

Luke 2:39-52
Jesus Grows Up

Mozart (18th century) began playing the keyboard at age three, writing music at age six, and composed his own symphony at age eight. William Sidis (early 20th century) was reading the *New York Times* at eighteen months, and had learned Latin, Greek, Hebrew, and several other languages by age eight. He entered Harvard at age eleven. More recently, Kim Ung-Yong (late 20th century) was doing calculus at age three, was invited to the United States by NASA at age seven and earned his Ph.D. in physics by age sixteen. We have no indication that Jesus was any such prodigy. There is no historical record of amazing academic achievements or mental prowess. He was a normal boy, but He was the Son of God.

Luke has been presenting compelling testimony from angels, shepherds, old men and old women that Jesus was the Son of God Who had come to save His people. In this passage Jesus, Himself, gives testimony that He knew Who He was and why He had come. This is vital because throughout the years, many heresies have arisen regarding whether (or when) Jesus was aware of His own deity. For example, many claim He did not become aware of Who He really was until it was revealed to Him at His baptism. Others suggest His self-awareness evolved over time, and perhaps was even misunderstood by Him. Still others say that deity was never really in His mind at all, but rather was imposed by others around Him or even by later writers.

The most divisive of these in the early Church was Nestorianism. This teaching emphasizes the disunion between the human and divine natures of Jesus. It gets its name from Nestorius (386–450) the Patriarch of Constantinople. He argued that in Jesus Christ, there were two distinct persons - one human, the other divine. This, in fact, is a denial of a true incarnation and was condemned at the Council of Ephesus in 431. Orthodox Christianity teaches that Christ had two natures united in one person without either the transference of attributes or loss of identity. If Christ was two different persons, He could have suffered and died only as a man. If Christ was two different persons, the human person died, and He could not then be our eternal High Priest.

Another point to consider. Think of all you had done by the time you were thirty. We know nothing of all of this regarding Jesus. The information in this passage is all we have from His infancy to the beginning of His public ministry.

Childhood

“When they had performed everything according to the Law of the Lord, they returned to Galilee, to their own city of Nazareth” (v.39). Luke transitions quickly from the presentation of Jesus at the temple to His adolescence. Luke does not mention the visit of the magi, the flight into Egypt, the massacre of the innocents or the death of Herod the Great. This is unusual for a historian like Luke, and can only be explained by the fact that the Holy Spirit determined that nothing else in these years was necessary to our salvation and spiritual growth. Luke simply summarizes all of the childhood years of the life of Jesus with the statement that He “continued to grow and become strong, increasing in wisdom; and the grace of God was upon Him” (v.40).

Unlike the Greek gods of myth, Jesus did not come into the world fully formed. He went through all the stages of normal childhood development. This means two things. First, while we cannot say that Jesus knew everything (even everything about Himself) when he was say, three, or seven, we can assert that by the time He had an adult mind (age 12), He knew who He was. That He experienced growing up also means that He is able to truly understand all of the things we experience, even the seemingly insignificant traumas of childhood. Hebrews 4:15, “For we do not have a high priest who cannot sympathize with our weaknesses, but One who has been tempted in all things as we are, yet without sin.”

A Godly Family

“His parents went to Jerusalem every year at the Feast of the Passover” (v.41). Passover was one of the great Jewish holy days. The single day of Passover was combined with the seven day Feast of Unleavened Bread to remind Jews of their bondage in Egypt and the miraculous escape provided by God.

“Three times in a year all your males shall appear before the LORD your God in the place which He chooses, at the Feast of Unleavened Bread and at the Feast of Weeks and at the Feast of Booths, and they shall not appear before the LORD empty-handed” (Deuteronomy 16:16). By Jewish Law, all men were required to attend; for a woman to do so was encouraged by not usual. Since many Jews had moved far away from the temple at Jerusalem, the other feasts were not always attended by all males, but Passover was the one feast at which all adult male Jews were required to attend.

Jesus was brought up in a household that honored God. Remember that they were not wealthy. Work had to be set aside to go to Jerusalem, and that meant the family’s income also ceased. It was probably a two week trip, considering travel time and the fact that they stayed “spending the full number of days” (v.43). And they all went together. Husband and wife worshipping together. They did not do the minimum. They did not make excuses regarding how busy they were, or how inconvenient the timing was. The family went and worshipped. Mary was not required to go, but did so anyway. This is an opportunity to reflect on how we model the disciplines of the faith for our children.

The Boy Lost

The family traveled with others (v.44). Extended family, neighbors, etc. This provided company and protection. No doubt the city of Jerusalem reminded them of the crowded conditions on the night of Christ’s birth, and we can only imagine the number of times that story must have been told among family members. Imagine the scene. Disgruntled and condescending Roman soldiers keeping the peace, thousands of noisy, dirty sheep waiting to be slaughtered, friendships being rekindled. For Jesus, this was His last Passover as a child. When He turned thirteen, He would be considered a man.

The key text then follows. “⁴³As they were returning, after spending the full number of days, the boy Jesus stayed behind in Jerusalem. But His parents were unaware of it, ⁴⁴but supposed Him to be in the caravan, and went a day’s journey; and they began looking for Him among their relatives and acquaintances. ⁴⁵When they did not find Him, they returned to Jerusalem looking for Him. ⁴⁶Then, after three days they found Him in the temple, sitting in the midst of the teachers, both listening to them and asking them questions” (v. 43-46).

Luke says nothing about the Passover week itself, but picks up the story on the return trip. Was this an act of disobedience? Were Joseph and Mary negligent? Since the family traveled with others, and the first place the parents looked was among their relatives, it can be inferred that nuclear family groups often intermingled on long trips. This served to increase fellowship and provide distraction for the young. And since we know that Jesus lived a sinless life, however else we might explain His absence, it cannot be considered disobedient.

What Luke is describing is the beginning of the transition from Jesus being solely under the attention of Joseph and Mary to His submission to the greater will of His heavenly Father. That Jesus continued to submit to His parents is indicated (v.51). That this was the first time He demonstrated His need to fulfill His role as Son of God is the point of the story. It is not that this is the time when Jesus “realizes” He is the Son of God. Rather this was the first opportunity to demonstrate that fact.

The Boy Found

When the family finds Jesus, He was “sitting in the midst of the teachers” (v.46). This would be a typical setting in the temple courts. A rabbi would be speaking, and gathered about him were those listening and asking questions to clarify the topic being taught. At Passover, there was the rare opportunity for Jesus to hear the finest teachers from around Palestine who had come into Jerusalem for the feast. He would have not enjoyed this in the small village of Nazareth.

That “all who heard Him were amazed at His understanding and His answers” (v.47) shows that Jesus made quite an impression on those around. Jesus was no prodigy, but He had no doubt learned literacy and numeracy. Perhaps after Joseph died He would run the family business, or at the very least, as the eldest son take responsibility for the family’s finances. We can only wonder at the dialogue these rabbis were unknowingly having with the Messiah, but we can be certain that Jesus was gracious and humble in His actions.

The response of His family is not surprising, “When they saw Him, they were astonished; and His mother said to Him, ‘Son, why have You treated us this way? Behold, Your father and I have been anxiously looking for You’” (v. 48). Perhaps their surprise was that this young boy was not panicked and distraught running through the streets looking for His parents. His mother even tries a guilt trip, but to no avail.

The Claim

Jesus had not wasted His time when apart from His family He was not some character from a Dickens novel. His answer ends the discussion, “Why is it that you were looking for Me? Did you not know that I had to be in My Father’s house?” (v.49). The wording can be equally translated “My Father’s affairs,” or “in the things of My Father.”

The key word, or course, is the word “My.” By using this, Jesus is claiming God as His father. Not a father in the general understanding of all people, or even of all Jews, but rather Jesus is stating in clear, unmistakable terms, that He is the Son of God.

The claim, itself was not new. “The angel answered and said to her, ‘The Holy Spirit will come upon you, and the power of the Most High will overshadow you; and for that reason the holy Child shall be called the Son of God’” (Luke 1:35). Later others would make this claim after having encountered Christ:

Nathaniel - “Nathanael answered Him, ‘Rabbi, You are the Son of God; You are the King of Israel’” (John 1:49).

Martha - “She said to Him, ‘Yes, Lord; I have believed that You are the Christ, the Son of God, even He who comes into the world’” (John 11:27).

Those who crucified Him - “Now the centurion, and those who were with him keeping guard over Jesus, when they saw the earthquake and the things that were happening, became very frightened and said, ‘Truly this was the Son of God!’” (Matthew 27:54).

Demons - “And they cried out, saying, ‘What business do we have with each other, Son of God? Have You come here to torment us before the time?’” (Matthew 8:29).

Satan - “And the devil said to Him, ‘If You are the Son of God, tell this stone to become bread’” (Luke 4:3). Though phrased as a question, the context indicates that this was rhetorical.

The claim to be the Son of God was why He was hated by the Jewish religious leaders. John 5:18, “For this reason therefore the Jews were seeking all the more to kill Him, because He not only was breaking the Sabbath, but also was calling God His own Father, making Himself equal with God.”

It was also why He was crucified. John 19:7, “The Jews answered him, ‘We have a law, and by that law He ought to die because He made Himself out to be the Son of God.’” It was understood that by claiming to be the Son of God, Jesus was claiming to be equal to God in the fullest sense.

Any arguments that Jesus never claimed to be God, or did not know He was God, are categorically refuted by this passage.

The Remainder until Adulthood

Jesus “kept increasing in wisdom and stature, and in favor with God and men” (v.52). This is all Luke tells us about the years between the incident at the temple and Christ’s baptism at about age thirty. Jesus continued to increase in His understanding of the world, no doubt learned more of the trade of carpentry and running a family business perhaps. He grew physically from a young boy into a man. And as He did so, He gained a reputation of favor and respect. By the time Jesus was ready to begin His public ministry, He was an adult Who had matured through all the normal human processes. He was ready to be our Savior in every sense of the word.

Take Aways

Consider how well you model the disciplines of the faith before your children.

How often do we arrange time to be about our Father’s affairs?

Do we truly appreciate that Jesus was fully God and therefore able not only to make sufficient propitiation for our sin, but also fully human and therefore can completely appreciate our every personal experience?