

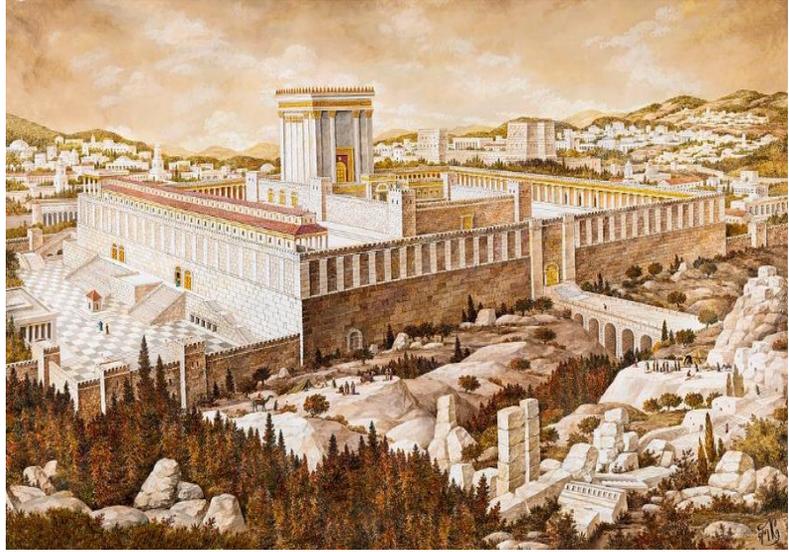
The Son of God

Luke 2:39-52

“Why were you looking for me? Did you not know that I must be in my Father’s house?”

This is the only mention of Jesus’ childhood in the gospels. There are some extra-biblical sources that record fanciful tales of Jesus as a rambunctious young miracle worker. But such accounts should be rejected. For reasons we may not understand, it pleased God to give us few details about our Lord’s childhood. After all, the purpose of the gospel accounts is

not to offer a full biography of Jesus’ life but to focus on his identity and earthly mission. Therefore, the gospel accounts have been described as crucifixion narratives with long introductions. That is a bit of a simplification but a point that is well taken. This one event described by Luke offers helpful insight into Jesus own self-understanding from his childhood. It is a bold announcement of the identity of this One who was born to “save his people from their sin” (Matthew 1:21).



As we learn throughout the New Testament, Jesus’ status as the Son of God was not in conflict with the fact that he was also flesh and blood. Through the miracle of incarnation God had taken on a human nature. Jesus came into the world to save sinners. A part of that was to identify with those he came to save. And so even as he reminded his parents of his loyalty to his divine mission, he willingly submitted himself to the authority of Joseph and Mary. And just as with the visit of the shepherds in Jesus’ infancy, Mary treasured up in her heart these mysterious events.

1. The Godly Upbringing of Jesus

- Vv. 39-42
- It is clear from this passage that Jesus was raised in a pious Jewish home. His parents were faithful to the religious expectations of their people. All male Jews were expected to attend the Jerusalem temple at least three times a year for the feasts of Passover, Pentecost and Tabernacles. This was a challenging expectation given that many Jewish families were scattered throughout the Roman Empire.
- Women were not required by the law of Moses to attend the three great feasts at Jerusalem every year. Such a requirement upon the women would have required the entire family to make what would have been a costly trip. Such a journey would have been, for many Jewish families, a great hardship. Nevertheless, both Joseph and Mary went to Jerusalem “every year at the Feast of Passover” the most important Feast of the year. The mention of Jesus being 12 probably holds no special significance other than to inform us of his age at this particular event. The Jewish rite of Bar Mitzvah was not yet being observed. What is noteworthy is that the piety of Joseph and Mary was not minimalistic as something offered grudgingly but a heart-felt devotion to God.
- God’s commandments were never intended to be nor have they ever been a hardship for the people of God. That both Joseph and Mary went to Jerusalem every year, at least at Passover, the greatest of the three feasts, says something of their piety. They seem to be a family who went beyond the minimum expectation and this no doubt for the sake of their love for God.
- That Joseph and Mary lost track of Jesus is no indication that they were negligent. Jerusalem was inundated with Jewish pilgrims and tourists during the annual feasts. Since they tended to travel in large caravans for these events it is not especially surprising that Joseph and Mary lost track of their son during the return to Nazareth.

2. The Divine Nature of Jesus

- Vv. 46-49
- The three days it took for his parents to find him would include the day of travel when they discovered he was missing, the day it took to travel back to Jerusalem, and the day they arrived in Jerusalem to find him in the temple. This episode has caused some to speculate as to whether Jesus had, in this instance, sinned against his parents. But this notion must be dismissed vigorously. Jesus was not possessed of a sinful nature. What is more, it is clear from Scripture that Jesus never sinned. In this case, Jesus was just exactly where he was supposed to be. What is more, his parents – having learned the identity of their son through the words of an angel – ought to have known that Jesus was to be in the temple, his Father's house.
- It is significant that Jesus' first recorded words are found here in verse 49: "Why were you looking for me? Did you not know that I must be in my Father's house?" The first recorded words of Jesus are a direct announcement of his identity: The Son of God.
- The teachers with whom Jesus was engaged in conversation were "amazed at his understanding and his answers" (vs. 47). Jesus probably attracted attention because of his relatively young age. But it is also clear that the astonishment of the teachers was on the merit of Jesus' knowledge and wisdom. He is not portrayed as offering any new teaching. Rather, the knowledge Jesus displayed pertained to the Scriptures. He demonstrated a deep understanding of the Word of God; an understanding which went well beyond what anyone would expect of a child. It is not necessary to view Jesus' knowledge at this point as supernatural. It may well be that that Jesus' astonishing knowledge was simply that of a boy who had dedicated himself to the study of Scripture in a way that was highly unusual for anyone his age.
- Nevertheless, the account clearly highlights the divine nature of the boy. He has a deep love for and understanding of the law of God, which, while not indicative of divinity on its own, nevertheless is consistent with it. Jesus' response to his parents (vs. 49) should not be understood as a disrespectful rebuke. Rather he expresses surprise that, knowing what they knew about his origins, they did not understand that the temple would be the place where he would need to spend significant time. It was his "Father's house."
- Luke's brief account of this event reveals that Jesus clearly knew that he was the Son of God. This matters in part because of challenges from liberal scholars who deny that Jesus claimed to be or ever thought of himself as Divine. Jesus' rather abrupt answer to his mother's plaintive, "Why have you treated us so?" demonstrates his awareness of his unique relationship to God. As his miraculous conception proved, Jesus was the eternal Son of God. And while Joseph and Mary knew this on one level it is clear that their son's divine nature presented many unique challenges to the family.

3. The Extraordinary Humility of Jesus

- Vv. 42-45; 50-52
- In the first few centuries of the church one of the heresies that arose came to be known as Docetism. It was the belief that Jesus' humanity was merely an illusion; that he did not truly take on a human nature. While these early Christians would never have dreamed of denying the deity of Christ, they found it doubtful that God could or would become a man. Those who propagated this heresy were probably motivated by a desire to guard the deity of Jesus against those who attacked it. However, the error of stripping Jesus of his humanity is just as grievous as that of denying his deity. Sinners need a Savior who is both fully divine and fully human.
- The episode Luke describes reveals that Jesus was part of a rather ordinary Jewish family. That his parents lost track of him in the mass of fellow pilgrims traveling to and from Jerusalem shows that Jesus' family life was not unlike any other family of that time. It was natural for Jesus to be with friends and not under the eye of his parents at all times. Certainly, Jesus was not engaging in sin but he most definitely would have had friends from his village and Joseph and Mary would not have considered it strange for their son to be with other people as they traveled together in a group.
- These ordinary human circumstances along with the observation that Jesus grew in body and mind like all humans, call to mind the extraordinary humility of Jesus. He who has eternally been the Son of God existing in perfect union with the Father and the Spirit "emptied himself, by taking the form of a servant, being born in the likeness of men. [8] And being found in human form, he humbled himself by becoming obedient to the point of death, even death on a cross" (Philippians 2:7-8).