

Sermon Notes – December 29, 2024
First Sunday of Christmas
The Holy Gospel of St. Luke 2: 41-52
Peace Lutheran Church
“Growing in the Temple!”

Two of the readings for this Sunday include parents and their children. Elkanah and Hannah have given Samuel over to serve Eli the priest. Joseph and Mary lose Jesus and then find Him in the temple. Jesus has found His own way into the faith community, which shows us Jesus separating Himself from His family of origin (so to speak) and attaching Himself to the people who become His faith family.

This shift in allegiances on Jesus' part introduces a radical understanding of the relationship between the church and the culture (Greco-Roman society) in which it finds itself which, like society today, was fundamentally patriarchal. Today a certain segment of people who identify as Christian believe that patriarchal structures are integral to Biblical faith. Others maintain that “the Gospel cannot be claimed in defense of the patriarchal family “...since, as the community of co-equal disciples, Christians are radically different from this patriarchal environment.” This temple story is only one of the narratives that shows Jesus defining His true “family” as His followers, rather than as His family of origin. Jesus, therefore, undercuts the idolatry of families of origin. Even more, seeing the church as the body of Christ is but another way in which to think about the explosive change Jesus moves.

Supporting this shift is the ambiguous language in Luke 2: 49. Scholars have interpreted Jesus' words to His parents – “Did you not know that I must be in my Father's house?” - to mean either that Jesus was pointing to the house of the one who made all of creation or pointing to His need to be about “the things” of His Father - teaching and learning, and discussion in the temple - which is the work of the church. Whichever way we read His question, He was aligning Himself with a notion of God that transcends human family, disallowing the identification of God-the-Father as only male. Before there was Adam and Eve ...there IS God.

This is an explosive text for the first Sunday of Christmas. In addition to redefining family, it calls the church “God's chosen ones, holy and beloved” (Col. 3: 12), who are responsible for emulating Jesus in the temple, letting the word of God dwell in us, and working to “teach and admonish one another in all wisdom” (v. 16). This portrait of the body of Christ, open to all people, dismantles power structures that turn people away from the true family.