

## CHRISTMAS 1C - 12/30/18

### *Home Alone*

(Luke 2:41-52)

Christmas, perhaps more than any other season or holiday of the year, is known for its favorite movies. I'm sure you each have your own favorites, as do I.

Checking out "The 50 Best Christmas Movies Of All Time" at the Rotten Tomatoes website earlier this past week, for instance, I was not at all surprised that each of our family's favorites somehow found its way onto that list. At #1, not surprisingly, and surely deserving, was "It's A Wonderful Life." At #3 was another family favorite, "Miracle On 34<sup>th</sup> Street." #7 was one of Kaitlin's and my favorites, "Babes in Toyland" featuring comedians Stan Laurel and Oliver Hardy. #15 was the classic "A Charlie Brown Christmas" that I fondly remember from my youth. #20 was one of all *three* of my daughters' favorites "Christmas in Connecticut" starring Barbara Stanwick as a 1940's version of Martha Stewart – only the plot twist, as it turns out, is that Stanwick's character was something of a fraud. At #32 was my three daughters' *all-time* favorite, however – hands-down, in fact – "White Christmas," with Bing Crosby and Danny Kaye...

And then, as you can imagine, there were many others on the list as well that were not necessarily at the top of *our* lists, including, "Home Alone" slipping in at #46. A funny movie, to be sure, but which is not so much *about* Christmas as it is, of course, a movie that takes place *during* Christmas.

You've probably seen it, I'm sure. But in case you haven't (spoiler alert!) , it stars Macaulay Culkin as an 8-year-old boy named Kevin McCallister who is mistakenly left home all by himself when his family flies to Paris for the Christmas holiday.

A power outage during the night, which messed up their alarm clocks, caused the McCallister clan to oversleep; including his aunt and uncle and cousins who were taking the trip to France with them. Then, in all the confusion, and the mad dash to get to the airport on time, Kevin, who had been banished to the attic for his poor behavior the night before, is simply forgotten and accidentally left behind.

However, once they are all safely on the flight to Paris – except for Kevin, of course – his parents, Kate and Peter, have the following exchange:

Kate McCallister: “Did I turn off the coffee?”

Peter McCallister : “No, I did.”

Kate: “Did you lock up?”

Peter: “Yeah.”

Kate: “Did we set the timers on the lights?”

Peter: “Yeah.”

Kate: “Did you close the garage?”

Peter: “That’s it. I forgot to close the garage. That’s it.”

Kate: (*pausing*) “No, that’s not it.”

Peter: “Well, what else could we be forgetting?”

Kate: (*leans back and thinks, then suddenly sits back up and yells out*)  
“KEVIN!!!”

And with that (as they say), the movie is off and running with young Kevin hilariously attempting to fend for himself in their absence; especially when a couple of bungling burglars attempt to rob the McCallister home...

Well, interestingly enough, we have a very similar situation in today's gospel reading, don't we? That is to say, someone *else* finds himself (quote unquote) "home alone."

Now even though it's only been five days since Christmas for *us*, Luke's story nevertheless jumps *ahead* twelve entire years (!) to an incident that occurred following the annual trip taken by Jesus and his parents to Jerusalem for the Passover. (The *only* story, as it turns out, about the boy Jesus in the Gospel of Luke, and the entire Bible for that matter.)

As we heard, when the Passover festival had ended, and they started to return, twelve-year-old Jesus – unbeknownst to his parents – had stayed behind in Jerusalem. His parents, however, just naturally assumed that he was in their group of fellow travelers that included relatives and friends; in other words, people they could trust. So initially they didn't worry or have any cause for alarm.

In all the confusion, you see, and maybe even a bit of a mad rush to get on the road, they apparently didn't give the whereabouts of Jesus a second thought. Again, he was presumably safe with their family and friends. In fact, they even went a whole day's journey, says Luke, without ever seeing him or knowing exactly where he was. But at *some* point, however, after they had stopped for the evening most likely, I can imagine an exchange between Mary and Joseph that went something like this:

Mary: “I feel as though we’ve forgotten something.”

Joseph: “I don’t think so.”

Mary: “Did you pack those last couple of bundles I showed you?”

Joseph: “Yeah.”

Mary: “The extra clothes and food?”

Joseph: “Yeah.”

Mary: “That nice basket I bought at the market?”

Joseph: “I’m almost positive.”

Mary: “How about the pretty scarf?”

Joseph: “That too... I don’t think we forgot anything.”

Mary: (*pauses to think about this a little more, then scrambles to her feet and shouts out*) “JESUS!!! Good heavens, where’s Jesus?”

And so, as Luke tells us, they immediately started looking feverishly for him among their relatives and friends. But they did not find him anywhere in that caravan of fellow travelers. Therefore, like any concerned parents, with each passing minute their anxiety levels began to rise *exponentially*. And quickly the next morning – worried sick we can safely assume – they immediately headed *back* to Jerusalem in order to search for him...

It’s every parent’s worst nightmare, isn’t it? I can remember once, while we were out shopping at the mall, when Kaitlin suddenly disappeared. She was about three-years-old at the time. One minute, as Jeanette was browsing through the clothes racks, Kaitlin was right there beside us. But the next minute she was suddenly gone, and we began to panic.

You see, at the time, it had only been a little more than a decade since the famous case where seven-year-old Adam Walsh had disappeared

from the Hollywood Mall in Hollywood, Florida. So the tragedy of that abduction, and the haunting memory of his death, still weighed heavily on our minds.

We called out her name repeatedly and then frantically. And started going systematically through the entire department searching for her.

After what was probably no more than 30 seconds, but which felt like an *eternity*, Kaitlin suddenly popped out from under one of the coat racks giggling. At three, you see, she was still small enough to fit under the coats as they hung there without being seen. And she thought that hiding from us in this way was fun...

Believe me, we showed her how much fun it was when we got her home that afternoon! Now don't worry, she was only scolded for what she had done. But it was as *stern* of a scolding, I think, as we ever gave her. Because, as you can well imagine, she had scared us half to death!

And even though Jesus was 12 at the time, I can't imagine that Mary and Joseph were any less frightened by *his* disappearance. Your mind jumps to terrible conclusions and worst-case scenarios.

So for three entire days, we're told, they searched diligently for Jesus. But they could not find him anywhere, apparently. I can't even imagine what must have been going through their minds at that point.

Then finally, on the last day, and presumably at their wit's end, they went to perhaps the least likely place of all – the temple. And it was *here* that they finally found him, sitting among the teachers, listening to them, and asking them questions.

And I love what Luke tells us next; in particular, the two completely different reactions displayed by Mary and Joseph when they eventually discover where Jesus has been all this time. Seeing him sitting there, listening to the greatest teachers in all of Israel and, what's more, asking them insightful questions of his own in response, Mary and Joseph were "astonished," says Luke. The Greek word here is *ekplesso* (ek-place'-so) which has a kind of violent connotation actually. It literally means "to strike out." But the sense here is "to be struck with amazement," or, as we heard, to be "astonished."

But Mary and Joseph were not the *only* ones impressed by Jesus, were they? "All who heard him," says Luke, "were amazed at his understanding and his answers." Here the Greek word is *existemi* (ex-is'-tay-mee) which literally means "to throw out of position." And it's used here in the sense of being "thrown into wonderment."

So not only Mary and Joseph, but literally *everyone* who was there at the temple that day was clearly amazed and astonished by this child prodigy. In other words, he spoke and interacted with those learned teachers at the temple in an unexpected and unprecedented way. Surely this was no ordinary boy. Obviously, he was a very *special* one.

Yet this is not a very surprising or startling conclusion for those of us who know the whole story, is it? Who know the rest of the story. Who know Jesus' *true* identity. Who understand that he was and *is*, indeed, the Son of God...

Which leads us then to Mary and Joseph's *second* reaction. Well, Mary's actually. His mother's. "Child," she says to him a little sternly, I would imagine, "why have you treated us like this?" (Never mind the

simple fact that they had left town three days earlier without even checking to make sure he was actually with them! Right?) “Look,” she continues, “your father and I have been searching for you in great anxiety.” (Notice how she’s laying a little guilt on him here.)

Now the Greek word, in *this* instance, is *odunao* (oh-doo-nah’-oh) which is a little stronger than merely being anxious, however. It means “to cause intense pain, to be in anguish, tormented.” Mary and Joseph are clearly beside themselves with fear and worry. Once again, losing a child is a parent’s worst nightmare. Your mind imagines all kinds of terrible things. And you literally *are* in anguish and pain.

And here, in this moment, we see a very *human* side of, not only Mary and Joseph, but Jesus as well. You see, he may very well be something of a child prodigy, but he’s *still* only 12-years-old, isn’t he? In other words, he still doesn’t completely understand the possible consequences and ramifications of his actions; especially not being able to anticipate how worried sick his parents were going to be when he elected to stay behind in Jerusalem without telling them.

Perhaps he feared they wouldn’t *let* him stay. So, typical 12-year-old boy that he is, what does he do? He just doesn’t tell them, and goes ahead and does it anyway. Sound familiar? It certainly does to me.

So you have these two reactions by Mary and Joseph which, in turn, reflect Jesus’ two natures, don’t they? Apparent child prodigy holding court, not to mention holding his own, with the most learned minds in all of Israel

Ah, you say. That only makes sense since he was *divine*; the Son of God.

But then, at the very same time, your typical 12-year-old boy thoughtlessly worrying his parents by staying behind in Jerusalem instead of returning home with them after the Passover. How obviously *human*.

Both human *and* divine. Clearly. And I imagine that's exactly *why* Luke chose to include this story from Jesus' childhood. There undoubtedly had to be others as well; other stories of the boy Jesus. Even if most of them were soon forgotten with the passage of time, some stories *had* to have made it down to Luke's day; a few at least. But this is the only one he chose to record for us. This is the only one that had something important to say apparently about Jesus' true nature and identity.

So we have this climactic moment in Luke's story where Mary confronts Jesus with what he has done; how much he has worried them. His response? Again, typical 12-year-old boy. Very human, in fact. "Why were you searching for me?" he asks. Not comprehending obviously, how they would have reacted once they discovered he was missing.

But then immediately followed up by a reminder that he is not *only* just their son. He says to them, "Did you not know that I must be in my Father's house?" The temple, you see, *was* the house of God. And Jesus is displaying here an emerging understanding – still not fully formed I'm sure – that he also has a unique identity and mission as God's *Son*.



So, there in the temple, he *was* home! Briefly home alone; separated from Mary and Joseph who searched for and finally found him. And then took him back with them to Nazareth where he was obedient to them (unlike in this instance, right?) and increased in wisdom and in years.

However, here's the key point, the key takeaway for us this morning: He increased in wisdom and in years, yes, but *also* "in divine and human favor." Why? Because, as we know, he was *both* divine and human.

From everything else we can deduce from the biblical record, especially the lack of any other stories in the Bible about Jesus' early years, he certainly seems to have had a rather normal upbringing. But for this one brief moment, this one snapshot from his childhood, we can plainly see signs of who he truly was and was eventually to become. For this one brief moment in the temple, he was *indeed* "home alone."

Amen.