

December 26, 2021 The First Sunday of Christmas

I'm sorry.

Maybe you were expecting to meet a newborn Jesus, barely one day old. Cute and round and cherubic, sweetly cooing and wrapped up in a warm bundle.

It might seem as if the Christ child should have just been born yesterday ... but Luke assures us that, no, he's 12 years old now.

They sure grow up fast, don't they?

I kid ... but many of us think and talk that way a lot, don't we?

Sometimes it seems like just yesterday *I* was a kid. I didn't have much responsibility but I couldn't wait to grow up and do whatever I wanted.

But looking back, in what seems like no time, I was the one now having a kid. But at least she was a tiny baby who

couldn't go anywhere when I wasn't looking. A lot of work, yeah, but she went along where we went and didn't talk back.

Now I wonder where that time went. My baby – babies even – aren't babies anymore and they all have minds and wills of their own.

I've been told it will feel as if I'll wake up tomorrow and they'll be full-fledged adults. I'm staring to believe that, hard as it is to admit.

I get the sense from Luke's telling, that Mary and Joseph were not all that different from many of us as parents. Now, hold on, you might say, I sure as heck would not have lost my child in the middle of a crowd without noticing for 24 hours!

Fair enough.

The best explanation I've gotten for that is that **some things* are and were* a little different. That it would have been common for the children to be thought of as safe among an

extensive network of friends and relatives. They are, after all, the ones that Mary and Joseph turn to when they decide it really has been a while since they'd seen Jesus. It sounds foreign to you or to me that they could have slept without knowing precisely where the boy was, if not with them, but "it takes a village" could have really been taken to heart among the Galileans.

The reunion of the family should sound a whole lot more familiar. "Where have you been? What were you thinking? We were worried sick about you!" Some of us have been driven to give such a lecture to a child gone for 5 minutes, nevertheless three days.

But a 12-year-old? That's about the right age for the disconnect that we're hearing here. "Why are you freaking out? Isn't it obvious that I'd be here hanging out right where I want to hang out?"

And, yes, that they could find their oldest child in a house of worship awing the priests and elders with his understanding of the Bible, certainly presents a mitigating factor in the consequences Jesus might have faced. Of all the places a preteen missing for three days could be found and all the activities they could be found doing ... if this isn't unique across all time, I'd be awfully surprised.

But as much as Mary may have treasured these things in her heart, I think Jesus heard an earful all the way back to Nazareth. I suspect some of the wisdom that increased in him was to keep mom and dad better aware of his whereabouts. And I am guessing something to the effect of "... but don't you EVER let that happen like that again" was appended to any expression of pride in Jesus' activities while they were separated.

Yes, Advent is over. Christmas ... and Christ ... have come. Behind us now are the birth pangs.

Here now are the growing pains.

Mary and Joseph did their best, I'm sure they did. They did everything as best they knew to raise their boy right. They were raising him to be a good, observant man of faith, and being the son of God, he of course went above and beyond their expectations. Luke tells us he was obedient to his parents in the years that came after this episode, but not much more than that.

But this story I think, leaves *us* much where it left Mary and Joseph. Treasuring Jesus ... but not fully understanding him and his being about his father God's business.

With Mary, we say, "I love you, Jesus, yes, but, no, I don't understand you."

This is meant in a bigger way than how we don't understand teenagers, even after we have been teenagers.

I mean that we don't understand what it is to be both human and divine. And to have gone through puberty in such

a state nonetheless. We don't understand what it is to love wholly and unconditionally, without putting ourselves first at some point in time, trying to protect ourselves from the vulnerability that comes along with that. We don't understand the full harshness of the reality that Jesus had to grow up, he had to go on to confront the same authorities that he once impressed and he had to die on an empire's cross while still but a young man.

That innocent, gentle baby in the manger is adorable and precious. But a Jesus who grows up and has something to say to us, in Word and deed, that challenges us. That gives us more to think about. That hurts us even, sometimes, when we realize that we have tried our best but our best just hasn't been enough.

The Gospel truth to this story, though, is that we don't have to understand. Which is good, because we are never going to fully understand Jesus in his entirety. But we can

always cherish our relationship to him. And always return to the recognition that he is gift ... and giver. And we are finally and forever freed from the need to be measured by our understanding so that we might advance in our wonder.

What child is this?

Thanks be to God that we are still finding that out.