

Pay Attention  
January 3, 2016

This past month we have been enjoying re-reading the Christmas stories. They culminate with the Joseph family leaving Israel for Egypt. Some years later the family returns to Israel and takes up residence in Nazareth. Much later, at about 30 years of age, Jesus began His public speaking ministry.

This morning we are going to read the one event we know of that occurred during that period of time between the family's return and Jesus' public ministry.

**Luke 2:41-52 (NIV)** Every year his parents went to Jerusalem for the Feast of the Passover. When he was twelve years old, they went up to the Feast, according to the custom. After the Feast was over, while his parents were returning home, the boy Jesus stayed behind in Jerusalem, but they were unaware of it. Thinking he was in their company, they traveled on for a day. Then they began looking for him among their relatives and friends. When they did not find him, they went back to Jerusalem to look for him. After three days they found him in the temple courts, sitting among the teachers, listening to them and asking them questions. Everyone who heard him was amazed at his understanding and his answers. When his parents saw him, they were astonished. His mother said to him, "Son, why have you treated us like this? Your father and I have been anxiously searching for you."

"Why were you searching for me?" he asked. "Didn't you know I had to be in my Father's house?" But they did not understand what he was saying to them. Then he went down to Nazareth with them and was obedient to them. But his mother treasured all these things in her heart. And Jesus grew in wisdom and stature, and in favor with God and men.

Have you ever noticed that when you have misplaced something and then find it again, it's always in the last place you look?

Jesus was not being disrespectful or flippant. He was genuinely surprised that they had not looked in the temple first. I figure they looked lots of other places before they hit on the temple. We don't know where they stayed when they were in town. Maybe they had relatives in town and had gone there first. They probably hit the marketplace. I have no doubt that there were several places that middle school age boys were tempted to gather, including the Roman theatre, arena, and soldier hangouts. Not finding him there, they probably asked where the older teenage boys hung out and checked there. They found the equivalent of the pool hall, swimming hole, and other such places.

Jesus was in none of those, not that they really expected to find him there. He was such a good boy. More likely, they may have thought, he had been kidnapped. Or maybe he got in trouble with the Roman authorities. All sorts of things run through your mind at times like these.

Apparently the temple was near the bottom of the places they thought to look. But there He was. Jesus said to them, "Why were you searching (everywhere) for me? Didn't you know I had to be (here) in my Father's house?"

Jesus considered that they would look at all they knew of Jesus, and all they had been told in the past, and come to the logical, to Him, conclusion, that He would be in the temple.

How could they not understand that? Had they forgotten? Had they forgotten what they had experienced earlier? Had they forgotten the miracles of His birth?

Let's review for a bit. Mary had been visited by an angel and told she would become pregnant without intercourse with any man. That had never happened before.

Mary's response to the angel's announcement is, "Okay!", and we hold her up as a heroin, full of faith and courage."

She then learns that her older relative, the one who had no children, was pregnant, another unlikely-sounding event. She visits Elizabeth and hears her say such things as...

**Luke 1:43 (NIV)** But why am I so favored, that the mother of my Lord should come to me?

She also learns of Zechariah's experience at the temple.

About this time Joseph has his own visit from an angel in a dream. When he wakes up, he remembers vividly what the angel says, and he acts upon it. He believes that God has spoken to him and he obeys.

He goes to get Mary, and they travel to Bethlehem and they experience the wonders of the shepherd's testimony and then the visit of the Magi, with valuable gifts.

How can you forget all those things? How can you forget all the prophetic statements they had heard about Jesus?

**Matthew 1:21f (NIV)** "...he will save his people from their sins."

**Luke 1:32-33 (NIV)** "He will be great and will be called the Son of the Most High. The Lord God will give him the throne of his father David, and he will reign over the house of Jacob forever; his kingdom will never end."

There were told that Jesus would become the king of the Jews. And when they took Him to the temple for His dedication two strangers in the temple spoke well of Him.

Simeon prayed out loud that he could die in peace because...

**Luke 2:30 (NIV)** "...my eyes have seen your salvation,"

And Anna too...

**Luke 2:38 (NIV)** ...gave thanks to God and spoke about the child to all who were looking forward to the redemption of Jerusalem.

Soon after this another angel warns Joseph to flee in the middle of the night to Egypt. Later it is again an angel appearance that tells them to return to Israel.

Had they forgotten all of that? Had they not considered what any of that actually meant? I don't mean they should have known that Jesus would die on a cross for their sins. They were not told that about Jesus. But all these statements meant he would be a king who would take up a

throne one day. Jesus wasn't going to remain a poor carpenter's son. So how do we explain their surprise and confusion?

Maybe they expected Jesus to become king soon after his birth, or soon after their return to Israel from Egypt and when that did not happen they began to doubt what they had heard. But how could you forget the miracles?

I think that when they returned from Egypt they settled into a normal life. As far as we know, Joseph worked as a carpenter. Life became routine just as it was for all of their neighbors, just as it is for you and me. Life was full of work, food preparation, the washing of dishes and clothes, mending, repairing, play, little league, visiting relatives, sickness, death, community events and all the rest of what makes up our busy lives. Despite what they had been told about Jesus, their lives were normal.

Sure, Jesus was an exceptional child. He was fully obedient and compliant, very perceptive and intelligent. By His comments they realized how He was taking everything in around Him and drawing amazing conclusions about life and faith, God and man. But did they credit this to their great parenting? Maybe they did. Possibly they bragged on Jesus and took credit for the kind of person He was turning out to be. Or maybe they thought they were just lucky, or blessed, but without connecting it to what they had been told about Jesus by the angels.

Sometimes my wife and I will think back upon our earlier life together and re-live those times. One of us will say, "Remember when...?" I wonder if Mary and Joseph never did that. By the time of this event, when Jesus is 12, it appears they have forgotten the past. It is a wonder to Jesus, and to us, that they are so surprised and confused about what Jesus is telling them as explanation.

Now you might think that this event changed the thinking of Mary and Joseph. You would think that after this, they would think back and review all those Christmas events and come up with a better conclusion than they had reached at this point. You might think that they would start looking for some kind of transition for Jesus from carpenter to king at some point in the future. But the evidence, what little there is, shows the opposite.

In Mark's gospel, we see another example of Mary's lack of understanding. It occurs after Jesus had begun His teaching and preaching ministry. He has been doing miracles, healing people of blindness, deafness, sickness, lameness, and demon possession. He has been doing all this and this is what we read in Mark's gospel.

**Mark 3:21 (NIV)** When his family heard about this, they went to take charge of him, for they said, "He is out of his mind."

And a few verses later it says that Jesus' mother and brothers showed up at the house where He was teaching, in order to take Him home. They thought He was nuts.

How could Mary come to such a conclusion? In the face of all the evidence thus far that He was someone special, destined for a special life, how could she think Jesus was crazy?

Her conclusion seems crazy to us. How do we explain her reaction? The only explanation I have is that Mary and Joseph had neglected what God said about Jesus' future. They had neglected what God said and did back when Jesus was born. They neglected their faith in what God said and did. So they quit looking for God's promised future.

In one of His most familiar parables, Jesus warns of becoming so busy with the worries and comforts of life that we drift away from the truth of what God is doing and intending to do.

**Mark 4:18-19 (NIV)** Still others (people), like seed sown among thorns, hear the word (good news); but the worries of this life, the deceitfulness of wealth and the desires for other things come in and choke the word, making it unfruitful.

**Note that these people are distracted by both good things and bad.** Both the worries of life and the comforts of life and the desire for more things of the world. We can only guess as to what led to Mary and Joseph's neglectfulness. But the message for us in this is that we must more careful attention to the Good News.

Our lives are much more complicated than theirs were. Our worries are more and our comforts and worldly distractions are more than they had. We are in even more danger of forgetting than they were. The writer of the book of Hebrews warns...

**Hebrews 2:1 (NIV)** We must pay more careful attention, therefore, to what we have heard, so that we do not drift away.

We must pay more careful attention to the good news of our salvation and the return of our Lord to earth.

We must pay more careful attention to spiritual things. We must intentionally, and actively, guard against letting the worries, comforts, and desires of our busy lives distract us from what is truly important.

Let me ask you a question this morning. Jesus is going to return to earth. In that moment when He appears how will you react, do you think? Will you say, "Hallelujah, at last!" Or will His return be so forgotten that you will look up and say, "What in the world is happening?"

Or maybe the things of the world have become so dear to you that you will say, "Oh, not today!"

This year you need to form new habits to help you remain focused on Jesus. My experience has taught me that the best habit for me is to start my day with prayer and Bible reading. And in that time of prayer I remind myself of the Good News. I sing a little song I know. The words say... "Thank You, Lord, for saving my soul. Thank You, Lord, for making me whole. Thank You, Lord, for giving to me, your great salvation, so rich and free."

I encourage you to...

> **Start your day by remembering that you are a sinner saved by the grace of Jesus.**

> **Dedicate your day to Him.** And

> **Remind yourself that all God has promised has not yet happened.** The best is yet to come. Look forward to it each day.

This year, don't let your Christmas memories end with the dismantling of your decorations. Maybe leave one out and use it to remind you daily to renew your faith in God's promises and your expectation of their fulfillment.

Invitation = The miracle of Christmas is that God sent us a Savior. You must personally receive that Savior as YOUR Savior in order to be forgiven of your sins. Do so today.