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Title: Journey to Christmas

Preaching: Katie Kerr, Minister to Children and Families, Promise Road Campus

Text: [Luke 2:41-52](#)

Email: [Katie Kerr](#)

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It's hard to believe that I have been your minister to children and families for four years and three months. Back then, my kids looked like this:



And now they look like this:



Apparently I only take pictures of them together at Christmas. During these last four years, my children have not only grown physically but also spiritually. Braydon has been baptized, is an active member of the youth group, went on his first mission trip, and is preparing to go on his second. Kendall will be participating in Pastor's class in a few short weeks, is an active member of Five.6, has attended church camp twice, and is a great helper in the nursery and with the media team. They're comfortable here; they're connected here and consider this their church home. But their mom is also the pastor. A question that I often wrestle with and the question I'd like us to consider this morning is this: Do all of our children here at Geist Christian Church feel the same way?

I'm wrapping up the sermon series called *Let's Talk About...*, which has looked at some topics in church that we don't often talk about, but we should. We asked you what you wanted to hear and kids in church made the list.

This morning we are going back in time to look at what a family in first century Israel looked like as we hear the story of Jesus visiting the temple during the Passover celebration. This story is only found in the gospel of Luke and is the only account of Jesus as a child. Let's go to Luke 2:41-52.

Each year his parents went to Jerusalem for the Passover Festival. ⁴²When he was 12 years old, they went up to Jerusalem according to their custom. ⁴³After the festival was over, they were returning home, but the boy Jesus stayed behind in Jerusalem. His parents didn't know it. ⁴⁴Supposing that he was among their band of travelers, they journeyed on for a full day while looking for him among their family and friends. ⁴⁵When they didn't find Jesus, they returned to Jerusalem to look for him. ⁴⁶After three days they found him in the temple. He was sitting among the teachers, listening to them and putting questions to them. ⁴⁷Everyone who heard him was amazed by his understanding and his answers. ⁴⁸When his parents saw him, they were shocked.

His mother said, "Child, why have you treated us like this? Listen! Your father and I have been worried. We've been looking for you!"

⁴⁹Jesus replied, "Why were you looking for me? Didn't you know that it was necessary for me to be in my Father's house?" ⁵⁰But they didn't understand what he said to them.

⁵¹Jesus went down to Nazareth with them and was obedient to them. His mother cherished every word in her heart. ⁵²Jesus matured in wisdom and years, and in favor with God and with people.

Now, I don't know if you have ever lost a child, but it is terrifying. I lost two-year-old Kendall one time at the library, and if you know Kendall you would not be surprised to know that she was heading right out the front door when someone who worked at the library found her. Scariest few minutes of my life. So could you imagine how Mary and Joseph felt when they couldn't find the Son of God? Not only did Mary and Joseph lose Jesus, but they did not locate him for three days. But before we are too hard on them let's take a look at verse 44: "Supposing that he was among their band of travelers, they journeyed on for a full day while looking for him among their family and friends." They probably thought

that preteen Jesus was just hanging out with the other kids amongst the people they were traveling with.

At that time, all of Israel considered themselves family. They all thought of themselves as children of Abraham. The Hebrew word *mishpachah* means the entire family network of relatives by blood or marriage and sometimes even close friends. The personal identity of the family was based on their tribe, which was derived from which male was most closely related to Jacob. People would live in their “father’s house” or with the oldest living male ancestor, and there would be three to four generations living together in a sort of compound. It was within this *mishpachah* that the children were raised and cared for. It was this community that was also responsible for their spiritual development. So, Mary, Joseph, and Jesus weren’t traveling with just anyone. They were traveling with their family—their community.

I love how Luke gives us a glimpse of a young Jesus at the temple amongst the other teachers, listening and asking questions. He wasn’t turned away; he was right at home and he was welcomed there. He was gaining knowledge, asking questions, and challenging others even as a young boy. His parents, however, were very confused. What was he talking about and how does he know so much? Can you imagine how difficult it would have been to raise Jesus? Raising any child is hard enough, let alone the son of God! Good thing they had a close knit community around them. It was within this community that Jesus would grow in knowledge and wisdom. This was the community that would prepare him for his ministry.

Today’s family dynamic is a far cry from those days. You will typically see only two generations living together with other family members living in other towns or states. There are quite a lot of things competing for our time, including demanding work, school, music, theater, sports, and social schedules. We are definitely more disconnected from our extended families, perhaps only seeing them at holidays or vacations. Parents sure can use all the help they can get because raising kids really does take a village or a community. The Pew Research Center found that in the wake of the COVID pandemic and amid reports of a growing youth mental health crisis, 40% of U.S. parents with children younger than 18 say they are extremely or very worried that their children might struggle with anxiety or depression at some point. We have an opportunity to give the children and parents within our church community the support they need. In fact, that is exactly what Jesus has called us to do.

There are many stories of Jesus and children in the Bible, but one story in particular is in all three gospels. Jesus and his disciples had been traveling and teaching going from town to town. And people along the way were bringing children to Jesus. His disciples were rebuking them and shooing them away, and Jesus became angry with them. This is one of only two times where Jesus was angry. In Mark 10:14-16 Jesus tells them this: “Allow the children to come to me. Don’t forbid them, because God’s kingdom belongs to people like these children.”¹⁵ I assure you that whoever doesn’t welcome God’s kingdom like a child will never enter it.’¹⁶ Then he hugged the children and blessed them.”

Jesus didn't want the children to be shoved to the back or excluded. He wants them right in the midst of the community, learning, questioning, and listening. Jesus has called us to be in community with one another, and that community includes the children. Making connections through simple conversations can develop into relationships, and these relationships can lead to a community that is engaged, connected, and thriving. "What did you learn in Sunday School today?" "How's school going?" "What's your favorite color?" "How did your basketball game go?" Just like adults, kids want to feel a sense of belonging. They love when someone takes an interest in them other than their parents. The Indiana Youth Institute found that youth who have a mentor are 92% more likely to volunteer regularly in their communities, 75% more likely to have held a leadership position in a club or sports team, and 22% more likely to have experienced a strong sense of belonging while growing up.

There are good things already happening here. We have adults leading Sunday morning children's class, Youth sponsors at meetings and on mission trips, adults helping with groups and running stations at VBS, and elders who partner with our Pastor's class kids and even take them to ice cream or show up at their football games. Oftentimes, we talk about how children are the future. Well they are, but they are also our present. Enfolding our children in this community benefits us all.

There's a story that Barbara Brown Taylor tells of an 8-year-old girl walking home from school in her small town, and she took a wrong turn, which led to another wrong turn, and suddenly she was lost. She sat down on the sidewalk crying and a police officer pulled up, asking her if she was okay. She explained that she was lost. He asked if she knew her address, and in that stressful moment, she did not. He said, "Well, let's drive around and see if you recognize your neighborhood or house." They drove around for a few minutes, when suddenly she yelled out, there it is, there it is. The officer pulled over and realized that they were in front of a church. He said, "Do you live at the church?" She said, "No, but this is where God gives us the bread. And I can always find my way home from the church."

Whether we are talking about mental health, difficult people, systemic sin, baptism, or the church's future, we need to make sure that our children and youth are a part of the conversation and a part of the community. When they are lost, we want them to look to this place and say, "That's my family. That's where I feel welcome. That's where I belong."

Let us pray.

God of community, oftentimes we feel lost and in need of belonging. Help us to build a community that is open to conversation, creates a beloved community, celebrates baptism, works with difficult people, embraces the church's future, and includes ages young and old. May this be a loving community, a welcoming community, a helpful community and a community of belonging. Fill us with your spirit so that we may continue the work that Jesus Christ has called us to do. Amen.