

Understanding God

Sermon for the 2nd Sunday after Christmas

Sermon Text: Luke 2:42-52



⁴² And when He was twelve years old, they went up according to custom. ⁴³ And when the feast was ended, as they were returning, the boy Jesus stayed behind in Jerusalem. His parents did not know it, ⁴⁴ 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, ⁴⁵ and when they did not find Him, they returned to Jerusalem, searching for Him. ⁴⁶ After three days they found Him in the temple, sitting among the teachers, listening to them and asking them questions. ⁴⁷ And all who heard

Him were amazed at His understanding and His answers. ⁴⁸ 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." ⁴⁹ And He said to them, "Why were you looking for me? Did you not know that I must be in my Father's house?" ⁵⁰ And they did not understand the saying that He spoke to them. ⁵¹ 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. ⁵² And Jesus increased in wisdom and in stature and in favor with God and man.

We went with the shepherds to the baby Jesus and were amazed that God was born as a child. A week after Christmas, we meet the Holy family again. Jesus is 12 years old by now and the entire family was traveling to Jerusalem. On the return trip, Mary and Joseph lost sight of the 12-year-old Jesus. This is also not a problem because at the age of 12 it is entirely possible that a boy would like to walk with his friends rather than with his parents. But when His parents were already almost home and looked forward to their home after a long journey, their concern about Jesus turned into an agonizing fear. Jesus was gone! And nowhere to be found. Every mother and father know this feeling of panic and fear when their child is suddenly gone. Mary and Joseph could no longer think about relaxing at all. They hurried back to Jerusalem. Three days they suffered. Three days of having to live with the fear: "Is the boy still alive? Perhaps a wild animal attacked Him? Perhaps He's lying hurt somewhere? If only we could know where He is?" And then the relief when they found Him. "There He is! He's sitting in the temple! And calmly speaking with a few rabbis!" The reaction of Mary and Joseph is so human! In addition to the relief is the parents' reprimand: "My child, why did you do this to us?" Up until now, the story of the 12 year old Jesus could be a story about any normal family that has a problem with a teenager. But only up to here. Because from now on, the story of the 12 year old Jesus will continue in a way far from normal. Jesus doesn't answer His parents' question. He doesn't even apologize. Instead, He

answers with another question. No, not only a question, but with two: "Why were you looking for me? Did you not know that I must be in my Father's house?" Mary and Joseph are stunned. They don't understand the world anymore. They don't understand Jesus anymore. It is amazing that we hear nothing else about Jesus' childhood and youth except for this little story. That's why we should take a closer look to understand Jesus. And what we see from it is exactly this: We don't understand Jesus! Mary and Joseph didn't understand Jesus. No one else did. Later, the Pharisees with whom He talked with as a child, didn't understand Him. They scolded Him for taking the authority to forgive peoples' sins and they scolded Him for making Himself equal to God. And it was the same with many other people. Jesus presented the rich man, who wanted to do even more for God, with an impossible challenge. He should give away everything he has and give it to the poor. And then Jesus simply accepted sinners and tax collectors and forgave them their sins.... Just like that! The entire story of Jesus can actually be summed up in such a way that the people didn't understand Him. From the manger to the cross, Jesus remains hidden from human understanding. Not even Mary and Joseph understood everything. In the story of the 12-year-old Jesus, though, I find one thing remarkable. And that is the reaction of Mary. Again and again it is said of Mary that these things moved her in her heart. As it does also here: "Mary treasured up all these things in her heart." I imagine it this way: Mary didn't understand Jesus. But somehow she sensed that it wasn't possible to wrap your mind around Jesus. That's why she treasured the words in her heart, even if she couldn't yet grasp Jesus with her intellect. She probably had to do this all over again at the foot of the cross of Jesus. Because as the sword went through her heart and she saw her dear son die, she still didn't understand the world. Not until much later: when Jesus was resurrected and the Holy Spirit came and revealed to her all these things she had treasured in her heart.... Only then did she understand with her heart and with her mind who Jesus really was.

We can learn from Mary. We, too, don't understand Jesus most of the time. We don't understand why Jesus doesn't reveal Himself to us. We also don't understand how His death on the cross can be our salvation. We understand even less how it can be that God can come to us through Jesus. We also don't understand why God can't work more visibly and powerfully in our lives. There are also so many other things that we don't understand. We often don't understand the Bible. We don't understand God and why He doesn't answer our prayers. When that is the case, it is human and normal. But we shouldn't lose heart. We can keep things we can't understand in our hearts and give them time, as Mary did. Sometimes we will keep these things in our hearts for a lifetime before we receive an answer. And then it happens that God shows us everything. Like the shepherds who went to Jesus' manger. As well as the wisemen from the East and just like Mary, Jesus will be written on our hearts through faith. Amen.