

Luke 2:41-52

⁴¹Every year his parents traveled to Jerusalem for the Passover Festival. ⁴²When he was twelve years old, they went up according to the custom of the Festival. ⁴³When the days had ended, as they were returning, the boy Jesus stayed behind in Jerusalem. His parents did not know it. ⁴⁴Since they thought he was in their group, they went a day's journey. Then they began to look for him among their relatives and friends. ⁴⁵When they did not find him, they returned to Jerusalem, searching for him.

⁴⁶After three days they found him in the temple courts, 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. His mother said to him, "Son, why have you treated us this way? See, your father and I have been anxiously looking for you."

⁴⁹He said to them, "Why were you looking for me? Did you not know that I must be taking care of my Father's business?" ⁵⁰They did not understand what he was telling them.

⁵¹He went down with them and came to Nazareth. He was always obedient to them. And his mother treasured up all these things in her heart. ⁵²Jesus grew in wisdom and stature, and in favor with God and with people.

Routine

He had a routine. The routine was his research. He was about to write his first book, and he found it essential to do some thorough and careful research. He was dealing with an important topic. He hadn't been to all the places involved or seen all the things he was preparing to write about, but he wanted his book to be absolutely correct.

He went about his routine, collecting and compiling all the research he could before he sat down to write. He conducted interviews with those who *had* been there and had seen the things he would write about—many interviews. Today's interview was to be very important, indeed. He sat down with his stylus and tablet. No, not some electronic note-taking device—his was a wax tablet laid out on a piece of wood and a stylus to scratch the wax with. The notes would soon be transferred to something more permanent; this was just to jot down some important information.

At the beginning of the book resulting from all his research Luke tells us: "Many have undertaken to compile an account of the events that have been fulfilled among us... ³For this reason, it seemed good to me also, since I followed everything closely from the beginning, to write an orderly account to you... ⁴so that you may know the certainty of the things you were taught" (Luke 1:1, 3-4, EHV). To be sure, the Holy Spirit guided and directed and *inspired* Luke—as well as all the other writers of Scripture—as they recorded what God wanted us to know. But that doesn't mean they didn't collect as much information as they could before they wrote.

Now to the interview he was conducting that day. Imagine what his first question might have been. "What do you remember most about Jesus' childhood?" As Mary began to speak, Luke's stylus scratched in the wax feverishly. This was really good stuff that would surely make the final draft.

I.

The early days had passed. From recent services you remember those early days. The

shepherds had come and worshiped Jesus as he lay in the manger. Luke scribbled with his stylus about those days: “Mary treasured up all these things, pondering them in her heart” (Luke 2:19, EHV).

The early days had passed. Days filled with formally naming Jesus and bringing him to the temple to present him to the Lord, as the law required. Days with Simeon and Anna saying astonishing things about Jesus. Days with Magi coming from far away to pay their respects to the young King of kings.

But days had turned into years. All Mary had to say in her interview with Luke was that “The child grew and became strong. He was filled with wisdom, and God’s favor was on him” (Luke 2:40, EHV). Years of routine went by.

And then, another memorable day. It had started out as just another day in what had been a relatively boring routine for several years.

“Every year his parents traveled to Jerusalem for the Passover Festival. ⁴²When he was twelve years old, they went up according to the custom of the Festival” (Luke 2:41-42, EHV). Males of a certain age were *supposed* to go to the temple three times a year for festivals. But as the Jewish people had dispersed into surrounding countries, fewer and fewer made the once-required trip. Women weren’t required to go to these festivals at all. What Luke wrote down from his interview was that it had been an annual routine for the whole family to go. Mary and Joseph went above and beyond what was required in their devotion to spiritual matters.

II.

Do you find routine to be boring?

Every year you pull out the same Christmas decorations. Some get discarded, others are added in, but the routine is the same. Then there’s the routine of the same Christmas gatherings. Often it’s the same foods at the table year after year. It’s mostly the same people, too, year after year. Occasionally new family members are added to the mix. Some of those who had always been there before move away or pass away. The routine changes slightly as the years go by, but it’s largely the same.

Worship is like that, too. The Advent services lead up to Christmas. You wish the pastor would pick more Christmas hymns through the month of December. Then the Sunday after Christmas comes and you’re wondering why he’s *still* picking Christmas hymns. It isn’t just worship at the holiday season, either. Worship in general is routine.

It was that way in Bible times, too. Old Testament worship followed a prescribed order. God dictated for his people how they should worship and what things should be done. Synagogue worship developed as people began to live farther away from the temple. Those services followed a prescribed order of worship.

Our worship follows a liturgy. The music is different in the various worship settings, but the words are much the same. Concerning worship, the Apostle Paul wrote: “Let all things be done decently and in good order” (1 Corinthians 14:40, EHV). It’s a practical way to do things. It’s orderly.

Have you ever given much thought to the “routine” of worship? So many things in our world are in a constant state of change. Those who are in their 30's and older can remember a time when not everyone had a cell phone; or surely when those were “dumb” phones, not smartphones that could answer most of the world’s questions right in the palm of your hand.

Worship using a regular order maintains a little stability in a world where everything is in constant flux. The worship service is a place for peace. Our service is built on the

historical Christian liturgy. We have some different hymns than some of those we used a few years ago; there are different settings for the service; we use a different translation of the Bible than what we customarily used a few years ago. What has *not* changed is that it is still the Word of God that dominates our worship. What God *says* hasn't changed through the centuries.

Worship is routine. But it is a routine that is valuable.

III.

Back to Luke's interview with Mary. "When he was twelve years old, they went up according to the custom of the Festival. ⁴³When the days had ended, as they were returning, the boy Jesus stayed behind in Jerusalem. His parents did not know it. ⁴⁴Since they thought he was in their group, they went a day's journey. Then they began to look for him among their relatives and friends" (Luke 2:42-44, EHV).

The boredom of routine was shattered. Out of all the events in Jesus' childhood years, this particular trip to Jerusalem stood out in Mary's mind. Jesus was missing after a day's travel. Imagine the panic. Mary and Joseph had been tasked with taking care of the Promised Messiah as he grew from a baby to adulthood. Though there might have been hiccups along the road before, they were nothing compared to *this!* Jesus was missing.

Back they went to look for Jesus. "After three days they found him in the temple courts, sitting among the teachers, listening to them and asking them questions. ⁴⁷And all who heard him were amazed at his understanding and his answers" (Luke 2:46-47, EHV).

Most 7th graders, when they get to my Catechism classes, have at least a little bit of understanding of basic Bible history. Without it, they are probably going to struggle with some of the concepts we discuss. The same could be said for 12-year-old Jewish kids in Jesus' day. A certain amount of understanding was expected in young men his age. Jesus far surpassed that. Those listening to his questions of the rabbis and his answers to *their* questions were amazed.

The end of today's reading says: "Jesus grew in wisdom and stature, and in favor with God and with people" (Luke 2:52, EHV). We tend to think of Jesus in his earthly ministry as an adult. Part of his humility was that he chose to come into this world like any other human being. He had to learn and grow like everyone else. Today's Gospel shows part of that process. He was listening and answering questions, but he was still growing in the understanding he would need to carry out the Heavenly Father's plan.

The incident of 12-year-old Jesus at the temple was anything *but* routine. But it wasn't that way only because of the worship leaders that day—it was because of his own preparation. He already *had* learned and grown at the feet of Mary and Joseph. He came to the temple that day prepared to get something deeper out of the experience.

That's the job of every worshiper. It isn't just the preparation of the pastor and organist, the person preparing or running the screen, or the one broadcasting the service on livestream. It's *your* job to come prepared for worship. Your heart is to be prepared to hear God's Word; your mind ready to focus. Liturgical worship focuses your heart and mind on the facts of what God has done for you.

IV.

That spring day in the temple courts was outside the routine in many ways.

All who were there that day remembered for the rest of their lives the young man who knew so much about his Jewish heritage and his relationship with God. "There is still hope," they must have thought. This boy might be the rabbi of the future.

It wasn't a routine day for Mary and Joseph, either. Relief. That's what they felt when they finally found and recovered the Messiah. They also found that his religious education was progressing nicely. *They* knew who he was. They knew they had a great responsibility in training him the way God wanted him to be. They could see and hear for themselves that day that it was coming along nicely.

In reality, there wasn't a great deal different about the worship experience that day; it was just paying attention to detail that made the difference. Not details like how well the instruments or the singers sound; not how beautiful the tree is; not how the pastor sounds today. Jesus. *He* was the detail. *His* is the detail.

V.

Jesus said to Mary and Joseph: "Why were you looking for me? Did you not know that I must be taking care of my Father's business?" (Luke 2:49, EHV). Jesus was going through his routine just to make sure that every box was checked as he kept every bit of God's law perfectly in our place. He used the routine of a trip to the temple to continue preparing for the very *non-routine* business of dying on the cross to pay for our sins.

There is nothing in the worship experience more exciting than to focus on Jesus. God became human to take our load of guilt and sin and pay for it so that we might be one with him again.

Just as Jesus was, here at the worship service we are about our Heavenly Father's business. Some weeks your attention might wander, or you might shut out the preacher, but Christ is always here. The routine of worship is designed to cover the whole history of God's saving activity every year. Come prepared for the routine so you don't miss what the Savior wants you to hear that day.

Luke's routine of interviewing many people and organizing as much material as he could find meant that his gospel account has details, especially about Jesus' birth and early life, that no one else wrote down.

In these routine, more relaxed days after Christmas, don't just go through the motions in worship. Take the time and effort to understand and prepare for worship. You will find that the routine of worship is more than just routine. Amen.