



# Central Peninsula Church

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Luke 2:39—52

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## It Takes a Family

SERIES: *A Savior for All People*

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We are continuing our study this morning in the gospel of Luke. We come to Luke 2:39-52.

**“When they had performed everything according to the Law of the Lord, they returned to Galilee, to their own city of Nazareth. The Child continued to grow and become strong, increasing in wisdom; and the grace of God was upon Him. Now His parents went to Jerusalem every year at the Feast of the Passover. And when He became twelve, they went up there according to the custom of the Feast; and as they were returning, after spending the full number of days, the boy Jesus stayed behind in Jerusalem. But His parents were unaware of it, but supposed Him to be in the caravan, and went a day’s journey; and they began looking for Him among their relatives and acquaintances. When they did not find Him, they returned to Jerusalem looking for Him. Then, after three days they found Him in the temple, sitting in the midst of the teachers, both listening to them and asking them questions. And all who heard Him were amazed at His understanding and His answers. When they saw Him, they were astonished; and His mother said to Him, ‘Son, why have You treated us this way? Behold, Your father and I have been anxiously looking for You.’ And He said to them, ‘Why is it that you were looking for Me? Did you not know that I had to be in My Father’s house?’ But they did not understand the statement which He had made to them. And He went down with them and came to Nazareth, and He continued in subjection to them; and His mother treasured all these things in her heart. And Jesus kept increasing in wisdom and stature, and in favor with God and men.”**

It must have been frightening. I mean, they didn’t find their son for three days. That’s a long time. It’s a long time to lose your son; long enough to think about all the terrible possibilities of what might have happened to him.

Imagine your own feelings if one of your children was missing for three days. These days, most of us panic if we lose sight of a child for three minutes, much less three days. Last week I was driving south on highway 101 and drove by one of those portable flashing signs they put on the freeway that told of an Amber Alert. It said to

be on the lookout for a tan colored Toyota. I thought about the sense of sheer panic the parents of that lost child were feeling.

It couldn’t have helped that Mary and Joseph knew that he was more than just their son. Imagine the implications – they had lost the the Son of God, the Savior of the world!

How could this have happened?

### **I. Jesus was raised in a normal family with its share of tension.**

The last time we saw Jesus, he was just 40 days old and being dedicated at the temple. Sometime after that, Mary and Joseph took Jesus back to Nazareth where he would grow up. Verse 40 covers the first 12 years of Jesus’ life. During those 12 years Jesus grew. During that time he became strong. Do you think of Jesus as strong? He was! And he grew in wisdom, and God’s favor was upon him.

But now he is 12. In Jewish culture, at 12 years of age you were still a child, but you were right on the cusp of adulthood. At age 13 you became what they called a full-fledged “son of the commandment,” with all the responsibilities therein. It wasn’t like today – they didn’t have a prolonged period of adolescence that begins around age 11 and ends around 35. In Jewish culture, you were a boy at age 12 and an adult at 13. It was like turning 16 and then 18 and then 21 all in one day!

Passover was one of the three sacred festivals for which Jewish men were required to go to Jerusalem each year. Women and children were allowed to go, but they weren’t required. But Luke tells us that Mary and Joseph went each year and took Jesus with them. As we’ve seen, they were serious about their faith. They wanted to do things right. So every year they joined the crowd of pilgrims going up for the sacred festival. I imagine it as a joyous time; the kind of time adults look back on nostalgically. They all sang those songs of worship as they walked to the holy city of Jerusalem. During those times, Jesus would have learned the Psalms by heart. Someone has written, “To our forefathers, our faith was an experience. To our fathers, our faith was an inheritance. To us, our faith is convenience. To our children, our faith is a nuisance.” It wasn’t that way for Mary and Joseph. They were sincere in their faith. They remind us of how important it is for parents to nourish their children, not just physically but spiritually; to teach

our children about our faith; to expose them to experiences and people that will enrich their understanding of God. That doesn't happen automatically. Like Mary and Joseph we have to be intentional about it.

They stayed for the full seven days, and then they headed home. On the first night of their journey back to Nazareth, they realized that Jesus was nowhere to be found. How could responsible parents have lost him? They would have been traveling in a large caravan, with several of Jesus' younger brothers and sisters to look after as well. Often, women and small children would go ahead and men would follow with the bigger boys. Joseph and Mary may each have thought that Jesus was with the other. It wasn't until they gathered for the evening meal that they discovered their oldest boy was not there.

It would have taken them a second day just to get back to Jerusalem on foot. Finally, some time during the third day they found him in the temple. It wasn't all that unusual for an older boy to be seated in the temple courts with Jewish scholars, listening and asking questions about the Jewish law. But Mary and Joseph had to be surprised to see their son, raised as a carpenter in Nazareth, seated and holding court with the greatest teachers in Israel. And the teachers were stunned by his insight. They probably thought, "Boy, they must have a great school system in Nazareth! This kid is brilliant!"

Whatever pride and relief Mary and Joseph might have felt was short-lived. Every parent can understand what they were feeling: "Son, how could you have done this to us? We've been looking all over for you?" But Jesus didn't quite see it that way. His answer is sort of like, "Well, what did you expect? Isn't it obvious where I should be? Of course, I had to be in my Father's house. Don't you get it?" Like most parents of adolescent children, they really didn't get it. But at least they were able to get him to go back to Nazareth with them. That was a victory! The whole thing gave Mary a lot to ponder.

Luke closes this chapter of Jesus' life with a summary of the next 18 years. Between the ages of 12 and 30 Jesus grew in wisdom and stature, in favor with God and men. That, by the way, has always been to me a helpful tool in praying for my own kids. Sometimes I don't know to pray for them, so I pray that they would grow in each of these four ways: mentally, physically, spiritually and socially.

Somewhere in those years we know that Joseph died. Tradition says that Joseph was quite a bit older than Mary, and it's possible that Mary was left to raise Jesus and his brothers and sisters as a single mother. One thing is for sure: Jesus was raised in a very normal family, in a normal town with normal

parents. It's important that we do something about the "halo effect." The halo effect comes from all those pictures painted of this family through the centuries. They always appear bathed in luminous light with halos around their heads. The effect of the halo for us is that we forget that Jesus was born and raised in a completely human family. Jesus experienced the dynamics of ordinary family life, which at times can be complicated and fraught with tension. There are no halos. Human families experience joy and sadness; peace and conflict; understanding and misunderstanding. It's all part of being human. It's all part of being a human family. But somehow it was in those tensions of family life that Jesus was prepared to fulfill his purpose in life.

I want to point out to you three tensions that Jesus experienced in the context of family.

## II. The tensions of family life prepares us for God's purposes.

**A. The tension of identity:** The first one is the tension of identity. It's in the context of family that children learn how to answer the question: who am I? This story reveals something important about Jesus' identity. Up until now everything in Luke's gospel that has been said about Jesus has been said by others. Now for the first time we hear Jesus himself speak – about himself; and his first words are about his growing sense of identity as God's Son.

Joseph couldn't have missed the implications of his words. In verse 48 Mary scolds him: "*Your father* and I have been anxiously looking for you." Jesus turns around and says, "I had to be in *my Father's* house." Who is his father? Not Joseph, but God.

No one else can say that in quite the same way that Jesus did. Sure, when you and me pray we often address God as "Father." But we can only call him that because of our relationship to Jesus. John writes, "**But as many as received him, to them he gave the right to become children of God, even to those who believe in his name**" (Jn.1:12).

When you read through the Gospels, you can see that his knowledge of his unique sonship is what governed all that he did. Jesus said, "**All things have been handed over to me by my Father; and no one knows the Son except the Father; nor does anyone know the Father except the Son...**" (Mt. 11:27). On another occasion he said, "**The Father loves the Son and shows him all the things that he is doing**" (Jn. 5:20).

But don't get this wrong. Jesus didn't arrive on the scene with a full blown knowledge of who he was. He wasn't like an adult in a 12 year old body. Jesus grew into a knowledge of his unique identity as God's Son. At each stage of his development, he had perfect knowledge appropriate to that stage. Here at age 12, on the brink of adulthood, he's come to understand his unique identity and calling.

The tension lay in the fact that he was also fully human. This is the mystery and the marvel of Jesus. He was at the same time fully God and fully human. And as one who was fully human we see him having to deal with human parents and human obligations. He senses his call to be in his Father's house, but he knows that his time hasn't come yet and he must go back to Nazareth; he must go back to Joseph's house.

**B. The tension of priority:** This brings me to the second tension – the tension of priority. As Jesus grew in his understanding of his calling, this created tensions within the family. His commitment to his human family had to be balanced with his commitment to his heavenly Father. He had obligations at home. When Joseph died, Jesus as the oldest son would become the primary breadwinner for his family. They depended on him. But here he talks about his sense of obligation to be in his Father's house, doing his Father's work. He says, "Don't you know I must be..." This divine "must" will lead him down a path that will one day mean leaving his family.

And this created tension. In Luke 8:19-21 we have the record of such an incident.

**"And His mother and brothers came to Him, and they were unable to get to Him because of the crowd. And it was reported to Him, 'Your mother and Your brothers are standing outside, wishing to see You.' But He answered and said to them, 'My mother and My brothers are these (B)who hear the word of God and do it.'"**

What do you think they thought when they heard Jesus say these things? Jesus says, "It is no special advantage to have been a physical member of my family." It must have been hard for his family to stand outside and hear him speak these things.

Do you remember the wedding feast at Cana? Being, perhaps, relatives of the family, Jesus and his mother were invited. When the wine began to run out, Mary, a typical mother, said to her son, "Do something about it!" In effect, he said, "What does that have to do with me? It's not my concern. It's not my time yet." He said it lovingly. He never ceased to love and respect his mother, but he made his point, "I'm not here to fulfill your agenda. I'm taking my orders from someone else."

It's the tension of priority. When I first started in the ministry, my wife invited her grandparents over for lunch one day after church. It was kind of a big deal to her. We hadn't been married very long and it was the first time we would have them over. A few days before, I found out that I had neglected to write on my calendar that the church had scheduled a baptism for the same time after church. I figured since I was the youth pastor it wouldn't be essential that I attend. But when I asked the Senior Pastor for the afternoon off, he said there was no way I could miss the baptism. It was my job or the grandparents. I chose my job, and the grandparents were kind enough to take a rain

check.

These are hard decisions. Later this week one of our elders, Allen Johansen, and I will fly to Cambodia where we will minister at a pastors conference. When I was first asked to go, we weren't supposed to get home until the 15th. But then I remembered that I would be missing my daughter's 18th birthday on the 14th. I was in a pickle, but this time I changed my plans to get home in time to celebrate her birthday.

All of us have to deal with these tensions. It's the tension between the obligations we feel to our human family and the obligation we feel to others. One of the things that will help us make these choices is the issue of timing. At age 12 Jesus knew that it wasn't time to leave his parent's authority, so he went home and stayed in subjection to him. There are times in our lives when it's right to say no to a ministry opportunity to tend to the needs of our family, but there are also times to say no to our family to tend to the needs of others. It's not as simple as saying, "I always put my family first," or "I always put my ministry first." We have to understand what time it is.

**C. The tension of maturity:** The amazing thing is that Jesus was able to understand this at age 12. The third tension is the tension of maturity. I mean, look at this story from the perspective the parents of an almost teenager. Verse 50 says that Mary and Joseph did not understand his statement. In one way or another, all children this age are perplexing to their parents, and I think it's fair to say that all parents are perplexing to their children! Mary's first words to Jesus are "Son" ("Child") – and I wonder if she is making a point by using that term. After all, he's not yet an adult, but here he is acting like one!

Mary may have felt Jesus wasn't acting his age. He didn't seem to know that his proper place was not here in the temple with the scholars but safely at home with his mom and dad. Maybe she thought he didn't show proper respect. He didn't just listen to the teachers. V. 47 makes it clear that he also presumed to answer questions, like a teenage know-it-all. Mary's question to Jesus, "Why have you treated us like this?" implies that she feels his motivation was to deliberately hurt or embarrass them. "How thoughtless," she thought.

But like most kids that age Jesus didn't see it the same way his parents saw it. "Why are you looking for me? Where did you think I would be?" It wasn't about them. You can almost hear the words of the young person's classic complaint: "Why don't you trust me? Why are you always so concerned about where I am? Why do I have to have a curfew? Why can't I go to that movie?" I heard this definition of a teenager: "At 14 years old, one minute they think you're the greatest father on earth, and the next minute they seriously

wonder why God created you. At 16 they make a decision, and the choice is not encouraging.” We sometimes see Jesus as an exception because he was the Son of God. But here he might have felt as much. And in this case, he was right. Here is a 12 year old seeking to know God better; trying to learn at a higher level so that he might be prepared to teach when the time came. Sometimes we underestimate our kids.

But sometimes they underestimate their need for the family. The fact is, Jesus still had a lot of growing to do. Verse 52 says he went home and continued to “grow in wisdom and stature, in favor with God and men.” It was a process; it didn’t happen all at once. And it was a process that involved the whole person. It wasn’t just about memorizing bible verses. It included learning how to eat right and get enough exercise. It included learning how to get a along with other people. It included studying arithmetic and history and politics.

I think all of us who have children or work with children should be encouraged by this story. I know I am. Here are some of the best parents in the history of the world, picked out by God to raise his Son, and they don’t understand and communicate with their child. Yes, Jesus was an unusual child like no else, but he was human. And if they had tension in their relationship, we shouldn’t be so discouraged about the tension in our own homes.

## CONCLUSION

You see, it was in these tensions of family life, the tensions of identity and priority and maturity, that Jesus was prepared for his life’s work. It’s the same thing with our own families. Family life is the primary place where our character, values and faith are shaped for adulthood. Our growth doesn’t happen by some kind of extraordinary set of things. As with Jesus, it’s a process, and it’s a process that involves our whole person. We grow physically, mentally, spiritually and socially. And the primary place that happens is not in the temple, but in the home.

Families don’t have to be picture-perfect to be used by God. God’s grace and salvation are available to parents and children, to teenagers and single adults. God’s love can enter every home, every apartment, every dorm room and help us to grow up.

Family life is in danger of being relegated to low priority in our society; sometimes even in the church. In trying to have a youth group, senior’s group, women’s group and men’s group, we can forget the singular significance of families – nuclear, blended, single parent, multigenerational, functional and dysfunctional. Whatever our personal situation,

we need to appreciate and pray for and help families both inside and outside the church. Family life is hard. The pressures of work and sports and even church and school can crowd out the habits of families being together and praying and playing together.

But families are not add-ons to the other things in life. Families are foundational. With all the tensions, they’re the primary human units to grow human beings into whatever they become, for ill or, by God’s grace, for good. Families are not something to be fit into the bits and pieces of time left over from making a living. Work is necessary, but it must never take the place of family life itself. Our jobs, our companies, our nations will come and go. Only people are destined for eternity. And people are nurtured in families.

Some of you will recall the book, *Jonathon Livingston Seagull*. It was a book that extolled the virtues of independence and individuality at any price. That’s why the seagull is such a popular figure for photography and beach house walls. A seagull exists in freedom. When flying alone, he thrusts his wings back with powerful strokes, climbs higher and higher, and swoops down in majestic circles. But did you know that in a flock the seagull is a different bird? His majesty dissolves into cruelty and competition. There are no manners and there is no sharing.

On the other hand, take a bird like the wild goose. They fly in V-formation because it enables them to fly with more ease and speed. The point position is the most difficult, so the geese rotate this position every few minutes. The easiest position is in the two rear sections of the V, and the stronger geese allow the weaker birds to fly there. Some even believe the constant honking is meant to encourage the weaker geese along.

The seagull teaches us to break loose and fly alone, but the wild goose teaches us to fly in a family. When God’s Son came down at Christmas, he came into a family. It was in the context of family, with all its tensions, that he was prepared for his mission. As we enter into a New Year, whether we are single or married, raising children or being a friend and mentor to someone else’s children, let’s stay committed to flying in a family, both our natural family and the family of God, because it takes a family to prepare us to become the people God wants us to be.

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