

And he went down with them, and came to Nazareth, and was subject unto them: but his mother kept all these sayings in her heart. And Jesus increased in wisdom and stature, and in favour with God and man. [Luke 2.51-52; KJV]

They sit across the table from you, as before. They ride in the car with you, as before. They absorb much of your time, as before. But, now things are different, strangely different. “Who IS this person?” you ask yourself. And there are no answers, not from yourself, not from this stranger in your home. For, your home has become the domicile of an adolescent.

Older parents tell you it’s not that bad, when you look back on it. Younger parents naively tell you that it couldn’t possibly be that bad. But there is some self-doubt in their voices as they realize that, once you have little children, barring a terrible tragedy, you will have teenagers!

So, what do you do? One thought that comes to many a parent’s mind is this: You could trade them in, maybe. Here comes the Feast of the Holy Family, and you get to meet Jesus, the adolescent!

Jesus is different than our teens. Granted, He

gives His parents a scare in our text. But, it looks like they were the ones who were at fault here. They supposed, presumed, assumed the boy Jesus to be in the caravan of pilgrims heading down from Jerusalem and back to their homes. But, look at the result: Scripture says, “He was subject to them!” And, He increased in wisdom and stature, and in favor with God and man!

Now, this is an unusual teenager. Wouldn’t you like to have an adolescent like this in your home? Consider a trade: you exchange your teen for the boy Jesus!

I.

What do you get, trading for the boy Jesus? St. Mark and St. John both skip these years in Jesus’ life, starting directly to the the adult Jesus. St. Matthew introduces you to Joseph, the earthly foster-father of Jesus, but only to prove that Jesus’ conception in the blessed virgin is not of Joseph, but of God. After a snapshot of the wise men finding the young child, and a quick trip to Egypt, you meet Jesus, the adult.

St. Luke, alone, gives the Church most of her pictures of Jesus as a child. We see Him being born. We see Him being worshiped. We see Him being circumcised. We see Him presented in the temple at 40 days old. We see His childhood home in Nazareth. St. Luke ends the view of His early life with these words: “And the child grew, and waxed strong in spirit, filled with wisdom: and the grace of God was upon him.”

We are left to wonder what this childhood was really like for Joseph and Mary. But then, just as adolescence is about to pop out in the kid, Luke takes up the pen again, and gives us yet another glimpse of Jesus’ life. Here, He goes with His parents to the Holy City, on one of the three feasts where attendance in Jerusalem was mandatory for every adult male. Often, the wives and children came along to these obligatory feasts. But, Jesus was there for a different reason. You see, according to custom, Jesus would have His Bar-

Mitzvah in the year following this Passover.

The Bar-Mitzvah would take place in the local synagogue in Nazareth, at which time He would be declared a “Son of the Law,” which is what Bar-Mitzvah means in Hebrew.

The actual training in the synagogue would prepare the lad to read a portion of the Hebrew Scriptures in the Sabbath service.

It was the practice of the faithful Jewish parents, prior to their son’s Bar-Mitzvah, to take him to the temple in Jerusalem. Not only would he see the wonders of the holy city and the beauty of the temple, but he would also participate in classes organized and taught by the scribes for all of the 12-year old boys who were about to become “sons of the law.”

So, when we see Jesus in Jerusalem, as His parents foolishly assume Him to be in the convoy, what is He doing? First, being separated from His parents, He goes to a public place, a place where He would be safe and also would be easy to find. Second, He goes to

the place that He was brought to Jerusalem to see. And, as He waits, He learns more about God and His Word.

As this 12-year old sits in the teaching court of the temple, the doctors and teachers of the law are amazed. They see these pimple-faced youngsters by the hundreds at each festival, but this one is actually interested in what they have to say. He listens. He asks intelligent questions. He shows an understanding well beyond His years.

Finally, his parents arrive at the temple, searching for Him. What they see leaves them also amazed and astonished. Immediately, His mother confronts Him, and, as mothers often do, she lays her own guilt on her child: “Son, why hast thou thus dealt with us? Behold, thy father and I have sought thee, sorrowing.” Here comes another amazement: the 12-year does not get defensive and He does not sass back! He says, “Mother, this is where I’m supposed to be, isn’t it? my

Father’s shop!” So, He leaves the temple with His puzzled parents. That’s what you get if you trade adolescent son or daughter for Jesus.

II.

Truth be told, this boy Jesus remains a mystery. We can picture how He grew in stature. We can picture Mary, letting out hems, and Joseph, buying yet larger sandals, as Jesus grows in stature. But, what on earth would it be like for this child, who is God, to grow in wisdom? And what would it be like for Him to be just like His step-brothers and step-sisters, just like His cousins and nephews, and His schoolmates, like your kids, but for one thing factor: “except without sin”?

You wouldn’t take the trade because—though your teen is sinful, sassy, sloppy, and stubborn—you still love your kid! Despite all the parent-talk, you couldn’t, you wouldn’t trade your adolescent for anyone. It comes down to love, and at the level of love, no parent would trade their child for another.

But that's not true! There is a parent who trades His kid for another! God, the Father of your Lord Jesus Christ, does exactly that! The reason the boy Jesus is in the temple is because God chose to trade His only-begotten Son for your kid, for my kid, for all kids, and for all parents and grandparents, too!

III.

The Scriptures give you this picture of Jesus' childhood, however brief and therefore somewhat disappointing, in order to clearly demonstrate to you that this Jesus, who we know by God's say-so to be God Himself, is also truly a human being. God the Son takes on Himself a truly human nature, and thus He trades Himself for us all.

God the Son becomes fully human for the entirety of the human experience. This is what makes the trade work! He experiences the depths of the womb. He experiences the shock of the outside world. He experiences the helplessness of infancy. He experiences the joys of learning. He experiences

the onslaught of hormones. He experiences the period of launching out from the family. He experiences the growing awareness of His destiny. He experiences the unfairness of the adult world. He experiences death and burial. He experiences all this for you! God the Father has traded His only-begotten Son for you, for your teenagers, and for all people.

What marvelous love is this, that God would make this trade out of the same parent love that would keep all of us as sinful parents from making the same trade! Indeed, St. John is correct when he writes, "Herein is love, not that we loved God, but that He loved us, and sent His Son to be the propitiation for our sins" [1 John 4.10].

He has made the trade for you! In Christ, God loves you, forgives you, chooses you, keeps you, and forever claims you as His own child. This trade gives you peace with God, with yourself, with your neighbor, and even, with your kids! God be praised for His marvelous, Fatherly love!