus the twelve year old, venturing out on his own. Jesus was a twelve year old so immersed in his thoughts and world that he forgot to tell his parents where he was going. I think there is something wonderful here in this story for us to think about.

What were you like when you were twelve years old? Did you, on occasion, frustrate your parents? Did you ever wander off and not tell your parents where you were going? I did one time when I was twelve, wandering off with a friend to a local hamburger place in Chicago. I missed dinner, and when I eventually came home, my mother and father were both worried and angry. I apparently didn't learn, because I did the same sort of thing about a year later playing ice hockey after school and missing dinner.

Jesus was clearly still a normal child growing into maturity. So it is important not to jump too quickly to the conclusion of the story about a boy who wants to study God's word in the temple. Jesus was also typical twelve year old who worried and frustrated his parents. Jesus may have been a very special child, but he also needed to grow into faith and reason as we all do. This is the beauty of the Incarnation. Jesus shares our humanity, allowing us to see ourselves in the child, Jesus.

After three days of anxious searching, Mary and Joseph found their son in the temple sitting among the elders and teachers, listening to them and asking questions. We can sense Mary's frustration, and even anger with her son, Jesus. Mary said, "*Child, why have you treated us like this? Look, your father and I have been searching for you in great anxiety.*" Like any parent, Mary was upset because she loved her son, Jesus. Mary knew the very special circumstances of his birth, and their flight into Egypt as refugees, fleeing King Herod. Jesus shares our humanity, growing as a young person. Jesus grew, as you and I, into maturity and love for others.

Do you remember how old you were when you first began learning the stories of the Bible? I ask this because Jesus, at the age of 12, clearly knew the Hebrew Bible. Jesus, the boy, both studied God's word and asked questions. At what age do you remember first asking questions about God, God's word, and the world in which we live?

I have many Bibles in my office at church and in our study at home in Greek, Hebrew, German, Chinese, Japanese, and of course, English. However, one Bible is very precious to me. It was given to me many years ago when I was 11 years old, and has been repaired many times. It was repaired most recently in 2016 in Tokyo, as the cover was coming off. I show you this Bible because, like Jesus learning the scriptures, it is the Bible that I first began to read on my own. Perhaps you also have a precious Bible like this at home. During Christmas, take that Bible off the shelf or out of its box, and think about how you began to learn God's word.

Jesus answered Mary's question, "*Child, why have you treated us like this?*" by saying, "*Why were you searching for me? Did you not know that I must be in my father's house?*" Jesus' answer is

the answer of a very bright and precocious child. Luke tells us that his parents didn't understand what he said to them, reminding us that parents often don't understand the special world that their own children live and take delight in.

It is really wonderful how today's scripture allows us to turn our thoughts during Christmas to how we grow with Jesus over our lifetimes. Christmas is so much more than "holly jolly" cultural traditions. Christmas is about the wonder and mystery of how God dwells in our humanity. To say it another way, Christmas is about how we grow in faith as Jesus grows with us.

Paul writes about this in his letter to the Colossians, writing, "*Above all clothe yourselves with love, which binds everything together in perfect harmony.*" By using the metaphor of clothing, Paul is saying that love is the garment that covers our sinfulness while allowing us to grow into our humanity. Love is the garment we can never outgrow; love is the garment that we are always growing into. Imagine what your humanity would be like without love.

Paul also writes, "*Let the word of Christ dwell in you richly, teach and admonish one another in all wisdom, and with gratitude in your hearts, sing psalms, hymns, and spiritual songs to God.*" Like the words of the hymn above, "Be near me, Lord Jesus," in Jesus the twelve year old, we glimpse our own childhood and how God's word began to dwell in us. Though Jesus is the incarnate Word, he grew as you and I grow, asking questions about God and our world.

At Christmas, in the gift of a Savior, we are able to better see and understand our humanity in both its spiritual and rational dimensions. As Jesus was growing both spiritually and rationally, we too, grow as human beings. As we grow into our humanity, we are clothed in love that binds everything together in harmony. Love is both spiritual and rational. Love teaches us about who God is, and love binds us to our neighbor. Love makes us both think about, as well as feel, the world of God and the world of our neighbor.

At Christmas, "*clothe yourselves in love.*" Like a garment tailor-made for you, Jesus will clothe you in love. The garment of love is one that you will never outgrow. Luther called this the "Joyful Exchange" – Jesus takes our humanity upon himself, and places his righteousness upon us. Allow Jesus to clothe you in love. In doing so, the garment of Jesus' love will always grow with you giving perfect harmony to your humanity and binding you, in love, to your neighbor.

The Christmas story of Jesus is a story about God's love for humanity. It is the story of God putting on our humanity, and clothing humanity in God's love. *Clothe yourselves in love.* Whatever you do in word or deed, allow the love of Jesus to dwell in you. Amen.