

# "Looking for Jesus"

Text: Luke 2: 40-52

Grace, mercy and peace be yours in the secure knowledge that your sins are, one and all, forgiven in Christ Jesus, our Lord, and that you have therefore found – and even now possess – the one thing needful. Amen.

Dear Fellow Christians:

You've all heard the very old joke about the guys looking for his car keys. Someone stops to help and finally asks him if was sure he had dropped his keys in that spot, only to be told, *"No, I'm pretty sure I dropped them over by where I parked my car, but I thought I'd look here because the light is better."*

While no longer all that funny because it is so old, it illustrates a point – and in the illustration of that point this morning the absurd is actually going to make sense. While it would be unquestionably foolish to look for something in a place where you know you didn't lose it – just because the light happened to be better there – the same is not true when it comes to salvation and the Christian faith. There we are taught by God himself to look not where we would naturally expect to find something, but to look where the light is actually shining.

The text that will help to clarify this paradoxical truth is found in Luke's Gospel, the Second Chapter:

**ESV Luke 2:40-52 And the child grew and became strong, filled with wisdom. And the favor of God was upon him. <sup>41</sup> ¶ Now his parents went to Jerusalem every year at the Feast of the Passover. <sup>42</sup> And when he was twelve years old, they went up according to custom. <sup>43</sup> And when the feast was ended, as they were returning, the boy Jesus stayed behind in Jerusalem. His parents did not know it, <sup>44</sup> but supposing him to be in the group they went a day's journey, but then they began to search for him among their relatives and acquaintances, <sup>45</sup> and when they did not find him, they returned to Jerusalem, searching for him. <sup>46 48</sup> And when his parents saw him, they were astonished. And his mother said to him, "Son, why have you treated us so? Behold, your father and I have been searching for you in great distress." <sup>49</sup> And he said to them, "Why were you looking for me? Did you not know that I must be in my Father's house?" <sup>50</sup> And they did not understand the saying that he spoke to them. <sup>51</sup> And he went down with them and came to Nazareth and was submissive to them. And his mother treasured up all these things in**

**her heart. <sup>52</sup> ¶ And Jesus increased in wisdom and in stature and in favor with God and man.**

This is God's Word. These are not only the words of God, here that same God has promised to meet with us. To prepare our hearts to study and learn from these divine words – *to meet here with our God* – so we pray, **"Sanctify us in the Truth, O Lord. Your Word is truth!"** Amen.

Have you ever lost anything? Silly question. Everyone has. With some of us it seems to be almost a daily cause of frustration. How do you attempt to find what was lost? Wise men ask their wives, which usually solves the problem. Kids ask mom. If that doesn't work, you try to remember the last time you had the thing, or the last time you saw it. The problem with that, of course, is that if you could remember the last place you had the thing you lost, it would probably no longer be lost.

Mostly this sort of thing is just a minor frustration or an inconvenient distraction in a world full of frustrations and distractions. Not so with spiritual things. Where, for example, is someone supposed to go when he loses his faith? Where are human beings supposed to look when they have lost God? Or maybe it isn't yet to that point, but you nevertheless feel somehow detached from God because of your sins, or feel yourself sliding away because of an ever-worsening apathy. Where do you go to look for that sort of help?

In Isaiah 55:6-9 we are told: **"Seek the LORD while he may be found; call upon him while he is near; <sup>7</sup> let the wicked forsake his way, and the unrighteous man his thoughts; let him return to the LORD, that he may have compassion on him, and to our God, for he will abundantly pardon."** Obviously that's divinely perfect advice, but it doesn't answer the question "Where?" Where do we go to find God when he seems lost to us? Where does the unbeliever go to find the God that he has never known? Where is the believer supposed to go to be comforted and strengthened by the God that seems far away? We know to expect a surprising answer because of the next verses in Isaiah 55: **"For my thoughts are not your thoughts, neither are your ways my ways, declares the LORD. <sup>9</sup> For as the heavens are higher than the earth, so are my ways higher than your ways and my thoughts than your thoughts."** These words tell us that looking for God in a conventional way isn't going to work. God can't be found the way other lost things can be found. It doesn't work that way.

Our text for this morning serves as an object lesson that helps to illustrate this truth. You remember the account. As devout parents, Joseph and Mary routinely traveled to Jerusalem to celebrate the Passover. As was required by Jewish law, a boy had to be prepared to assume his role as "a son of the Law" by his 12<sup>th</sup> birthday. This preparation might have been roughly akin to our confirmation instruction, but with added ramifications.

Clearly Joseph and Mary must have made these trips from Galilee in the north down to Jerusalem (a three to four day trip depending on how fast they travelled) with something of a family entourage, since upon leaving Jerusalem they travelled a whole day before they discovered that Jesus was not in their group – something they obviously would have noticed had it been just the three of them. By the way, by this time it is likely that Joseph and Mary had several other children – half brothers and sisters to Jesus.

You can just image the frantic search and the growing panic as Joseph and Mary searched for the boy and were unable to find him *for three days*! Imagine the panic that you would feel, and then add to that the fact that they were well aware of how special Jesus was and of their added responsibilities as the caretakers of the Promised Messiah.

Where did they search for him? Undoubtedly in every *logical* location, every place they might expect to find a twelve-year-old boy, beginning among their **"relatives and acquaintances"** and continuing throughout the City of Jerusalem. They found him, of course, but in just about the last place they expected to find him – in the Temple in Jerusalem. We know from our text that they didn't expect to find him there because we read exactly that in our text: **"And when his parents saw him, they were astonished."** They were undoubtedly surprised not only by *where* they found him but by *what they found him doing*: **After three days they found him in the temple, sitting among the teachers, listening to them and asking them questions.** <sup>47</sup> **And all who heard him were amazed at his understanding and his answers.** Their response was not unlike what you and I might have said to our own lost child, or what we might have expected to hear from our own parents: **"Son, why have you treated us so? Behold, your father and I have been searching for you in great distress."** Translated into modern speech: *"What were you thinking? Your father and I have been worried sick!"*

Understand, first of all, that Jesus didn't experience human fear or anxiety like you and I do. He understood it, he knew what it was, but he had no personal experience with it. He didn't experience it himself because such things are borne of a lack of trust, a lack of faith. Remember, years later, how he condemned the fear and anxiety of his

disciples during that storm on the Sea of Galilee? Fear and anxiety were so foreign to him that he slept peacefully while his men feared for their lives. His reply to them when they woke him: **"Why are you so afraid? Have you still no faith?"** (Mark 4:40).

But the main message of our text is not *"Don't be afraid."* The message of this account is found in Jesus' reply to his mother and stepfather: **"Why were you looking for me? Did you not know that I must be in my Father's house?"** Did Joseph and Mary understand what Jesus was saying to them? They hadn't a clue: **And they did not understand the saying that he spoke to them.** Do you understand? You and I can surely relate to parental anxiety, but do we get what Jesus meant by his response?

Clearly Jesus was surprised not just by the fear and anxiety his parents were experiencing, but in particular by the fact that they didn't know *where to look for him*. To find Jesus, *you need to look not where you might logically expect him, but where he himself told us he could be found.*

Joseph and Mary were certainly aware that Jesus was no ordinary boy. Mary had been told, even before Jesus was conceived, that the boy **"will be great and will be called the Son of the Most High. And the Lord God will give to him the throne of his father David,"** <sup>33</sup> **and he will reign over the house of Jacob forever, and of his kingdom there will be no end."** Joseph had been told that Mary's son **"would save his people from their sins."** Clearly they had to have known how special their son was, and they must have had some sense of what he was sent to do – which is why the 12-year-old Jesus was surprised that they didn't know where to look for him.

Carry this lesson forward and you find almost the same sort of confusion today, the same stubborn refusal to seek Jesus where he can actually be found – despite the fact that we today, even more than then, should know better. Unlike then, today there are Bibles everywhere.

The members of our society today are more like those philosophers Paul visited on Mars Hill in Athens. They searched for all sorts of gods, but they looked only in places where the one true God could never be found. They supposed they could find him in the mythology of foreign cultures or in the minds of other philosophers. Yet when Paul pointed them to the one place where God could actually be found, they refused to find him there. They were repulsed by the first

glimpse of Jesus Christ that did not fit with their preconceived human ideas of what “gods” should look like. In other words, as soon as Paul spoke of the resurrection of the dead, the philosophers on Mars Hill were ready to move on and to look elsewhere.

Unbelievers today are no different. They look for God in nature, in man, in their own emotions or imagination. They seek to create him in their own image, and they come to doubt his very existence because they can never find him in any of those places.

What about you? Do you still expect to find God where he can never be found? The answer is yes - whenever you look for him, whenever you expect to find him, anywhere other than in his holy Word. Remember what Paul said on the subject in Romans 10:17: <sup>GWN</sup> ***"So faith comes from hearing the message, and the message that is heard is what Christ spoke."*** God has promised to meet us in his Word, but for some inexplicable reason (like Joseph and Mary in our text) that often seems to be the very last place we think to look for him.

We laugh at the man looking for something in a place he didn't lose it, just because there was light there, but when it comes to Christianity and Christ himself, that's exactly what we are supposed to do. We are to look in the light if we have any hope of being enlightened. Peter, who was there to witness the light of Jesus' transfiguration, talked of an even brighter, better light available now to every single one of us: ***"And we have something more sure, the prophetic word, to which you will do well to pay attention as to a lamp shining in a dark place."***

There are times in everyone's life where we feel acutely the need to visit with our God – times when everything seems to be going wrong or slipping away. Amazingly enough, when those times come, we are often too dim-witted to simply pick up our Bibles and read. Not even prayer is a viable alternative to the light of God's Word. Peter went on in his Second Epistle to encourage us to go to the light of God's Word, and to pay attention to that Word ***"until the day dawns and the morning star rises in your hearts, <sup>20</sup> knowing this first of all, that no prophecy of Scripture comes from someone's own interpretation. <sup>21</sup> For no prophecy was ever produced by the will of man, but men spoke from God as they were carried along by the Holy Spirit."*** (2 Peter 1:19-21) On the pages of God's Word he has therefore visited us, and *there* he has promised to be found also today.

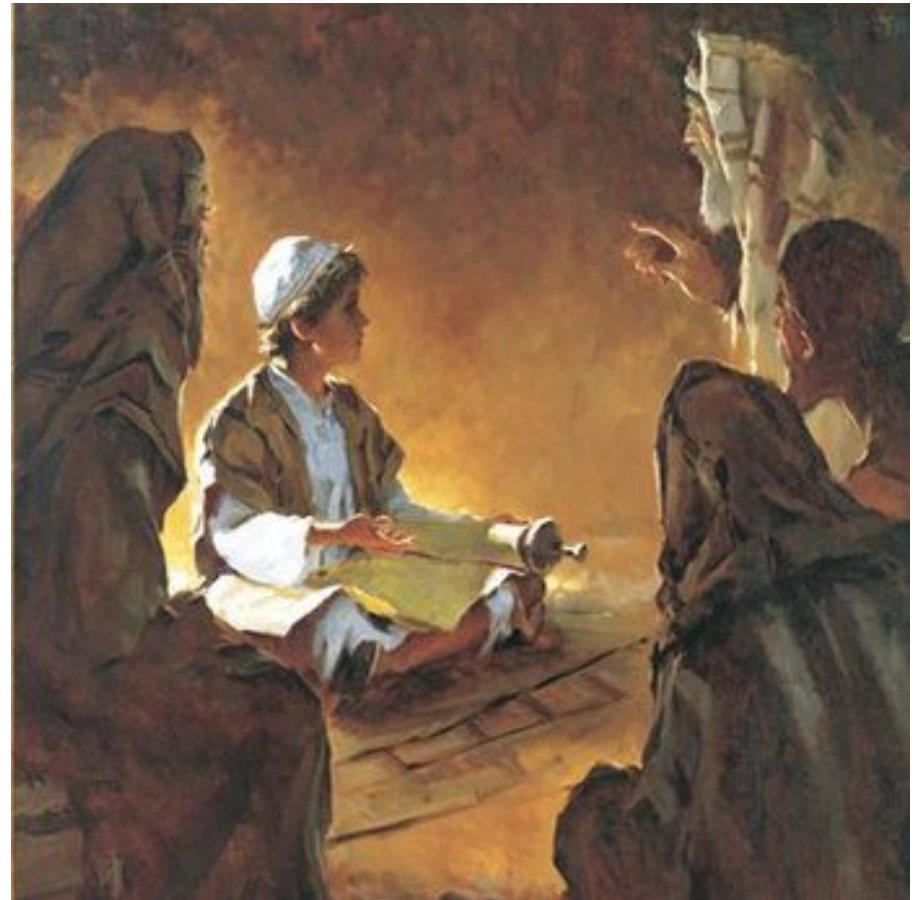
What will you find if you go there? The best, wisest advice would be to tell you to go and find out for yourself, for there the living God will meet

you, comfort you, encourage and strengthen you. There he creates saving faith, and there he sustains and strengthens that faith. There you will learn or be reminded of Jesus Christ, who was born to fulfill every demand of the law in your place and who, by his death on the cross, has won forgiveness for every single one of your sins. The One who has thereby solved our greatest problem (paying our sin debt and creating in us faith to trust that payment) will also now provide everything necessary to sustain us in that faith – *when we visit with him in his designated meeting place* – the Word of God. Go there in this New Year just begun – *every day*. Amen.

ESV **1 Kings 3:4-15** And the king went to Gibeon to sacrifice there, for that was the great high place. Solomon used to offer a thousand burnt offerings on that altar. <sup>5</sup> At Gibeon the LORD appeared to Solomon in a dream by night, and God said, "Ask what I shall give you." <sup>6</sup> And Solomon said, "You have shown great and steadfast love to your servant David my father, because he walked before you in faithfulness, in righteousness, and in uprightness of heart toward you. And you have kept for him this great and steadfast love and have given him a son to sit on his throne this day. <sup>7</sup> And now, O LORD my God, you have made your servant king in place of David my father, although I am but a little child. I do not know how to go out or come in. <sup>8</sup> And your servant is in the midst of your people whom you have chosen, a great people, too many to be numbered or counted for multitude. <sup>9</sup> Give your servant therefore an understanding mind to govern your people, that I may discern between good and evil, for who is able to govern this your great people?" <sup>10</sup> ¶ It pleased the Lord that Solomon had asked this. <sup>11</sup> And God said to him, "Because you have asked this, and have not asked for yourself long life or riches or the life of your enemies, but have asked for yourself understanding to discern what is right, <sup>12</sup> behold, I now do according to your word. Behold, I give you a wise and discerning mind, so that none like you has been before you and none like you shall arise after you. <sup>13</sup> I give you also what you have not asked, both riches and honor, so that no other king shall compare with you, all your days. <sup>14</sup> And if you will walk in my ways, keeping my statutes and my commandments, as your father David walked, then I will lengthen your days." <sup>15</sup> And Solomon awoke, and behold, it was a dream. Then he came to Jerusalem and stood before the ark of the covenant of the Lord, and offered up burnt offerings and peace offerings, and made a feast for all his servants.

ESV **Ephesians 1:3-14** Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who has blessed us in Christ with every spiritual blessing in the heavenly places, <sup>4</sup> even as he chose us in him before the foundation of the world, that we should be holy and blameless before him. In love <sup>5</sup> he predestined us for adoption as sons through Jesus Christ, according to the purpose of his will, <sup>6</sup> to the praise of his glorious grace, with which he has blessed us in the Beloved. <sup>7</sup> In him we have redemption through his blood, the forgiveness of our trespasses, according to the riches of his grace, <sup>8</sup> which he lavished upon us, in all wisdom and insight <sup>9</sup> making known to us the mystery of his will, according to his purpose, which he set forth in Christ <sup>10</sup> as a plan for the fullness of time, to unite all things in him, things in heaven and things on earth. <sup>11</sup> In him we have obtained an inheritance, having been predestined according to the purpose of him who works all things according to the counsel of his will, <sup>12</sup> so that we who were the first to hope in Christ might be to the praise of his glory. <sup>13</sup> In him you also, when you heard the word of truth, the gospel of your salvation, and believed in him, were sealed with the promised Holy Spirit, <sup>14</sup> who is the guarantee of our inheritance until we acquire possession of it, to the praise of his glory.

ESV **Luke 2:40-52** And the child grew and became strong, filled with wisdom. And the favor of God was upon him. <sup>41</sup> ¶ Now his parents went to Jerusalem every year at the Feast of the Passover. <sup>42</sup> And when he was twelve years old, they went up according to custom. <sup>43</sup> And when the feast was ended, as they were returning, the boy Jesus stayed behind in Jerusalem. His parents did not know it, <sup>44</sup> but supposing him to be in the group they went a day's journey, but then they began to search for him among their relatives and acquaintances, <sup>45</sup> and when they did not find him, they returned to Jerusalem, searching for him. <sup>46</sup> After three days they found him in the temple, sitting among the teachers, listening to them and asking them questions. <sup>47</sup> And all who heard him were amazed at his understanding and his answers. <sup>48</sup> And when his parents saw him, they were astonished. And his mother said to him, "Son, why have you treated us so? Behold, your father and I have been searching for you in great distress." <sup>49</sup> And he said to them, "Why were you looking for me? Did you not know that I must be in my Father's house?" <sup>50</sup> And they did not understand the saying that he spoke to them. <sup>51</sup> And he went down with them and came to Nazareth and was submissive to them. And his mother treasured up all these things in her heart. <sup>52</sup> ¶ And Jesus increased in wisdom and in stature and in favor with God and man.



# ST PAUL LUTHERAN CHURCH

BISMARCK, NORTH DAKOTA

# ST. PAUL EVANGELICAL LUTHERAN CHURCH

2510 E. Divide Ave. Bismarck, ND 58501

Parsonage and Office: (701) 223-4885 Cell: (701) 425-5483

Website: [www.bismarcklutheran.org](http://www.bismarcklutheran.org)

Mick Johnson, President Angela Pfennig, Organist  
Michael Roehl, Pastor

**The Second Sunday after Christmas – January 4, 2026**

## The Opening Prayer by the Pastor

## The Opening Hymn – 575

"Our God, Our Help, In Ages Past"

## The Order of Service – Hymnal page 1ff. *(Blue Hymnal)*

## The Scripture Lessons: *(Printed on the back page of this bulletin)*

**The First Lesson:** (1 Kings 3:4-15) While the idea of a genie and three wishes is fictitious, God did actually grant Solomon one wish – anything he wanted. This lesson tells us what Solomon picked and God's reaction. Make this lesson personal by asking yourself what you would have chosen. As we begin a new calendar year, pray God that your priorities might be realigned to conform not with the world around us, but with the God who created and saved us.

## The Psalm of the Day – Psalm 91 (Page 87)

**The Second Lesson:** (Ephesians 1:3-14) As we continue to thank our God for the gift of our Savior Jesus, our New Testament lesson lists some of the other gifts for which we also ought to give thanks. What a tremendous inheritance we have received in Christ Jesus, and how incredible to realize that we were chosen even before we were born.

## The Confession of Faith -

The Apostolic Creed *(Blue Hymnal page 5)*

## The Pre-Sermon Hymn – 555

"Savior, Like a Shepherd Lead Us"

## The Sermon – Text: Luke 2:40-52 *(Printed on the back page of this bulletin)*

**"Looking for Jesus"**

## The Offertory – *(Blue Hymnal page 7)*

## The Post-Sermon Hymn – 593 *(Stanzas 1-3)*

"The Old Year Now Has Passed Away"

## The Installation of the 2026 Church Council

## The Prayers of the Day, Followed by the Lord's Prayer

## The Benediction

## The Closing Hymn – 593 *(Stanzas 4-6)*

"The Old Year Now Has Passed Away"

## Silent Prayer

**Welcome!** - We warmly welcome any visitors who might be with us this morning and invite you to join us every Sunday at this time. St. Paul is a congregation in fellowship with the Church of the Lutheran Confession (CLC) – a conservative Lutheran synod with churches and missions throughout the United States and around the world. We are glad you are here. Thank you for letting us share the Word of God with you. Please record your visit in our Guest Book, and come again.

## Attendance – Sunday (20) Average (37)

### This Week at St. Paul:

<b>Today</b>	<b>-9:00 a.m.</b>	– Sunday school and Bible Class
	<b>-10:00 a.m.</b>	– Worship Service
	<b>-11:00 a.m.</b>	– Fellowship Hour
<b>Wednesday</b>	<b>-6:00 p.m.</b>	– Confirmation Class
	<b>-7:00 p.m.</b>	– Midweek Bible Study
<b>Next Sunday</b>	<b>-9:00 a.m.</b>	– Sunday school and Bible Class
	<b>-10:00 a.m.</b>	– Worship Service with Communion
	<b>-11:15 a.m.</b>	– Fellowship Hour

**CLC News** – Pastor Ben Libby has returned the call to Messiah of Eau Claire. Pastor Em. Michael Eichstadt has accepted the vacancy call to Holy Cross of Phoenix. That congregation has called Pastor Joe Naumann to serve as their fulltime pastor. Pastor David Naumann has returned the call to Trinity of Spokane. Pastor Cory Drehle has returned the call to Living Hope of Appleton, WI.

**Regular Schedule Resumes** – We return this week to our regular Sunday and Wednesday schedules, including Sunday school and Bible Class on Sunday mornings at 9am and Midweek Bible Study each Wednesday at 7pm.

**2026 Usher/Cleaner List** – The 2026 list has been prepared. Hard copies are available on the bulletin board, in your mailbox, and coming soon to the church website (just as soon as the pastor can figure out how to do that again.)

**Church Undecorating** – Volunteers are needed to take down the Christmas decorations during the fellowship hour this morning. Many hands will make light work of it. There may or may not be prizes.