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Title: The Sound of Silence

Preaching: Danny Gulden, Lead Pastor Promise Road Campus

Text: [Luke 2: 39-51](#)

E-mail: [Danny Gulden](#)

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Let me ask you a personal question this morning. How long do you leave your Christmas decorations up? Some of us leave them up until at least January 6, which ends the twelve days of Christmas or at least somewhere in that range depending on when we find a warm(ish) dry day during that time. Others of us let it linger a little bit past

that until the neighbors start asking when we are going to take them down. There are those of us that are taking them down today, ready to get them down and packed away for next year, ready to move on to the next thing.

It feels like if the Gospel writer Luke put up Christmas decorations, he would fall into that last category. Here we are on the day after Christmas, the second day of the twelve days of Christmas and Luke has already packed away the Christmas story in his Gospel. The way Luke tells it, Jesus is born and eight days after his birth, he is brought up to Jerusalem, to be presented at the temple. He is met by the old priest Simeon, who holds Jesus in his arms and says that "my eyes have seen your salvation." The newborn Jesus is also met by the prophet Anna, who praises God for the baby and anoints him as the one who will redeem all of Jerusalem. Mary and Joseph then return home to Nazareth. In the next verse of Luke, Jesus is suddenly 12 years old. Time sure does fly! Here is how Luke records this in his Gospel.

"When they had finished everything required by the law of the Lord, they returned to Galilee, to their town of Nazareth. The child grew and became strong, filled with wisdom; and the favor of God was upon him. Now every year his parents went to Jerusalem for the festival of the Passover. And when he was twelve years old, they went up as usual for the festival." Luke 2:39-42

So here is what we know about Jesus from the time he was eight days old until he was twelve.

He grew and became strong

He filled with wisdom and God looked favorably on him
His family was a devoutly Jewish family who went faithfully to Jerusalem every year for Passover.

Alyce McKenzie tells about the role her baby brother Robert had to play in the Christmas play one year When my "baby" brother Robert was five years old, he had blonde curls and big blue eyes and was just about the most adorable little boy imaginable. (I have his permission to share this personal, but positive, description of him!)

"He was assigned a part in the Christmas Eve pageant by its director, Mrs. Betty Hefflebauer. He had his heart set on being a wise man because of the cool costumes. But she did not cast him as a wise man. Nor did she cast him as Joseph, the innkeeper, or a shepherd. To her mind, none of these parts seemed quite right for him.

Instead, she gave him what my mother tried to convince him was the most important part of all—the narrator. He only had one line, and it was straight out of Scripture (Luke 2:40). After all the actors in the pageant had processed down the double aisles to the front and had taken their places in the Nativity Scene at the front, little Robert was to come out, walk to the center, pause to heighten the moment, gesture dramatically toward the baby, and say, loudly and clearly, "And the child grew and became strong!" He had the last word of the whole play. That was what my mother kept telling him.

My mother took him to Sears and bought him a Christmas suit: little black pants, a red velvet blazer, a white shirt, and a clip-on bow tie for his acting debut. We all helped him practice around the house, prompting him with the first part of his line, "And the child grew..." to which he would chime in "and became strong!"

Other times, he would start things off by saying, out of the blue, "And the child grew," to which the whole family would respond in chorus, "and became strong!" Add to that the weekly practices during Sunday school and, by the time Christmas Eve arrived, our little thespian was set to do the family proud.

We're still not sure what happened that night. Maybe it was because he had never practiced making his entrance and saying his line in a darkened sanctuary. During Sunday school there was always light streaming through the Garden of Gethsemane window at the back. Maybe it was because he had never practiced making his entrance and saying his line with the place packed with people.

Whatever the reason, when the Holy Family and their entourage were in place and his moment came, Robert walked out, his red velvet jacket glowing in the candlelight, and stood in front of the congregation. He was a baby deer with blonde curls and big blue eyes caught in the headlights. He opened his mouth, and nothing came out. His eyes began to glimmer, and his little lip trembled. He looked toward the baby and gestured but couldn't get the words out. Mrs. Hefflebauer, from her position as prompter crouched behind the lectern, whispered to him, "Pssst, Robert...And the child grew and became strong." Still nothing. Again she whispered, this time a little louder, "And the child grew and became strong."

Suddenly, a look of relief washed over his cherubic countenance. He leaned forward in a conspiratorial manner and whispered to the congregation in an audible and even dramatic stage whisper, "And the child grew and became strong!"

Maybe the silence during that Christmas Eve pageant was appropriate. Because there is a lot of silence when it comes to Jesus' childhood. He is born and then he is in middle school. Those who parent and grandparent and care for children, when we look to guidance and advice from what Jesus' parents did to raise him, we are left with...mostly silence. For church leaders looking to design the most wonderful children's ministry, to have a deep and lasting impact on our kids, we look to the childhood of Jesus for guidance, what worked so well for him, and we are left with...mostly silence."

What were those missing years for Jesus like?

A trip to the temple in Jerusalem when Jesus is twelve provides some clues. When Jesus is twelve, his family goes to the Passover festival, as was their custom. When it comes time to leave, Jesus stays behind. His parents notice about a day later that their son is not with the traveling party, they go back and find that he has been in the temple the entire time

"After three days they found him in the temple, sitting among the teachers, listening to them and asking them questions. And all who heard him were amazed at his understanding and his answers." Luke 2:46-47

At 12, the age when Joseph was Jesus' father which start teaching him the Torah, according to religious custom, Jesus is sitting among the great teachers, asking questions, and even doing some teaching on his own.

Perhaps the greatest gift we can give to children at Christmas is letting them know who they are and whose they are.

The greatest gift we can give to another is letting them know who they are and whose they are

The greatest gift we can give to ourselves is to know who we are and whose we are.

Think back for just a moment, to after the Shepherds visit the newborn Jesus, the newborn king, Mary gets a moment alone and we are told this is what she does with this moment.

"But Mary treasured all these words and pondered them in her heart." Luke 2:19

She knows who Jesus is and whose he is.

Think for a moment how incredible it is that God lived among us in human form. Our experiences are not unique to us, so much so to the point that even God in Jesus experienced much of what we experience.

Can you imagine Jesus playing tag in the streets of Nazareth?

What about Jesus skinning his knee or complaining to his mother Mary about what's for dinner?

Maybe Jesus did travel sports or dance competitions. Jesus' early years tell us this. That in all things, you belong to God. In all things, you have the right to be who God created you to be.

God knows what it's like to be human and God knows that often being human and becoming what we are created to be is slow work.

In a quick-fix, instant results world, these gaps in Jesus' life are good news for us.

Salvation is never a quick-fix, instant results type of movement in our life.

And even when it seems like God is silent, God is moving and working towards making us exactly who God needs us to be.