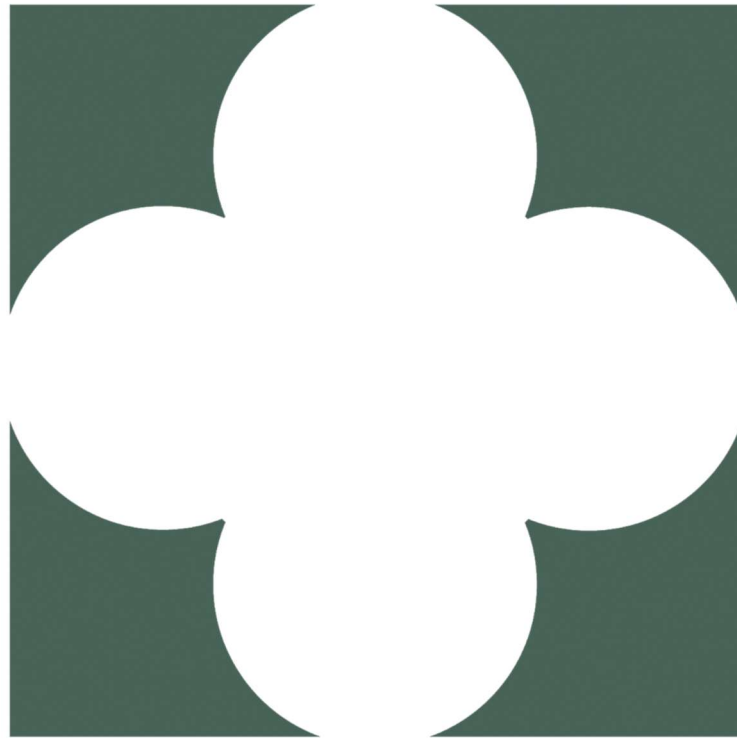


# Have You Seen Jesus?

Dr. Patricia L. Hunter



seattle first baptist

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Luke 2:40-52

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*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. When the festival was ended and they started to return, the boy Jesus stayed behind in Jerusalem, but his parents did not know it. Assuming that he was in the group of travelers, they went a day's journey. Then they started to look for him among their relatives and friends. When they did not find him, they returned to Jerusalem to search for him. 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. When his parents saw him they were astonished; and his mother said to him, "Child, why have you treated us like this? Look, your father and I have been searching for you in great anxiety." He said to them, "Why were you searching for me? Did you not know that I must be in my Father's house?" But they did not understand what he said to them. Then he went down with them and came to Nazareth, and was obedient to them. His mother treasured all these things in her heart. And Jesus increased in wisdom and in years, and in divine and human favor.*

This is the first Sunday after Epiphany, and the Christmas season has officially ended. Our text today is about the 12-year-old Jesus who was left behind. Jesus being left behind had nothing to do with Christian dispensationalism or the rapture, but moreso with childlike curiosity, the desire to learn, and being oblivious to family whereabouts.

It does seem rather jolting to move so quickly from the baby in a manger to the teenage Jesus, to next week the adult Jesus. This story of the 12-year-old Jesus in the Temple is a transitional story between the infant Jesus and the adult Jesus who came to fulfill his divine purpose.

During Christmas we frequently romanticize the holy family as the perfect family. In paintings of the holy family with infant in manger, all three family members are depicted with halos. But in this story, there is tension and tempers start to flair. Christian theologian William Danaher, Jr. wrote:

*with this story the holy family is less than idyllic. For in this story, we have somewhat of a precocious son who is oblivious to how his actions impact his family or others in general. Pretty typical of a teenager. Here, Jesus is starting to separate himself from his family.*

Yes, there were tense moments and misunderstandings in Jesus' family just like ours.

Although this story may feel like it was plopped into the gospel without much context, there are some nuggets of wisdom here that can help us along our faith journey. The first nugget I get from this text is that ***Jesus grew up in community***. In this text Joseph is Jesus' father. In the scriptures when the angels came to Mary and Joseph, the angels said that the Holy One would be the father of Jesus, but here his parents are Mary and Joseph.

Jesus' family and friends were traveling home to Nazareth from celebrating the Passover in Jerusalem. This was an annual community pilgrimage from Nazareth to Jerusalem. In community, Jesus played, worshipped, and learned sacred stories. And as an adult, Jesus did his

ministry in community. Of course, there were times when Jesus had to get away from the crowd for self-care.

There is something about community that makes life more joyful and worth living. Many of us during this pandemic have become acutely aware of how important community is to our mental, spiritual, and physical well-being. Those months before the vaccine was available, we were stuck and isolated in our homes and working in front of screens most of the day. The isolation was brutal and continues to be challenging for those who for health reasons are not able to venture out.

One of the tenets of being a womanist scholar is being in community. Alice Walker said that a womanist is committed to the survival and wholeness of the entire people, male and female. And a womanist is not a separatist, excepts periodically for health.

We grow and are challenged in community. We are healed and find purpose in community. We are corrected of our errors and find strength in community. We are created to be in community. Mary and Joseph knew wherever Jesus was, he was with others in community. They didn't worry about his safety; they just didn't know where he was.

After a day or so, Mary and Joseph still couldn't find Jesus. But no worries, he was probably hanging out with some of the other relatives or playing around with his neighborhood buddies. The question that comes to my mind, was how many people were in the crowd that you couldn't see your own kid? Well, the text doesn't tell us. But it does say that family is more than birth relatives. Family and safety are found in community.

After Jesus went missing the first night, I imagine Joseph and Mary started asking everyone, Have you seen Jesus? Have you seen Jesus? Have you seen Jesus? What parent or auntie or uncle in charge of young ones has

not asked the question at some point ... have you seen Bobbie, Princess, Rachel, Liam, Jesus?

I am reminded of when I directed vacation bible school when I first got out of seminary. We had over 100 kids come from all over Puget Sound to our VBS. We rented buses to go on field trips. We went to NW Trek, Wild Waves, Underground Seattle, and the Woodland Park Zoo. We had adult helpers, but not enough for 100 kids who were so excited to go to the zoo on a sunny summer afternoon.

We had an hourly check-in system at the Zoo, and the children had to always be with at least two other kids. And everyone had to be back on the same bus at 3 PM. Once we let them go, I felt sheer panic. What if one didn't come back? What if it got to be 3:30 and then 4 PM and still one was missing? We didn't have a plan for that scenario.

Let me say, child abductions of little black kids were very rare 40 years ago. So, we figured we would be OK on our field trips. The children knew there were consequences for missing the hourly check-ins, at least a 15-minute time out. A few missed the hourly check-in—but they only missed it once. Well, praise the Lord by 3:05, all 100+ children came back—which was amazing, for most of them didn't have watches. Nevertheless, the panic of where were they was real. The panic of a missing child abducted from home or a mall is even more real today.

I imagine that after two nights of not knowing where Jesus was, the anxiety of Jesus' parents was sky high. But on the third day, Mary and Joseph went to the temple and guess who they found? Jesus! Jesus was totally oblivious to their concerns. Of course, mama Mary said, boy where have you been, what have you been doing, and what were you thinking? We were worried sick about you!

I imagine Jesus said, but mama you knew I'd be here. I thought I told you I wanted to talk to the teachers.

Boy, if you don't get yourself up out of here!

And with that, Jesus got up and went home to Nazareth with his parents.

Up until this point in the gospels, people and angels spoke about the child Jesus. He will be the son of the Most High God. He will be called the Son of God. The child is our Savior and the Messiah. Finally, in the Temple, Jesus speaks for himself. Why were you looking for me? Didn't you know I would be about my father's house? In other words, I thought the angels told you what I would be up to?

The text also lets us know that while Jesus was with the temple scholars, he was there to learn. He was listening to the teachers and asking them questions. It doesn't matter how much we think we know, there is always more to learn. We don't come out of the womb full of knowledge and wisdom about everything. There are times when we need to sit at the feet of others and soak in their expertise and wisdom. At 12 years of age, Jesus knew he needed to learn some things.

Jesus increased in wisdom and in years, and in divine and human favor. Mary continued to hold all these things in her heart. For at 12 years of age, Jesus' wisdom exceeded that of his parents.

Danaher also wrote we know through this text that:

***... God's wisdom is available to the young as well as to the old, which means that we must make room for God to surprise us with unexpected revelations given by unusual messengers.***

Sometimes those messengers are our children. Jesus said later in his ministry, Let the little children come unto me and do not stop them. For to

such belongs the kingdom of heaven. Children know things that we as adults need to listen to. Wisdom is found in those under age 30 too. We've met children that have old souls, that are wise beyond their years. They know things even before they know they know things.

At age 12 Mary knew Jesus was different from all the other neighborhood kids. His wisdom and knowledge of spiritual things separated him from the rest. Jesus was filled with wisdom. Acclaimed preacher and scholar Barbara Brown Taylor wrote that Jesus was a child of Sophia as well as Mary's child. Sophia is the Greek word for wisdom. As a youngster, Jesus knew things that flesh and blood had not revealed to him.

Jesus had a heart for the Temple. He was not lost, but on divine assignment in the Temple preparing for holy work. Have you seen Jesus? Of course. He's not lost. He is not only in our sacred spaces, he is in each of us and particularly in our little ones. Look for him, he's here. Let us follow the way of Jesus in community, seeking wisdom, and sharing love. Have you seen Jesus? Oh yes, he's right here.

Please stand as you are able and let us sing *Lead On Eternal Sovereign*, #573.