

# ***Good Intentions***

I Kings 3:4-15; Ps. 119:97-104; Eph. 1:3-14; Luke 2:40-52

Grace Lutheran Church, West Carrollton, OH

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It is not unusual this time of year  
to try to at least vaguely map out  
the course our lives will take  
in the coming year.

We might call it our plans,  
our aspirations,  
our goals,  
or even our  
"New Year's Resolutions."

This year,  
I have a very short list,  
but topping it is that this Fall,  
I am DEFINITELY getting  
the flu shot!

Skipping that in 2024

turned out to be a little bit of a miss. =/=

Now,

I used to get ***very detailed***

about my list of goals.

In my 20s,

I wrote them out longhand

on a yellow legal pad.

By my 30s, I had graduated to a

"personal digital assistant,"

Somewhere along the way

I progressed to an excel spreadsheet.

Eventually, I simplified,

and went with the 3x5 index card

stored in my desk drawer.

I'm sure there must be an app out there

somewhere for this type of thing,

but you know the old adage  
about old dogs and new tricks.

Whatever tool I was using,  
I would break my life out  
into five to seven different spheres  
and list goals for each one.

Nothing terribly creative.  
You can probably guess the categories.

Things like,  
professional goals,  
academic achievements,  
personal health and fitness,  
spiritual disciplines,  
household finances,  
relationships with loved ones,  
and maybe a few others.

As you might guess,  
some of those goals were achieved,  
some fell quickly by the wayside,  
and I'm still working on others,  
somewhat irked  
by my  
lack of progress.

Looking back over those successes  
***and failures...***

I can clearly see  
what was not quite so clear  
when I first toiled away  
with pen and paper,  
palm pilot,  
desktop,  
or index card.

Looking back,  
those goals in which I succeeded  
were in clearly response  
to divine intention.

And, if I honestly assess things,  
those that failed,  
were often, not always,  
but far too regularly  
formed somewhere else,  
either out of my own selfishness,  
or perhaps somewhere  
far worse.

This morning,  
we see Jesus at the tender age of 12,  
growing into God's intention for him.

We see him  
fully embracing his identity  
as the Son of God,  
and fully dedicating himself

to the life-task

God would place upon him.

Our gospel lesson offers us just a tantalizing  
glimpse into the life of Jesus as a child.

Apocryphal accounts do exist,

but they are patently false,

depicting Jesus

as a wonder boy

who imparts knowledge to his

teachers about the mysteries

of the alphabet,

or who stuns his family and playmates

with miracles that are more like

a sorcerer's tricks.<sup>1</sup>

In comparison to those fanciful accounts,

our gospel lesson

seems dull and unimaginative.

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<sup>1</sup> See my 2021 Christmas II sermon "The Priority of our Affections" p. 2-6 for quotations from this as well as the Arabic Infancy Gospel. (Bock BECNT p. 267; Garland ZECNT p. 147).

But it is that very ordinariness  
that lends it credibility and power  
as it reaches our ear.

I've wondered too if at least one benefit  
of the brevity of Luke's account  
for us as modern readers  
might be that it hinders  
our attempts  
to "psychologize" the account.

If we had been given a wealth of data  
about the years between his birth  
and the start of his ministry,  
the skeptic within us might try to  
"read between the lines of the story"  
and claim something like,  
"Well, Jesus'  
*'messiah complex'*  
must have begun right there...  
when he was x years old,  
and such and such happened."

Luke spares us from heading down  
that rabbit hole.

He includes just enough information  
that we might conclude that  
at a young age,  
Jesus already knows the score.

He fully understood  
his identity as God's Son,  
fully understood his destiny,  
and would not flinch  
in the face of it. =//=

You're familiar with the story Luke tells.

Mary and Joseph are exceedingly devout  
in their own adherence to Judaism,  
and as parents are dedicated  
to the religious upbringing  
of their children.

The law mandated that Jewish men  
attend one of three holy festivals in



Jerusalem each year.<sup>2</sup>

Women and children were not  
required to make the journey,  
but here we see  
Joseph, Mary, and Jesus  
making the journey.

Luke tells us that  
this pilgrimage was  
an annual event  
for members of the Holy Family,  
thus revealing their  
dedication.<sup>3</sup>

But  
there is something even more significant  
about their attendance  
at the Passover feast this year.

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<sup>2</sup> Exod. 34:23 and Dt. 16:16

<sup>3</sup> Luke 2:41,

Luke tells us that Jesus was twelve years old;  
on the cusp of adulthood in that culture.

At age 13, he would assume the adult  
responsibilities of  
keeping the law  
and learning a vocation.

Consequently, at age 12, a Jewish boy  
would enter an intense relationship  
with his father.

It would be a period  
of rigorous instruction.

Joseph would mentor him  
in both how to make a living and  
***also*** the hows and whys  
of living faithfully  
according to God's law.

All throughout the festival,  
Joseph would have been explaining to Jesus

every detail of the meaning  
of the Passover.

When Jesus went missing,  
Joseph and Mary would, of course,  
be deeply distressed,  
out of their minds with fear,  
but also they would be  
profoundly disappointed.

That accounts for the abrasiveness  
of Mary's question  
when they finally find him.<sup>4</sup>

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<sup>4</sup> Luke tells us that after the feast, Jesus stays behind in Jerusalem. In that time, the whole village would travel together. Women and children would tend to travel together and men with the other men. Given this transitional age of Jesus, perhaps Mary thinks Jesus is with Joseph and the men, while Joseph thinks Jesus is still clinging to his mother. It also is not very far out of the realm of possibility to think that a 12-year-old boy might want to be with his friends at least some of the time and not with his parents. Whatever the explanation, Joseph and Mary do not discover Jesus' absence until they settle in for the night at their first stop along the four-day journey back home.

The rendering of Mary's words  
printed in our bulletins reads:

"Son!

Why have you treated us  
like this?

Your father and I

have been *anxiously*  
searching for you!"

But, I don't think even that quite captures the  
intensity of what  
Joseph and Mary  
must have felt.<sup>5</sup>

Mary's words express not just fear of loss,  
but anguished disappointment.

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The next day, they race back to Jerusalem looking for Jesus in the throng of pilgrims along the road. They arrive late that night. Early the next morning, they search about the city for Jesus and find him in the Temple.

<sup>5</sup> The underlying term is ὀδυνη. It occurs only 4x in the NT, elsewhere always signifying anguish. In Luke 16, Jesus twice uses it to refer to the anguish of the rich man suffering torment in Hades. In Acts 20, Luke describes the anguished grief of the Ephesian elders as they say farewell to the Apostle Paul for the last time.

She is scolding Jesus. She is saying

“What are you doing?

This year, of all years,  
you should be

clinging to your father,

--- doing his will, listening to him,

letting him mentor and apprentice  
you in all things.”

=//=

Look at how Jesus answers her.

The NIV and ESV translate Jesus' answer as

"Why were you looking for me?

Did you not know I must be in my  
Father's house?"

Other translations render it "... I must be about  
my father's *business*..."<sup>6</sup>

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<sup>6</sup> King James Version; New King James Version

But neither the word "house" (οικος)  
or "business" (εμπορια) are in the original.

Literally, the Greek reads "in the of father my."

Translators must smooth that out,  
but I don't think Jesus' point is about  
inhabiting a particular physical space  
or embracing a specific vocation.

I think that Jesus is gently pushing back  
on his parents because  
they have begun their search  
by asking the wrong questions.

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Think about it.

What would parents  
first ask each other in this situation?

Perhaps something like:

Where did we see him last?

OR,

With which relative or friend

was he spending the most time  
with during the feast?

Maybe he stayed with some of those  
who live in nearby Bethlehem.

OR even,

Did you see anyone suspicious

that might have had

nefarious intent?

OR

Should we alert the authorities?

(The Romans won't be of any help,  
but what about the Jewish  
temple authorities?)

Certainly, someone has seen something.

When Jesus responds to Mary's  
question with one of his own:  
"Why were you searching for me?"  
He isn't being a  
snarky teen-ager.

Instead,  
he is reminding them that  
from what they already know of him,  
they should have known  
to come to the Temple  
first.

In doing so, Jesus is not only chiding his parents,  
he is signaling his intentions.

Perhaps that is why he uses that enigmatic  
phrase "in the of father my."

He is alerting them to the things  
that have now become  
and will continue to be **necessary**  
as he lives out  
the unfolding of God the Father's plan  
for Him.



Interestingly,  
this is the first of nine times in Luke's  
Gospel where Jesus uses the word δεῖ  
- which we translate with the phrase  
"it is necessary" -  
to speak of what God's redemptive plan  
requires of him.

Jesus always submits to the necessities  
of God's plan.<sup>7</sup>

And in that way,  
this tantalizing glimpse  
into Jesus' childhood,  
foreshadows  
much of what will happen  
in the narrative portrait  
Luke will paint for us.

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<sup>7</sup> 4:43; 9:22; 13:33; 17:25; 22:37; 24:7, 26, 44; Interestingly, the next time Jesus teaches in the temple in Luke's gospel (19:45 - 21:38), his teaching will precipitate his death.

Joseph and Mary's distress at the loss of Jesus  
and their discovery of him on the third day,  
hints at the resurrection.

This account at the beginning  
of Luke's gospel story,  
Tells us of two "disciples"  
racing to Jerusalem,  
to look for Jesus.

At the end of Luke's telling  
comes the account  
of two other "disciples"  
racing **back** to Jerusalem  
after having been  
unexpectedly  
found by Him,  
on the road to Emmaus.

Those two bookends  
tell us that Luke  
intends for us to see his entire gospel,  
not just the final chapter,  
as pointing to the empty tomb.

That way, when Easter actually happens,  
it is not just a strange "happy ending"  
tacked onto the end of the story.

No.

***It is the consummation  
of God's resolve for you.***

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    ==//==  
        ==//==

So, call them what you will:  
plans,  
    aspirations,  
        goals,  
            or even resolutions.

Reflecting on this brief vignette,  
from Jesus' childhood,  
we see them...  
    the "good intentions..."  
        authored by God,

the kind that pave our way  
to HEAVEN!

Because,  
even from his childhood,  
it was always Jesus' good intention  
to embrace unreservedly  
his *identity*  
as the Son of God,  
to dedicate himself wholly  
to the *life-task*  
God the Father  
placed upon  
Him:

And that task,  
was not to condemn you,  
but to save you.<sup>8</sup>

**AMEN**

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<sup>8</sup> John 3:16-17

