

The Childhood of Jesus - "Jesus Was Busy Winning Our Righteousness."  
Texts: St. Luke 2:22-38, St. Matthew 2:1-12, St. Matthew 2:13-23, St. Luke 2:41-52  
January 7/8, 2023 | Saude, Jerico, & Redeemer Lutheran Churches

### In Nomine Iesu

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Lord God, heavenly Father, in mercy You have established the Christian home among us: We beseech You so to rule and direct our hearts, that we may be good examples to children and those subject to us, and not offend them by word or deed, but faithfully teach them to love Your Church and hear Your blessed Word. Give them Your Spirit and grace, that this seed may bring forth good fruit, so that our home life may advance Your glory, honor and praise, our own improvement and welfare, and give offense to no one; through the same, Your beloved Son, Jesus Christ, our Lord, who lives and reigns with You and the Holy Spirit, one true God, now and forever. Amen. (*Evangelical Lutheran Hymnary*, p. 149)

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In Christ Jesus, who entered this world of temptation and sin to win our righteousness and salvation, dear fellow redeemed:

When we review the accounts of Jesus' childhood—especially the first three readings for today—Jesus is not depicted as doing anything on His own. When He was forty days old, His parents brought Him to Jerusalem to present Him to the LORD and to offer a sacrifice for Him as Old Testament Law required. Then Simeon took Jesus in his arms, blessing God. A number of months after this, wise men showed up at their house in Bethlehem, worshipping Jesus and giving Him gifts. Then because of Herod's jealous wrath, an angel of the LORD told Joseph to take Jesus and Mary to Egypt for safety.

We might have expected more out of the Son of God incarnate. When He was presented at the temple, He could have impressed His parents and Simeon and Anna by opening His mouth and speaking a blessing to them. Or He could have made gifts appear for the wise men to help them on their journey home. He could have made His family vanish from Bethlehem and arrive in Egypt with no trouble. He could have stopped the terrible work of Herod's soldiers.

But we see none of this. There was nothing in His appearance or actions that set Jesus apart from other children His age. He needed to be fed and have His diapers changed. He had to learn to walk and talk. The only difference that might have been perceived is that Jesus never threw a temper tantrum as infants and toddlers occasionally do. He never sinned even at this early age.

God had humbled Himself so completely when He entered our world as a baby, that He required the care of others. He needed the kind of help and assistance that all children need. God has given the responsibility of raising children to every adult, even those who do not have children of their own. Children need our collective care and support. They cannot provide for themselves, or when they are younger, defend themselves.

And the kind of care that God especially requires of us is spiritual care. Deuteronomy 6 says, "*You shall teach [the words of God] diligently to your children, and shall talk of them when you sit in*

*your house, and when you walk by the way, and when you lie down, and when you rise” (v. 7) — our conversations about what God has done for us should happen constantly. Proverbs 22 says, “Train up a child in the way he should go; even when he is old he will not depart from it” (v. 6).*

And Jesus speaks a blessing for those who take this seriously, but He speaks a curse for those who don't. He said, *“Whoever receives one such child in my name receives me, but whoever causes one of these little ones who believe in me to sin, it would be better for him to have a great millstone fastened around his neck and to be drowned in the depth of the sea” (Mat. 18:5-6).* Parents cause their children to sin by not teaching them the truth of God's Word. But they give them eternal blessings by constantly pointing them to Jesus and reminding them of the gifts they received from Him at their Baptism.

This is serious business! And serious business can often seem too much for us to handle. But the care of our children is God's will. And what God wills, He blesses. It is no mistake that the children in our life are in our life. God has given us to serve them, and He has given them to enrich our life. Children are a check on our selfish impulses by giving us a purpose and a focus outside of ourselves. And they are the source of tremendous joy and gladness as we watch their growth and development... and their misadventures.

As children mature, we see them become more and more independent. They still need us, but not for the same things. They start to test boundaries and not always in a sinful way. They want to explore on their own and find out what they are capable of. We see this independence in Jesus as a twelve-year-old. It is clear that His parents were comfortable with this, because they trusted that He was part of the group traveling home after the Passover. They didn't feel the need to verify it. Jesus was a good boy!

And Jesus for His part was not doing anything sneaky by staying behind at the temple. He wasn't trying to trouble His parents or make them worry. He was laser-focused on the important task of the moment and tuned out everything else around Him. This happens with our children too. Sometimes they don't hear us give them some instruction because they don't want to hear it. That is sinful. But other times, they don't mean to be disobedient — they are just so focused on what they are doing that everything else gets tuned out. I suppose that happens with adults too!

It is clear that Jesus' motivations were pure by His response to His mother, when she chided Him for His decision to stay in Jerusalem. Jesus was genuinely surprised at their concern. In His first recorded words in the New Testament, He asked them, *“Why were you looking for Me? Did you not know that I must be in My Father's house?”* They didn't understand this at the time, but it became clear to them later. And so we learn to be patient with our children, even when they do things that are hard to understand.

Raising children is difficult, frustrating, stressful, awesome, enriching, and fun all at the same time. We wish we were better at it. It's easy for us to list our failures, the times we grew impatient and lost our temper, when we put ourselves first, when we did not model goodness and faithfulness through our words and actions. And we know well the failures of our childhood, when we did not respect our parents and other authorities as we should, when we did things we knew were wrong, when we behaved selfishly and unkindly.

Jesus came to right all these wrongs. We are told that He submitted to His sinful parents and showed love to all the people around Him, even when they did not treat Him like they should have. We probably do the most sinning against those who are closest to us, who are part of our household. But Jesus showed perfect love to all. He did not sin. Even as a baby when it looked like He wasn't doing anything, **Jesus Was Busy Winning Our Righteousness.**

His active obedience under the Law was for you, offered to God on your behalf. God does not hold your failures against you. He doesn't even see them, because Jesus paid for them with His blood, and He covers you with His own holy life. No matter how unqualified you may feel at times to watch over those in your care, you are where you are supposed to be, and God promises to strengthen you for this important work. Even your lowly and imperfect efforts are sanctified by His grace and used for the care and salvation of the little lambs who are His more than they are yours.

*Glory be to the Father and to the Son and to the Holy Ghost; as it was in the beginning, is now, and ever shall be, forevermore. Amen.*

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