

The Wonder Years
Luke 2:41-52
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Pastor Joshua Sawyer
First Christian Church
6630 Dodge Street
Omaha, NE 68132

(Opening Slide) I don't blame you, between the ages of 1-30, if you have a hard time relating to Jesus. You see it isn't your fault. The truth is, when the testimonies of the life of Christ were gathered, some were left out, some lost, and some were selected to be included. If you read your Bible you will notice there is a gaping hole, in regard to the life of Jesus, as it is portrayed in the canonical gospels. It seems as though Jesus may have loved children and proclaimed that the kingdom belonged to "ones such as these", but he didn't have time to be a child. Our Christmas story left us with a baby in a manger, the gospel of Luke **(Slide #2: first painting of young Jesus)** provides Jesus a cameo appearance as a child traveling with his parents to Jerusalem for a Passover festival. The next time we meet Jesus he is a grown man around the age of 30 years old and just preparing to start his ministry.

These missing years have captivated the imagination of people for ages **(Slide #3: second painting of young Jesus)**. As early as the second half of the second century a number of infancy gospels were created. Of the gospels created, parts of the Protevangelium of James and the gospel of Thomas survived. It is the gospel of Thomas that provides us with the most fantastical tales of the childhood of Jesus. This gospel shares how he healed a man's foot that had been split by an ax; declares how Jesus brought home water to his mother in the fold of his garments, after the pitcher he had taken to fetch the water broke; and conveys how, while helping his father make furniture, he miraculously lengthened a board that had been cut too short. Another account found in the gospel of Thomas portrays Jesus as one who seeks to prove his own innocence, by bringing a child back to life in order to prove that he did not push him down the stairs.

Authors Christopher Moore and Anne Rice have both relied upon these gospels in order to write their own fanciful tales of the childhood of Jesus. Ann Rice provides a captivating depiction of Jesus turning a clay sculpture of a bird into a real bird, in her book *Christ the Lord Out of Egypt*. Christopher Moore uses a character called "Biff, who was Jesus' childhood friend" to share these missing years.

There is a reason why I desire for us to imagine these missing years of Jesus. It is because I think this is an important part of life. Of course, I say this as a 31 year old, who couldn't imagine leaving out all the history that has happened between my birth and last May. And I realize the gospel of John declares "20:30 Now Jesus did many other signs in the presence of his disciples, which are not written in this book. 31But these are written so that you may come to believe that Jesus is the Messiah, the Son of God, and that through believing you may have life in his name."

Let us listen to our passage in order to take a brief glimpse of the missing years of Jesus...

Luke 2:41-52 **(Slide of Scripture)**

The Boy Jesus in the Temple

41 Now every year his parents went to Jerusalem for the festival of the Passover. 42And when he was twelve years old, they went up as usual for the festival. 43When the festival was ended and they started to return, the boy Jesus stayed behind in Jerusalem, but his parents did not know it. 44Assuming that he was in the group of travellers, they went a day's journey. Then they started to look for him among their relatives and friends. 45When they did not find him, they returned to Jerusalem to search for him. 46After three days they found him in the temple, sitting among the teachers, listening to them and asking them questions. 47And all who heard him were amazed at his understanding and his answers. 48When his parents saw him they were astonished; and his mother said to him, 'Child, why have you treated us like this? Look, your father and I have been searching for you in great anxiety.' 49He said to them,

'Why were you searching for me? Did you not know that I must be in my Father's house?'
50 But they did not understand what he said to them. 51 Then he went down with them and came to Nazareth, and was obedient to them. His mother treasured all these things in her heart.

52 And Jesus increased in wisdom and in years, and in divine and human favor.

When the text tells us that Mary and Joseph realized that Jesus was not with them on their return trip home I imagine Mary to have done something like this...**(Video of Home Alone)**. I can just imagine the 12 year old Jesus, not wanting to be with his parents on their family trip, off with friend playing games or perhaps walking alone trying to navigate life as an adolescent.

I appreciate this passage because I love the idea that Jesus was not merely a cute and cuddly baby or a full grown man ministering to the nations, but he was a teenager **(Slide #8: back talking teenager)**, who decided to stay behind when he was supposed to travel with his parents and when his parent's found him he merely told them, "Da, where did you think I was going to be?" Jesus was a ruddy adolescent boy who grew in favor with man and God. Jesus grew in favor with man and God. Did you catch that last verse? Was there a point when Jesus had less favor with man and God? If so, what curried this favor? What caused God to look down upon Jesus with more favor than he did before?

I love this idea: that Jesus grew in favor with God and man **(Slide #9: painting)** because it reminds me that we, too, are called to learn how to grow in favor with man and God on a daily basis. Our Christian faith is a daily opportunity to affirm and re-affirm the presence of the Holy Spirit in our lives through acts of kindness, compassion, love, forgiveness, grace, patience and peace. Our faith is something that we are learning to grow into to, something that stretches to fit the contours of our soul.

How are we growing with humankind and God?

We may not have these formative years of Jesus' life as a guide for our own growth. But I think we can safely deduce from the "young" people in our midst that part of growing includes a sense of wonder, laughter, hope for the future, a desire to suck the marrow out of life, an inquisitive mind, and zealous love.

We are in a new year, with new possibilities -- How are those resolutions going? Perhaps this is the year that we decide to grow in wisdom, to grow in favor with our neighbors and God. How will we do this?