

The Lord's Visit to Jerusalem at the Age of Twelve

Luke 2:39-52

Luke 2:39-52: So when they had performed all things according to the law of the Lord, they returned to Galilee, to their own city, Nazareth. 40 And the Child grew and became strong in spirit, filled with wisdom; and the grace of God was upon Him. 41 His parents went to Jerusalem every year at the Feast of the Passover. 42 And when He was twelve years old, they went up to Jerusalem according to the custom of the feast. 43 When they had finished the days, as they returned, the Boy Jesus lingered behind in Jerusalem. And Joseph and His mother did not know it; 44 but supposing Him to have been in the company, they went a day's journey, and sought Him among their relatives and acquaintances. 45 So when they did not find Him, they returned to Jerusalem, seeking Him. 46 Now so it was that after three days they found Him in the temple, sitting in the midst of the teachers, both listening to them and asking them questions. 47 And all who heard Him were astonished at His understanding and answers. 48 So when they saw Him, they were amazed; and His mother said to Him, "Son, why have You done this to us? Look, Your father and I have sought You anxiously." 49 And He said to them, "Why did you seek Me? Did you not know that I must be about My Father's business?" 50 But they did not understand the statement which He spoke to them. 51 Then He went down with them and came to Nazareth, and was subject to them, but His mother kept all these things in her heart. 52 And Jesus increased in wisdom and stature, and in favor with God and men.

Background Notes

Under the Mosaic Law, the testimony of two witnesses was important for establishing the truth. The truth that Jesus was the Messiah and Savior was established at the beginning of Luke's Gospel with the testimony of two witnesses, Anna and Simeon. After giving an account of the Lord's infancy, Luke was about to move on to our Lord's public ministry, but first he recorded an episode from His boyhood.

Between our Lord's infancy and the beginning of His public ministry, the biblical record is silent as to the events of our Lord's life - except for this one event, that occurred when He was 12 years of age. There is apocryphal literature from the 2nd and 3rd centuries that contains fictional boyhood sayings and acts of Jesus, but this material was never accepted by Christians as historically reliable. The Lord's Passover visit to Jerusalem at twelve years of age is the only inspired account of any events in our Lord's boyhood years. However, we know that during all those "silent" years, the Lord was perfect, and that He lived a life that was pleasing to God the Father. At the Lord's baptism, the voice of God affirmed this when He said: "This is my beloved Son in whom I am well pleased" (Matthew 3:17). Remember, this statement was made before our Lord began His public ministry or did any miracles.

Luke skipped over the Lord's sojourn in Egypt with Mary and Joseph as a young child. He recorded in Luke 2:39: "So when they had performed all things according to the Law of the Lord, they returned to Galilee to their own city of Nazareth." Luke 2:39 means one of two things by the phrase, "they returned to Galilee and Nazareth." Either they eventually returned to Nazareth after their time in Bethlehem and Egypt, or (as is more likely the case) they returned to Nazareth after the Lord's presentation as an infant at the Temple.

Then they later visited Bethlehem for an extended time when the Lord was 1 or 2 years old, probably when they came up to Jerusalem from Nazareth for one of the annual feasts. Remember, Bethlehem is only about six miles south of Jerusalem. The Lord was possibly almost 2 years old when the wise men came to Bethlehem, before the family went to Egypt. (Don't confuse the visit of the shepherds and the wise men - they were two separate events, in spite of the nativity scenes and the paintings on your Christmas cards! The wise men came to the "house where the young child was" (Matthew 2:11), whereas the shepherds came to the manger where the baby Jesus was laid.) Herod killed not just infants, but children up to 2 years old. So there are a couple of ways to harmonize the timeline of the family's visit to Egypt in Matthew 2 and the phrase "they returned to Galilee and Nazareth" in Luke 2:39.

Doctrinal Points

1. As God, the Lord Jesus was an unusual child.

Verse 49 gives us the first recorded words of Jesus: "*Why did you seek Me? Did you not know that I must be about My Father's business?*" Obviously, as a boy growing up, the Lord spoke, but these are His first words that are recorded in the Bible. Notice that these words are a claim to His deity. When Mary His mother said to Him, "*Your father and I have sought You anxiously,*" the Lord responded, "*Why did you seek Me? Did you not know that I must be about My Father's business?*" The Lord was definitely drawing a distinction between His heavenly Father and His earthly legal father, Joseph, who was not His biological father.

Notice that our Lord did *not* say, "Did you not know that I must be about *our* Father's business?" No, he said **My** Father's business. Remember, the Lord said to Mary Magdalene before His ascension in John 20:17, "*I'm ascending to My Father and to your Father and to My God and your God,*" - not "our Father and our God". As believers, we are sons of God, but we are not in the same relationship to Him as the Son of God. At 12 years of age, the Lord Jesus was aware of His unique relationship to the Father. He was the eternal Son of God, the second person in the Trinity. He was God incarnate.

Although He grew naturally from infancy to manhood, Jesus was an unusual child because He was fully God. He wasn't unusual in looks or physical strength, but in behavior. He was sinless. He was the perfect child! His parents never had to give Him "time outs" or spankings. Ask any parent and they'll tell you that such a child is not only unusual - he doesn't

exist! No wonder verse 51 says that His mother kept or “treasured all these things in her heart.” The Lord Jesus was an unusual child because He was God.

Think of the Lord’s unusual behavior in Jerusalem. I’m sure the other boys were running around playing hide-and-seek and doing other pre-teen activities, but our Lord was in the Temple courts discussing Scripture and the things of God. Verse 46 says that He was sitting in the midst of the teachers, listening to them and asking them questions - not in a flippant or argumentative way, but as a child who loved God’s Word and wanted to know God’s Word. Everyone who heard this 12-year-old boy was astonished at His understanding and answers. The Lord Jesus as God was an unusual child.

2. As Man, the Lord Jesus as a normal child.

If you lived in 1st century Jerusalem and saw the pilgrims from Nazareth arrive for the Passover festival, would you have been able to pick Jesus out of the crowd of pre-teens in the group? Would He be the one with the halo? Sorry...no halo. Would He be the one with the white robe (child size)? You certainly won’t find that in the Bible - not even a white robe when He an adult. At 12 years of age, the Lord probably wore a hand-me-down earth-toned robe. From a distance, I don’t think we would have been able to pick Jesus out from the other 12-year-old boys just by appearance, because as “true Man,” the Lord Jesus was a normal child.

Jesus was not only fully God – He was fully Man. As Man, He grew and matured from normal infancy to normal boyhood to normal manhood. He ate and slept and learned. He grew physically, mentally and socially. *“And Jesus increased in wisdom and stature, and in favor with God and men.”*

However, if we were to come closer to the group of pre-teens and circulate among them, it wouldn’t be long before we’d recognize which boy was Jesus. He would be the friendly, unselfish boy who was always helping others and sharing with others. Jesus would be the boy who obviously loved life, but was serious and wise about important matters such as God and God’s law. And He would have been the boy whom everyone loved – *“He grew in favor with God and men.”*

“And the Child grew and became strong in spirit, filled with wisdom; and the grace of God was upon Him.” Certainly the Lord was an unusual child because He was fully God -- no less than 100% God -- but He was also fully Man -- no less than 100% human -- and therefore a normal child. The Lord Jesus as man was a normal child.

Practical Application

Be a friend like Jesus!

The last verse of Luke 1 mentions the maturing of John the Baptist: *“So the child grew and became strong in spirit, and was in the deserts till the day of his manifestation to Israel.”* Do you notice the significant difference between that verse and the last verse of chapter 2, about the maturing of the Lord Jesus? *“And Jesus increased in wisdom and stature, and in favor with God and men.”*

The obvious difference is that Jesus grew in favor with men as well as God. John the Baptist was strong in spirit, and spiritual, and dedicated, and greatly used of God, but he was extreme and ascetic in his lifestyle. He was probably not the kind of person to whom you would naturally be attracted, or with whom easily make friends! The Lord Jesus was also strong in spirit and mind – but He was also sociable. He grew in favor with God **and** men. He was well liked and made friends easily. In Hebrew school, He would have been voted the most loved student. We would have loved to be Jesus’ friend! He reached out to people, and encouraged them, and helped them.

What a friend we have in Jesus! As He was then, so He is now! And we should follow the example He left us. He’s the perfect model to follow - as a child, as a teenager, as an adult. Be a friend like Jesus!