

To Seek and To Save the Lost

The Boy Jesus in the Temple

Luke 2:41-52

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The Boy Jesus in the Temple

Scripture

We are studying the life of Jesus in the Gospel of Luke in a sermon series I am calling, "To Seek and To Save the Lost."

The first two chapters of Luke's Gospel deal with what is called "The Infancy Narrative." That is, they deal with the predictions of the births of John the Baptist and Jesus, their births, and then what happened to Jesus following his birth.

Luke described the birth of Jesus, which took place in a stable in Bethlehem (2:1-7). Then he told us about the shepherds visiting Jesus on the night of his birth (2:8-20).

Joseph and Mary continued to stay in Bethlehem after the birth of Jesus. Eight days after his birth, Jesus was circumcised and named "Jesus," in accordance with the name given by the angel before he was conceived in the womb (2:21). Forty days after his birth, Mary, along with Joseph and Jesus, went to the temple for her purification and Jesus' presentation to the Lord, as it is written in the Law of the Lord (2:22-24).

While they were in the temple precincts, Joseph and Mary and Jesus met two very godly people who gave an astounding testimony about Jesus. Simeon and Anna each testified about the true identity and mission of Jesus (2:25-38).

Then Luke simply mentioned the return of Joseph and Mary and Jesus to Nazareth (2:39), which almost certainly took place after the visit of the wise men (Matthew 2:1-12) and the family's flight to Egypt (Matthew 2:13-15). He also made a very important statement about the humanity of Jesus (Luke 2:40). We examined this text last time in our study of Luke's Gospel.

Today we will look at the only biblical story about Jesus prior to the start of his ministry at the age of thirty. And in this text Luke made a very important statement about the divinity of Jesus.

So, please follow with me as I read about the boy Jesus in the Temple in Luke 2:41-52:

⁴¹ Now his parents went to Jerusalem every year at the Feast of the Passover. 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. (Luke 2:41-52)

Introduction

Pastor John MacArthur tells us in his commentary on Luke's Gospel that history has recorded some truly amazing children, child prodigies who performed astonishing feats. Early in the eighteenth century Jean Louis Cardiac, known as the "wonder child," was said to have recited the alphabet at the age of three months. By the age of four, he read Latin, Greek, and Hebrew, and translated Latin into English and French.

Christian Friedrich Heineken, known as the “infant of Lubeck,” was a contemporary of Cardiac. He reportedly knew the major events recorded in the Bible by the time he was a year old. At the age of three, he was familiar with world history and geography, as well as Latin and French.

No doubt the most famous child prodigy of the time was the composer Wolfgang Amadeus Mozart. The young Mozart began playing the keyboard by ear at the age of three. By the time he was six, he had begun composing his own pieces. At that same age Mozart, along with his older sister, began touring Europe, giving both private concerts for the nobility, and also public concerts. At eight, he composed his first symphony.

The noted nineteenth-century philosopher John Stuart Mill was also a child prodigy. Under the rigorous tutelage of his father, John learned Greek at the age of three. At the age of eight, he began learning Latin, geometry, and algebra.

Another nineteenth-century child phenomenon was Truman Henry Safford, noted for his remarkable powers of calculation. When the ten-year-old Safford was challenged to calculate the square of 365,365,365,365,365 in his head, he did so in less than a minute. At about that same age Safford devised a new method for calculating the moon’s risings and settings that was significantly faster than the existing one.

William James Sidis (1898–1944) was the son of a Harvard-trained psychologist. He is regarded as one of the most intelligent persons who ever lived, with an IQ estimated to have been well over 200. According to his biographer, Sidis was reading the *New York Times* at the age of eighteen months, and had taught himself Latin, Greek, French, Russian, German, Hebrew, Turkish, and Armenian by the time he was eight. At eleven he entered Harvard, where he lectured the Harvard Mathematical Society on four-dimensional bodies.

One of the most noted contemporary child prodigies is Kim Ung-Yong, born in South Korea in 1963. By the time he

was four, he was able to read Korean, Japanese, German, and English, and at that same age solved complicated calculus problems on Japanese television. Kim came to the United States at the age of seven at the invitation of NASA, and earned a PhD in physics before he turned sixteen.

But the accomplishments of these and all other child prodigies combined pale into insignificance compared to one twelve-year-old boy, whose name was Jesus. No human genius, no IQ in excess of 200, no precocious feats of learning can compare with the infinite mind and capabilities of the child who was God incarnate. In a dramatic and moving account of the only recorded incident of Jesus' childhood, Luke revealed from Jesus' own words that he was God.¹

So, in today's lesson I want to analyze Jesus' first recognition of his own identity.

Lesson

As we examine Jesus' first recognition of his own identity in Luke 2:41-52, we will learn about the divinity of Jesus.

Let's use the following outline:

1. Jesus' Temple Visit Was Recorded (2:41-42)
2. Jesus' Development Was Normal (2:43-45)
3. Jesus' Knowledge Was Amazing (2:46-47)
4. Jesus' Identity Was Misunderstood (2:48, 50)
5. Jesus' Identity Was Revealed (2:49)
6. Jesus' Obedience Was Striking (2:51)
7. Jesus' Growth Was Notable (2:52)

I. Jesus' Temple Visit Was Recorded (2:41-42)

The first thing we learn is that Jesus' temple visit was rec-

¹ John F. MacArthur, Jr., *Luke 1-5*, MacArthur New Testament Commentary (Chicago, IL: Moody Publishers, 2009), 188-189.

orded.

The Old Testament called for the mandatory attendance of all males thirteen years old and older to attend the annual feasts of Passover, Pentecost, and Tabernacles (Exodus 23:14-17; 34:23; Deuteronomy 16:16). By the time of Jesus, however, the dispersion of many Jewish people outside of Israel made that very difficult. Consequently, many Jewish men came to Jerusalem only for the Passover.

Women were not required by the Old Testament to attend any of the annual feasts, though they were certainly encouraged to do so. For a woman to attend one of the feasts was considered a sign of great spiritual commitment.

So, it is interesting to note that both Joseph and Mary **went to Jerusalem every year at the Feast of the Passover** (2:41). Furthermore, **when Jesus was twelve years old**, he accompanied his parents (2:42).

In his commentary on Luke's Gospel, Kent Hughes notes that we do not know if this was Jesus' first trip to **the Passover**. Very likely he had been before. But his presence now as a twelve-year-old was significant because in another year, as a thirteen-year-old, Jesus would officially become a "son of the law," a full member of the synagogue, similar to the modern custom of *bar mitzvah*. Because of this, Jewish leaders suggested that fathers should train their boys in the observance of the Passover a year before they turned thirteen years old.

So twelve-year-old Jesus, brimming with energy and excitement, was brought along to observe and learn as much as he could about the heart of Israel's religious life in Jerusalem.

When the jostling, merry throng passed through the gates of the holy city, a grand sight met Jesus' twelve-year-old eyes. Some 200,000 pilgrims packed out the walled city, which had only about 30,000 inhabitants. Every available space was rented, and instead of rent cheerful hosts were given the hides of sheep sacrificed by their guests. Merchants who had come in

advance lined the streets displaying their wares, and beggars stationed themselves strategically by the city's ancient gates. The most intense activity was at the sheep stalls, where pilgrims bartered for sheep and goats to sacrifice at the temple.

When the sun rose on the day of the Passover, intense activity filled the encampments, the homes, and especially the temple. A full contingent of priests (twenty-four divisions instead of the customary one) attended the temple. Their first task of the day was to take the leaven that had been gathered by candlelight from each home and ceremonially burn it. Next they prepared for the ritual slaughtering of the Passover lambs. By midday all work stopped, and a holy air of anticipation rested over Jerusalem.

At about 3:00 p.m. the sacrifice began. We may well surmise that Joseph and his relatives, in preparation for Jesus' manhood, took young Jesus into the temple with them so he could observe the sacrifice. If so, as the gates of the temple court closed behind the vast group of worshipers, he heard a ram's horn sound and saw Joseph, in concert with hundreds of other worshipers, slaughter his family's lamb. The priests, standing in two long rows, caught the blood in gold and silver basins, then doused it against the base of the altar. Levites sang the Hallel Psalms (113–118) above the din as Jesus' father dressed his lamb and, before leaving, slung the animal, wrapped in its own skin, over his shoulder and departed with his young son in tow.

At home, the lamb was roasted on a pomegranate spit and eaten after sundown by the whole family. In the flickering amber light of a candle-decked room, the meal was joyfully consumed according to Passover liturgy with interspersed hand-washings, prayers, and Hallel Psalms. At the conclusion the son (perhaps young Jesus was given the privilege) asked the father the ceremonial question, "Why is this night different from all other nights?" and his father responded with a moving review

of the people of God's deliverance from Egypt.

The night ended late, with many people returning to the streets for more celebration. Others went back to the temple mount to await the opening of the doors at midnight for further worship and prayer.

When young Jesus finally went to sleep, the dazzling images of Passover undoubtedly danced in his awakening human soul. And that was not all. Jesus' devout family stayed for a whole week in Jerusalem, as the next verse tells us ("when the feast was ended")—so that their twelve-year-old had the run of the old city, especially the temple. Jesus spent those seven days in "holy delight." Every rite spoke volumes to his soul. His nimble mind connected Scripture with Scripture and then with his own life. His heavenly Father revealed more and more to him about who he really was.²

II. Jesus' Development Was Normal (2:43-45)

Second, we learn that Jesus' development was normal.

Luke said that **when the feast was ended, as Joseph and Mary were returning to Nazareth, the boy Jesus stayed behind in Jerusalem.** However, **his parents did not know it, but supposing him to be in the group they went a day's journey (2:43-44a).** Joseph and Mary assumed that Jesus was with some of the other families and children who were traveling together back to Nazareth. The very fact that Joseph and Mary assumed that Jesus was socializing with others shows that his development was normal.

However, when evening came and it was time to bed down for the night, Joseph and Mary **began to search for Jesus among their relatives and acquaintances, and when they did not find him, they returned to Jerusalem, searching for**

² R. Kent Hughes, *Luke: That You May Know the Truth*, Preaching the Word (Wheaton, IL: Crossway Books, 1998), 99–101.

him there (2:44b-45).

III. **Jesus' Knowledge Was Amazing (2:46-47)**

Third, we learn that Jesus' knowledge was amazing.

After three days—one day away from Jerusalem, one day back, and one day searching of Jesus—**they found him in the temple, sitting among the teachers, listening to them and asking them questions** (2:46). Jesus and **the teachers** were most likely in one of the outer courts because women were not allowed into the inner courts of **the temple**.

Apparently, it was customary during the feasts for **the teachers** to spend time in the outer courts dialoguing with and teaching the people. The style of teaching consisted of the teacher and the people sitting together with the asking and answering of questions by both teacher and people.

Jesus seized this opportunity in Jerusalem to dialogue with some of the greatest minds of the Old Testament in his day. He had a growing, burning, passionate, consuming interest in the Scriptures. His mind was coming alive as he understood God's Law, the sacrificial system, messianic prophecy, and all that God had done and was doing to save his people.

Interestingly, this is the only place in the Bible where Jesus is portrayed as the student. After this occasion he is always the teacher, the one who would ask questions for which the Jewish teachers had no adequate answers (cf. 11:19-20).

Luke said that **all who heard Jesus were amazed at his understanding and his answers** (2:47). Jesus' questions and answers were deeply profound. His wisdom and knowledge far exceeded that of any twelve-year-old boy they had ever known.

IV. **Jesus' Identity Was Misunderstood (2:48, 50)**

Fourth, we learn that Jesus' identity was misunderstood.

When his parents saw him, they were astonished (2:48a). The reason **they were astonished** is because of where Jesus was. They, like other parents, would have expected their twelve-year-old son to be in the neighborhood with his friends. Instead, Jesus was in the temple.

And so Mary said to him, “Son, why have you treated us so? Behold, your father and I have been searching for you in great distress” (2:48b).

Jesus, of course, did not intend to cause his parents **great distress**. However, they clearly did not understand what he said to them next, nor did they understand who he really was—even though they, of all people, should have known who Jesus was. Luke said in verse 50 that Joseph and Mary **did not understand the saying that he spoke to them**.

V. Jesus’ Identity Was Revealed (2:49)

Fifth, we learn that Jesus’ identity was revealed.

Jesus said to his parents, **“Why were you looking for me? Did you not know that I must be in my Father’s house?”** (2:49).

These are the first recorded words of Jesus. He was surprised that his parents would not know where he was. The Greek in the second question could be translated as, “Did you not know that *it is necessary* for me to be in my Father’s house?” Jesus had come to understand that he was the Son of God, and that God the Father was *his* Father. His study of God’s word enabled him to understand that all of the Old Testament prophecies about God’s Deliverer found their fulfillment in him. This was a profoundly revealing moment for him.

VI. Jesus’ Obedience Was Striking (2:51)

Sixth, we learn that Jesus’ obedience was striking.

Even though Jesus now knew that he was God in human form, **he went down with Joseph and Mary and came to Nazareth and was submissive to them** (2:51).

Is this not striking? Jesus, knowing that he was divine, was submissive to his parents. What an example to all of us.

VII. Jesus' Growth Was Notable (2:52)

And finally, we learn that Jesus' growth was notable.

Luke concluded the chapters on "The Infancy Narrative" with a statement that **Jesus increased in wisdom and in stature and in favor with God and man** (2:52).

Conclusion

So, having analyzed Jesus' first recognition of his own identity in Luke 2:41-52, we should believe that he was fully divine.

Prior to this episode, others pointed to Jesus' identity and mission. But, in this episode Jesus himself—as a twelve-year-old boy—revealed that he had come to understand his own identity and mission in life. The rest of Luke's Gospel will show Jesus continually sharing with others his identity and mission.

Eventually, Luke summarized Jesus' identity and mission in Luke 19:10, where Jesus, speaking of himself, said, "For the Son of Man came to seek and to save the lost." "Son of man" was one of our Jesus' favorite titles for himself. The title speaks of both the deity and humanity of Jesus. The vision in Daniel 7:13 presents the "Son of man" in a definite messianic setting; and Jesus used the title in the same way.³

Believe that Jesus is fully divine, and that he has come to save all people who know that they are lost in sin. Amen.

³ Warren W. Wiersbe, *The Bible Exposition Commentary* (Wheaton, IL: Victor Books, 1996), John 1:50.

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equip them for their ministry in the church
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in order to magnify God's name.*

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PRAYER:

O Lord our God, Luke tells us that Jesus was fully divine.

Because Jesus was fully divine, he is able to sustain and keep our human nature from sinking under your infinite wrath, and the power of death; to give worth and efficacy to his own sufferings, obedience, and intercession; and to satisfy your justice, procure your favor, purchase a peculiar people, give his Spirit to us, conquer all our enemies, and bring us to everlasting salvation.

And for all of this we thank you in Jesus' name. Amen.

BENEDICTION:

May the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, the love of God, and the fellowship of the Holy Spirit be with you all, now and always. Amen.

CHARGE:

Now, brothers and sisters, go and serve God wholeheartedly!