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Luke 2,41-52

Epiphany 1 — 10 January 2015

Greeting: To those who are called, sanctified by God the Father, and preserved in our Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ; mercy, peace, and love be multiplied to you. Amen.

We hear a portion of the Holy Gospel According to Saint Luke, which was read earlier:

And Jesus increased in wisdom and stature, and in favor with God and man.

So far the reading. Let us pray: Let the words of my mouth, and the meditation of our hearts, be acceptable in Thy sight, O Lord, our Strength and our Redeemer. Amen.

Introduction: When I was a boy, I remember seeing ads for a certain kind of bread that was fortified with 12 essential vitamins and minerals. Because it was fortified, the ad went on to say it could build strong bodies 12 different ways.

The ad had a certain appeal. Who wouldn't want to grow up to bigger and stronger than everyone else? And 12 easy ways to gain strength! Wow!

Looking back on it, there is a certain amount of humor in the ad. The ad seemed to indicate that this particular brand of bread might be a shortcut in providing all of the essential vitamins and mineral that a person needs. We all know that eating three balanced meals a day is the correct prescription for gaining all of the essential vitamins and minerals we need. Also, the proper amount of both mental and physical exercise

is also needed. These things are needed to maintain a healthy balance in life.

All this brings me today's text, in which we see a twelve year old Jesus growing in stature and wisdom. This leads me today's sermon theme: "**Jesus: Our Model For Growing In The Lord.**" I'll develop this theme in three parts:

- 1) Worship;**
- 2) Learning;** and
- 3) Growing.**

1) Worship. Luke begins by noting that every year Joseph and Mary went to Jerusalem to celebrate the Passover, a festival which God instituted so His people would always remember that He had rescued them from slavery in Egypt. In addition to Mary and Joseph, it also sounds as if a good portion of Nazareth also made the journey. It sounds as if it was a familial and communal journey.

We know from the Old Testament that God commanded His people to gather to worship Him three times, and the place of worship was the Temple in Jerusalem, where God promised to meet His people with forgiveness. But we also know that most people would choose to go only on the Passover.

Now such worship, whether then or now, can either be a burden or a joy. Human nature being what it is, I am sure that some people might have thought, "Do I have to go?" As we know from Jesus' parables, people can be pretty imaginative when it comes to making excuses for not publicly worshiping God.

But the important thing to note is that they went every year, and they went as a family. But not only as a family, but also with many

others.

To get from Nazareth to Jerusalem was a journey of many days, and if they were going as a group it meant that they were not going at top speed. They had to walk. It also meant that all work stopped from the time they left to the time they returned. I'm sure that in some years the weather was bad. Sometimes there might have been urgent chores to attend. But they went every year. Perhaps they held dear in their hearts a passage from the Psalms:

LORD, I have loved the habitation of Your house
And the place where Your honor dwells. (Psalm 26,8)

I'd like to think that beyond a sense of duty, there was also a sense of joy in their regular worship.

Today, we can reflect on that sense of joy and think of God's great love for us, a love so great that it moved Him to send His only Son to us and for us, so that whosoever believes on Him shall not perish, but have everlasting life.

That love produces love in return. And the best place where that love can be nourished and we can grow in that love is through regular public worship.

Think about this for a moment. That's how the twelve year old Jesus grew, and that's how we grow as well.

And Jesus grew through

2) Learning. Jesus did not only go out and worship, but He also studied God's Word — can we fully comprehend that the Word who became flesh in turn had to study the Word?

But Jesus not only studied God’s Word, He not only listened to the teachers of the Law expound on that Word, but He also asked questions. That’s how people learn. They not only listen, but they also ask questions. Does this make sense? What exactly did you mean? Is it this or that? Questions, questions, questions.

There are some who feel that children should be seen and not heard. That is what I would call the stuffed goose approach to learning. You know the goose — a funnel is shoved down its throat and it is fattened up. Just stuff the fool bird. Jam the food down its throat and the bird has no say in the matter.

Some might conclude that this is the best way for children to learn. Just stuff their heads full of information, and they’ll know all they need to know.

But there has to be a balance between learning a basic amount of knowledge and then seeing the need for that knowledge and then applying that knowledge. In seeing the need for knowledge and then applying that knowledge is where questioning come in.

Even Luther in his *Small Catechism*, after each statement — whether from the Ten Commandments, the Creed, the Lord’s Prayer, the Sacraments, or the Office of the Keys — always asks the question, “What does this mean?” We might even go further and ask, “What does this mean for me?”

Wouldn’t it be exciting to have a time machine and go back and listen to the twelve year old Jesus as He sat in the temple at the feet of the doctors of the Law, and listened and questioned and in turn was questioned? The reaction of all who heard Him was one of amazement. Of all, Mary and Joseph were the most amazed — literally they were beside themselves. They were floored!

In a sense, however, we can go back. We can read the Gospels and see how Jesus put questions to the people. He told stories. How He answered the questions of those who were earnestly seeking, of those who were His supporters and disciples, and even those who were trying to trick Him or trap Him.

We too can share in that amazement that God in Jesus has turned to us so we can be turned to Him. That in Jesus, God has turned to those who could not help themselves. That we can identify with those in Scripture who said to Jesus, “Lord I believe, help me with my unbelief!” (Mark 9,24)

Jesus invites our questions. There is no area of life where He does not want to help us, to forgive us. We may ask, “Lord, I have my doubts,” or “Lord, I’m hurting.”

And so Jesus comes to us through Word and Sacrament to assure us of His presence. He asks that we lay our questions at His feet, the feet of the One who went to the Cross for us to win for us the forgiveness of sins and rose from the dead to assure us that He is with us in life and in death, in health and in sickness, in youth or in old age. Perhaps our questions may be answered now, or perhaps they will be answered in eternity. But there are no bad questions with Jesus, and with each question He would change our doubts to faith by assuring us that He is with us.

And with worship and learning and questioning, we come to:

3) Growing. Humanly speaking, the twelve year old Jesus grew in stature and in wisdom, pleasing both His heavenly Father and those around Him, including His earthly family. In response to worship and the study of God’s Word, Jesus kept growing in obedience not only in regard to His heavenly Father, but also in regard to His earthly parents.

He kept growing and we too can keep growing.

Now Jesus' parents had worshiped along with the others and now all were on their way back to Nazareth. It seems to have been a large company of travelers. The custom was that the women and children would be in the front and the men would bring up the rear. Perhaps after the first day's journey everyone got sorted out by family, and then Mary and Joseph realized that Jesus was not with them. Thus the question: "Where was Jesus?"

They went back to Jerusalem and began to search for Him. They were worried sick. Where could Jesus be? Where could He have gone? Could something bad have happened?

They finally found Him in the courts of the temple, there speaking with the Bible scholars of the day. Mary asked Him, "Child, why have you done this to us? Look, your father and I have been worried sick over You." They were out of their minds with worry.

We now catch the humanity of Jesus' response. "You were looking for Me?" But Jesus said that He was in His Father's house taking care of His heavenly Father's business. Again, from a human standpoint, we can imagine what went through Mary and Joseph's heads as they heard this response. But He went back to Nazareth and as the text says, "He was subject to them." Jesus followed the Fourth Commandment, "Honor your father and your mother," and He obeyed them.

He grew not only in obedience to Mary and Joseph, but also in obedience to the will of His heavenly Father. This obedience eventually took Him to the Cross, for Jesus became obedient unto death, even death on the Cross (Philippians 2,8). He became obedience for His parents and for us, so that we wouldn't die in sin, but even in the face of death have life

because of His death and resurrection.

In our lives, are we ever like Joseph and Mary, looking for Jesus? Do we ever seek Him, sometimes anxiously and sometimes not? And if we're seeking, where do we find Him?

We always find Jesus in the same place that Mary and Joseph found Him: in God's house. Here, around His Word, is the one place that we can be sure that we have found what He offers us — forgiveness; a Word of reassurance that in the midst of a world that is all too often not reassuring and filled with tension and anxiety and strife, in lovingkindness our God has turned to us in and through His Son to give us life and salvation.

Conclusion: Just as a balanced diet helps our bodies grow, so also Jesus would invite us to hear His Word — hear the Word of forgiveness, be washed through Holy Baptism in the Word of forgiveness, be nourished through the Word of forgiveness given in Jesus' true Body and Blood, given and shed for the forgiveness of sins.

Jesus would invite us to ask questions and to grow spiritually. He does not ask that we look at Him as cows look at the barn door, but rather bring our questions and our doubts and our problems to the foot of His Cross, for it is there that He gives us the answers for life. Life which begins now as we hear His Word, and life that continues with Him forever.

We grow in worship, gathering around the Means of Grace.

We grow in learning God's Word – listening and questioning and understanding.

We grow in being subject to His Word, for He first became subject

for us.

And here it is in all of this, that we can continue to grow with Jesus. Amen.

Now, may the peace of God, which passes all understanding, keep our hearts and minds in Christ Jesus, our Lord. Amen.

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