

Grace and peace to you from God our Father and from the one who shows us the Father's will, our Lord Jesus Christ, amen.

Every time I read this story from Jesus' as a pre-teen, I can't help but think of the Christmas classic movie Home Alone. I mean Jesus was left behind by his parents in Jerusalem, just like Kevin being forgotten at home in that movie classic. Of course, Home Alone is about a boy around the age of 10-12 years-old who is unintentionally left at home for Christmas when his large, extended family take a vacation to France. The family gets on the plane and it takes off and that's when the mom has a feeling that she's forgotten something, only to realize she and the entire family have left Kevin at home. Not to ruin the ending if you haven't seen it, but the family is eventually reunited after the mischievous little boy spends a few nights at home alone. We might call the account we heard this morning from "Jerusalem Alone," but this isn't the story of some mischievous little boy surviving in the big city or negligent parents who forgot their son. This is the story of God's Son Jesus, knowing exactly who he was and why he came into the world.

Just 10 days ago we celebrated the infant Jesus, born in a stable and laid in a cattle feeding trough for his bed. Now, just 10 days later we catch up with this Holy Family and Jesus is already 12 years old... How fast kids grow up these days... During the intervening 12 years, Mary and Joseph have made the journey from Nazareth to Jerusalem each year to celebrate the Passover along with

thousands of their fellow faithful Old Testament believers. People travelled from all over Israel to Jerusalem, to celebrate the Passover, but this Passover was one that Mary and Joseph would not soon forget. The festival came to an end and the family began their journey back home to Nazareth. Travel back then was on foot and people travelled in large groups for safety. They travelled for nearly a day when Mary and Joseph started looking for Jesus who they had thought was with their Nazarene family and friends. When Jesus was nowhere to be found among all the travelers heading back to Nazareth panic began to set in. If you've ever lost sight of a child in a large crowd even for just a few moments, you know how it feels. The darting eyes, the questioning of relatives and friends if any of them had seen Jesus. A couple of months ago I was watching my grandchildren at home when Gabriel decided he would take off. I searched and searched. I drove around the block several times looking for him. Then I called PJ at work and asked her what I should do. I searched some more... I finally found him hiding behind the couch in our the Florida room. It must have been so much worse for Mary and Joseph! Can you just imagine? Mary and Joseph thinking about WHO they had lost! This was not just their son, this was the Son of God entrusted to them by God the Father, and they had lost him! This was really not good!

They started retracing their steps all the way back to Jerusalem. I searched for Gabe for an hour or so before I found him, I know how panicked I was! They

searched the city for three days when they finally arrived at the temple. There he was sitting among the teachers, listening to them, asking them questions, and amazing them with his own knowledge of the scriptures. These religious experts had what would become a quite common reaction when listening to Jesus. They were amazed. This 12 year-old boy showed such maturity in understanding and putting things together that he just wowed all that witnessed it. At first, Mary and Joseph were also caught up in the amazement at what they were seeing and hearing, but then that parent part kicked in... Frustration, relief, fear and anger all come together as Mary questions Jesus, "Son, why have you treated us like this? Your father and I have been searching for you with great anxiety. Anxiety, even great anxiety doesn't do justice to what you go through when you've lost a young child. In this case, Greek word literally means the physical pain of torture. It's a word sometimes used to describe hell. In other words, "Why did you put us through this hellish experience?"

I think Jesus was a bit surprised his parents wouldn't instinctively know where he would be. He's like, "Didn't you know this is where I would be? This is my Father's House after all..." I love the wording in the old King James Bible where Jesus says, "did you not know I must be about my Father's Business?" I thought a lot about that one line this week as I kept coming back to Jesus, at the ripe old age of 12, already knows exactly what his Father's business is and He's

not going to let anyone, even his earthly parents get in his way. By 12 years old Jesus is already so conversant in the language of the Scriptures that He's amazing all the old hat, died in the wool, religious leaders at the Temple in Jerusalem. We're not talking about some hay seed Rabbi from the backwoods of Darke County, er, I mean Galilee. We're talking about blowing the socks off the big time leaders who have made it to the top of the religious hierarchy in the capital City of Jerusalem. Jesus was amazing the ones who preside over worship at the one and only Temple, the only House of God in the entire world! I imagine Jesus telling them about how the Messiah had to come from Bethlehem then escape the baby genocide by fleeing to Egypt and then after God spoke to Joseph telling him Herod the psychotic King who wanted Jesus dead, had himself bit the dust. I imagine Jesus explaining how the Messiah wasn't primarily coming to overthrow the Roman rulers, as they thought, but came to show them how to live a God pleasing life; a life where the least of these our brothers and sisters are cared for and loved, not exploited. It's not about regime change or the mighty warrior God finally killing all of Israel's enemies, it's about living in peace with your enemies and loving even the ones who persecute you and try to kill you. It's about repaying violence with love, turning the other cheek, and forgiving all those who are indebted to you, no matter how much it hurts to do so. Learning to live that kind of life, is the business of Jesus' Father that Jesus was about and even at the age of

only 12 years old, Jesus was amazing the top religious leaders in the world and giving them an education on what a God pleasing life looks like. Later on, Jesus would say He came to bring Good News to the poor, to free the prisoners, and to heal the sick and bring sight to the blind. That's the stuff Jesus was teaching the priests in the Temple when he was left behind by his earthly parents...

One last thing I noticed. Mary and Joseph didn't understand when Jesus explained where he had been and why. I thought about all the places in the Bible where I don't understand what God is doing and all those times in my life when I don't understand what God is asking of me and I realized it's OK to not understand everything. God's ways are so far beyond anything we can comprehend it's not possible to always understand the heart and mind of God. Besides, God never once asks us to understand, only believe... We're only asked to trust God's promises not figure out the calculus that makes them possible. Trust first, then obey.

As we begin this New Year, may God richly bless you with His presence. May we all stop trying to understand every jot and tittle of scripture and just simply believe and follow Jesus, our best example of everything God wants us to know... Amen.