

SAINT THOMAS CHURCH

Fifth Avenue · New York City

Sunday, January 04, 2026

The Second Sunday of Christmas

Festal Eucharist

11:00 am

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A Sermon by

The Rev. Prisca Lee-Pae

on

Luke 2:41-52

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Faith After Christmas

The joy of Christmas still lingers, but today's Gospel already leads us beyond the stable and into the temple. We no longer encounter a newborn child lying in a manger, but a twelve-year-old boy sitting among teachers, listening, asking questions, and astonishing those around him.

This story is unique to Luke's Gospel—a brief but vivid glimpse into Jesus' boyhood. Luke, the careful storyteller, impresses upon our imagination the scene of a young Jesus engaging in serious and dignified conversation with the scholars of the temple. And then we hear his words: *"Did you not know that I must be in my Father's house?"* They sound confident, even fitting, on the lips of the young Christ.

When I first read this passage, I was struck by the boldness of those words. But reading it from a mother's perspective feels quite different. I can deeply empathize with Mary and Joseph's anguish as they search for their lost child for three days. I can also imagine how painful it must have been to hear Jesus ask, *"Why were you searching for me?"*—as though their fear and worry were unnecessary.

And yet, as a mother raising teenagers, I also recognize something very familiar here. This is exactly the kind of thing a twelve-year-old might say. I also understand the parents' shock at finding him not frightened or apologetic, but calmly sitting among scholars in the temple. There are moments when we suddenly realize that although our children come into this world through us, they do not ultimately belong to us. They belong to God.

I remember when our son was four years old. He and his father, who is a priest, were driving home from preschool when they passed the scene of a car accident. My husband said, "It looks like a bad accident," and continued driving. But our son said, "Dad, stop the car right now and pray. That person needs prayer more than anyone else right now—and your job is to pray." My husband was so surprised that he stopped the car and prayed.

We often fall into the trap of limited thinking—believing that our parents gave birth to us, and that we gave birth to our children. But our existence is not simply the product of human relationships. We are God's creation. We are God's children. And the same is true for those entrusted to our care.

Perhaps it was not Jesus who was lost in Jerusalem, but his parents' understanding. When Jesus says, *"Did you not know that I must be in my Father's house?"* he gently but firmly points them—and us—toward a deeper truth about identity and belonging.

In the Old Testament, there are references to God as Father, but they are rare and usually collective, covenantal, and metaphorical. Jewish tradition was cautious about using such intimate language because of God's holiness and transcendence. In that context, the words of the twelve-year-old Jesus are striking—even groundbreaking.

He not only calls God *his* Father, but he will later teach his disciples to pray in exactly the same way: “*Our Father in heaven.*” This is not a small shift in language. It is a radical reorientation of the human relationship with God. Jesus is not merely giving us a new prayer; he is inviting us into his own relationship with the Father.

By teaching us to say “*Our Father,*” Jesus draws us into an intimacy that was once unthinkable. The God who was approached with awe, distance, and careful reverence is now addressed with trust, closeness, and belonging. This does not diminish God's holiness; instead, it reveals a holiness that makes room for love. The transcendence of God is not erased, but transformed—into a holiness that welcomes us home.

What begins in the temple with a twelve-year-old boy becomes the foundation of Christian faith and prayer. To call God “Father” is not first a statement about God; it is a declaration about who *we* are. It tells us that we are not strangers, not servants living in fear, but children who belong. Prayer, then, is not primarily about saying the right words or understanding everything correctly. It is about relationship—about standing where Jesus stands and speaking to God from within that relationship.

This is why the words “*Our Father*” are so powerful. They shape our identity before they shape our behavior. They remind us that before we do anything for God, before we understand anything about God, we already belong to God.

This story, heard at the very beginning of a new year, invites us to ask ourselves important questions. Who am I? What kind of life am I called to live? What is my role in the community to which I belong?

If you do not yet have clear or satisfying answers, there is no need to be discouraged or impatient. Mary did not understand everything—but she treasured these things in her heart. Sometimes faith does not require immediate clarity, but faithful attention. Sometimes the most faithful response is simply to hold what we do not yet understand and continue walking.

The path of treasuring and following—of trusting and continuing—will not lead us astray. It is the path by which we are slowly shaped into whole and faithful human beings. This is not a path we walk by our own strength, nor one we ever fully complete. It is a gift given to us by grace.

In Luke's Gospel, faith is not the ability to understand everything at once. Faith is the courage to live with words and experiences that remain unfinished.

On this Second Sunday after Christmas, the Church seems to ask us:
How much do we need to understand Jesus before we follow him?
Are we postponing our faith whenever something cannot be explained?

Dear brothers and sisters,
Faith does not begin with understanding.
Faith grows through companionship.

Like Mary, even when we do not fully understand, we walk together. We treasure. We trust.
This is faith after Christmas.

Today, we come to the altar not because we understand everything, but because we respond to the call even without full understanding. And there, God calls us—once again—God’s beloved children.
