This past week millions of Americans traveled home in order to spend Christmas with their family. They either flied, drove, took the bus or rail or other modes of transportation. AAA estimated that more than 112 million Americans (that’s nearly 1 out of every 3 Americans) traveled home for the holiday…and guess what, they will get to do this all over again this week, as they go back to where they came from. Some have already begun their return trip, just trying to beat the mad rush of New Year’s Eve and New Year’s Day.

Why do people do this, you may ask? Well, I think there is something about being “home” that makes people willing to go the extra miles just to be with their family for the holiday. And this is not just an American thing, it’s a global phenomenon.

Being home means spending quality time with families, eating and smelling familiar comfort food, seeing and hearing familiar sights and sounds, visiting grandparents or aunts/uncles and even your annoying cousins. Being “home” also means one finding a place where one belongs.

The same goes with our spiritual home as well. Perhaps for some of you, this place of worship is your spiritual home. This is the place where you might be baptized, gotten married, saw your children or grandchildren baptized, confirmed or married....etc. This is the place where you may feel cozy and being “home” where you belong.

In the passage that we just read, we came across the story of Jesus, in his childhood year, coming to a place where he called it home. No, I’m not talking about Bethlehem, even though that’s where he was born there. Mary and Joseph were just passing through that time on their way to Nazareth. But they didn’t stay there long. They had to leave almost immediately, fleeing to Egypt as a migrant refugee into a foreign country while seeking shelter for the first couple of years.

The Gospel writer Luke introduced to us this rare chapter in Jesus’ life…his childhood years of Jesus…12 to be exact. Not much has been mentioned about Jesus’ childhood year. The age was significant because according to the Jewish culture, a boy was to become a “man”, at the age of 13 when he undergoes the ceremony of bar mitzvah. It’s the “coming of age” ceremony when he becomes a full-fledge member within the religious community, sort of like the Confirmation in the Christian setting. But as we know, Jesus was no ordinary boy. He was a child prodigy especially when it came to his religious training and spiritual upbringing.

The story goes that it was the festival of Passover and there was a great gathering of people from all over the region and converged into Jerusalem for their annual pilgrimage. Now when the festival was over, on their way back to Nazareth, Mary and Joseph got separated with Jesus in the midst of the crowd. They probably thought that he was walking along with the caravan of people or along with other children of his age. No big deal! But soon, Mary and Joseph realized that Jesus was nowhere near them, so they began to panic searching all over for him for 3 days but they couldn’t find him…so they retraced their steps back to the temple in Jerusalem and lo and behold, there he was, standing, having deep theological conversation and discussion amongst the elders inside the temple. Remember, this boy was only 12 years old at that time! The crowd must have wondered, *“Who was this boy? Wasn’t he the son of Joseph the carpenter from Nazareth?”*

The boy Jesus was hanging out with the adult, even though he was still a child. This was a big deal. When the parents finally found Jesus, even though they were relieved, but they were seemingly upset at him for getting himself separated from them. Do you remember what Jesus’ response was to his mother? He said *“Why are you searching for me? Don’t you know that I must be in my Father’s house? I know what I’m doing. I know where I belong. This is exactly where I should be.”* Now, I am paraphrasing a bit here but you get the sense of what Jesus was trying to tell his earthly parents. Mary and Joseph knew exactly what he meant, but they treasured all of these in his hearts.

This was an Epiphany moment for the boy Jesus revealing a glimpse of his true identity. But **his true identity would only be manifested some 20 years later when the Holy Spirit descended upon him by declaring, *“This is my beloved child, with whom I am well pleased.”[[1]](#footnote-1)*** The boy Jesus honored the 5th Commandment of the Law of Moses by obeying to his parents…both his heavenly and earthly parents.[[2]](#footnote-2)

This was very little recordings at all among the four main gospels that talks about the childhood years of Jesus between his birth and his baptism, which we will read about next week. Luke offered us the most detail biographic recording of the life of the early childhood year of Jesus from his conception all the way to his early teens. Right before our passage in the same chapter, Luke covered the presentation of the child Jesus for his circumcision, and how the prophets of Simeon and Anna could now rest in peace, after seeing the Messiah child has come before their eyes. For they had thought that they would never see such momentous occasion before their lifetime.

Likewise, in the *Infancy Gospel of Thomas* and *the Gospel of James,* which our afternoon Bible Study group studied earlier this year, also made some reference and key insights to the childhood years of Jesus. Although the source of those non-canonical materials was unsubstantial, they were however not rejected altogether either. They do offer us supplemental perspectives of the live of Jesus, as a child growing up to be a man, just like us.

These childhood stories of Jesus are important to us because they connect us with him and make Jesus more relatable. He’s not some mythical figure with super-natural power and authority. He was born in human flesh and he also died a human death. He probably lived a “normal” childhood as an apprentice to his father in carpentry. Like other children, he got lost in the crowd and was scolded by his parents for not sticking close by them. I’m sure, many of us have had similar experiences as well when we were growing up as children or with our children.

Furthermore in our text this morning, we also catch a glimpse of Jesus’ theological foundation that was established based upon the upbringing of his parents and those around him in the supporting community. Mary and Joseph were devout in their faith and they made sure that they would take this annual pilgrimage with their family to Jerusalem for the festival of Passover. Now that says a lot. You see, the distance between Nazareth and Jerusalem is approximately 100 miles and that’s a good 3-4 days of walking. This shows the level of devotion of Mary and Joseph and their commitment in raising their family properly according to their faith.

Furthermore, we also get a sense of Jesus’ faith foundation when he chose to stay behind and engaged into deep theological interpretive discussions among the religious leaders. The community allowed this child to speak. They did not stop him despite his young age. Jesus was well versed in the scripture and demonstrated great spiritual wisdom, knowledge and insights. No surprise there either. He was a child (soon to be a man) destined to do great things for all of humanity. Mary and Joseph knew this all along, but they had cherished this in their hearts all this time.

The gospel writer Luke summed up this story in verse 52 by declaring **“*Jesus increased in wisdom and in years, and in divine and human favor.”***  The word “favor” in Greek can also be translated as “grace”. So Jesus’ wisdom was increased in years in both divine and human grace. It took years even for Jesus to develop in wisdom and became who he was destined to be.

On the eve of these final days of the year and the new year is only about 36 hours away, our passage today challenges us to take a moment to reflect upon OUR own spiritual journey. *How have we grown spiritually over this past year? What have we done to nurture our spiritual practices?* Or is that even a question that crosses our minds? If so, why not?

In this coming year, *how do we position ourselves, and challenge ourselves to grow more in God’s grace and with God’s wisdom? What areas of discipline do we need to improve in rekindling our relationship and reconnect with God in the coming year?*

As we read in our story today, even Jesus went through his own spiritual journey of discipline and development through his early adolescent years. He did not become a spiritual sensation overnight. It took him years of personal devotion, spiritual discernment and prayers. Despite his virtuous and royal status, he humbled himself and became a servant for us all at the end. He retreated himself to be alone and reconnected with his Heavenly Father. Jesus exhibited to us a model of spirituality and discipline that we are always a “work-in-progress” and under construction by God.

Jesus knew exactly where he belongs. He knew where his spiritual home was…not on this earth, but in His Father’s house! And in the same way he is right now preparing a room for us, as we honor our callings to make room for others and to demonstrate and walk alongthe path of faith with others.

Therefore, let us **seek God’s wisdom first, above and beyond all things and lay aside our own human knowledge and personal ambition.** As **Proverbs 3** reminds us that we shall *Trust in the LORD with all our hearts, and do not rely on our own insight. 6 In all our ways acknowledge him, and he will make straight our paths. 7 Do not be wise in our own eyes; fear the LORD, and turn away from evil. 8 It will be a healing for our flesh and a refreshment for our body. 9 Honor the LORD with our substance and with the first fruits of all our produce; 10 then our barns will be filled with plenty, and your vats will be bursting with wine.*

May we, in this coming new year…2019! open our hearts and our eyes for new possibilities and invite God to speak to us and reveal God’s magnificent grace upon us, as we participate in God’s mission here on earth. Thanks be to God. In the name of God the Father, God the Son, and God the Holy Spirit, Amen.

1. *Matthew 3:17* [↑](#footnote-ref-1)
2. *Luke 2:51* [↑](#footnote-ref-2)