

We're still in the Christmas season, and celebrating the presence of Christ in our midst. And we have this wonderful story of Jesus growing up. We've mentioned before, the ancient symbol of Luke is the Ox, big, strong and powerful, full of details and additional material.

This story of Jesus at twelve years old is unique to Luke... And I love this story because it gives us a glimpse of Jesus as a young person; and it connects his birth with his ministry as an adult.

There are a lot of similarities of this story with what happens during the passion week. Jesus as a child is going to Jerusalem, kind of like Jesus as an adult setting his face to go to Jerusalem... Jesus as a child is in the Temple, the exact place where the drama of Passion week will occur...

Jesus as a child is interacting with the religious professionals... When he's a boy they are amazed by him, but when he's an adult, the same people will plot to have him killed... And Jesus is missing for 3 days and then found. Much like being in the tomb for three days and then found in the resurrection.

There's a lot of connections, in other words, Luke may be telling us that Jesus whole life is congruent, what started at his birth was destined to be fulfilled at the crucifixion and resurrection.

The gospel of Luke has several recurring themes, one of them is the idea of lost and found... Like this story, we also have the parable of the lost coin, the lost sheep, the prodigal son, just to name a few others...

This morning I'd like to do some reflecting on this idea of lost and found... Our story today is a literary masterpiece for flipping this whole idea of lost and found, upside down.

Losing stuff is troubling. You all know what that's like. Looking and looking for something can be a pain. And it's not only a waste of time, if we lose something special it can be a little heart breaking.

And losing a thing is really petty compared to losing a life. All of us in some way have experienced what the Apostle Paul calls "the sting of death". Perhaps you know what it's like to lose a friend or a family member. So, depending on what we've lost, it can be a little thing, or it can be absolutely devastating.

If you've ever been a parent, you know the worst nightmare, is losing a child. I can't think of anything worse than that.

So, put your-self in Mary and Joseph's shoes, they assumed Jesus was traveling with them in a group, when they left Jerusalem. And imagine the panic as they started to realize he wasn't with them...

If you've ever taken kids to the grocery store and momentarily lost visual contact with them, you know that panicky feeling. Jesus' parents must have been absolutely scared to death. And frankly, I can't imagine!

Now, Jesus on the other hand is calmly talking theology with all the religious professionals... After Mary and Joseph tell Jesus what an ordeal they've been through, Jesus calmly comments that he was in his Father's house all along...

In other words, he was not lost at all, but in fact deeply found in God, his eternal father. He says, "Did you not know that I must be in my Father's house?"

As Jesus connected with His Divine Father, this whole idea of lost and found became completely turned upside down. What was thought to be lost, was never really lost at all. In fact, Jesus was deeply found in his Divine Father.

Quick story... I remember being in chapel at the Seminary one day. Just looking around at all the people, seeing a lot of fellow class mates and friends, teachers and professors that were friends, and I had this enormous feeling of gratitude wash over me.

I remember thinking, "these are my people." I didn't know that I had a people, but these were my people... Through tears, I felt this wave of enormous belonging. Apparently, I was lost, and I had found my home. And amazingly I didn't even know that I was lost, but I sure knew that I was found...

Isn't that interesting, that we can be lost in our lives sometimes and not even know it?

Another story... Prayer is something in my life that's been a beacon of sorts, lighting a way for me to find myself. For much of my life prayer was not anything I ever contemplated doing. If you don't believe in God, prayer seems kind of pointless.

And if you believe that God is angry at you, he's not someone you necessarily want to talk to. So, I pretty much disconnected myself from anything that resembled divine mystery. So, perhaps you could say I was lost... though I never thought of myself that way...

But things slowly changed. I remember the first time I became conscious that I said a prayer. And, I wasn't any kind of professing Christian at the time. Truthfully, I was still fairly certain God didn't exist.

It happened in the barn during lambing season. The breathing response of a lamb is triggered when the umbilical cord is severed. I remember witnessing a lamb sucking air and I was reminded of the creation story where God "breathed into its nostrils the breath of life".

And I was so humbled... And so thankful to witness that little miracle of birth. And without even realizing what I was doing, under my breath I just said thank you... And I remember catching myself... What was that?

Without even realizing what I was doing, I was thanking God for the miracle I had just witnessed. It was an emotional and relational response to God, the creator of all things. And it was as natural as breathing. And I don't think there was any way to stop it.

It was just simple gratitude. When I think back on that experience today, it was the beginning of more and more of those little thank-yous... Without my initially being conscious of it I was becoming emotionally glued to God.

I've noticed in my life that prayer is kind of a naturally ongoing occurrence. As I live and breathe, prayer happens... I can be driving down the road, and find myself thinking about this situation or that situation, wonder what to do and make a quick little ask— "Help me God."

And I imagine I'm not the only one, I trust that many, if not all of you do that, in your own way... Little prayers, and all day long... Every time I start a sermon, I sit at the computer and I breath, "Please, give me the words..." Every morning in my little routine, I pray, "Teach me to love." I think many of us pray this way all day long.

And I take comfort, as the Apostle Paul says, that the Holy Spirit prays for us continually, with sighs too deep for words. In a sense, God is glued to us and we become glued to God. And when we see ourselves reflected in God's light, we find ourselves. We are not only connected with God, but with each other. And that's deeply meaningful, it's finding meaning in the lost world of despair.

Many of us have had the experience of being on our knees. When something completely beyond our control beats us up. Whether it was a health issue or an accident, a family issue or you name it... Sometimes it's a tv cliché, the person kneels and the first words they say is, "God, we haven't talked for a long time."

We may go through times in our lives that feel dry, perhaps hopeless, perhaps lost, and no amount of effort or will on our part can change anything. Believe me, darkness is real...

In our very human way of experiencing life, we live with loss all the time and sometimes it can be completely overwhelming. The good news today is that for the God we worship, nothing is ever lost. In fact, lost and found is transformed into find and find and find some more. In God's world nothing is ever lost.

The God we worship is a God who receives our prayers and intervenes in our lives. The God we worship has claimed us in baptism and prays for us even when we can't. We can be lost, despairing and hopeless... And God is continually working to save us...

During this Christmas season, we profess that the light shines in the darkness, and the darkness did not overcome it. In Christ's light all things will be illuminated, all things will be found,

Jesus is the light that finds us. In our darkness, when we're lost, when we don't even know that we're lost, Jesus is the light.

And one day we will all take the hand of Jesus, and he will say, "welcome home." And we will never ever be lost again... Amen...