



Luke 2:40-52

“Grace Between The Generations” (8th in a series on Luke’s Gospel)

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“Following Christ From City Center!”

LUKE 2:40-52

"GRACE BETWEEN THE GENERATIONS"

Greatness Foreshadowed, 12 Years Silence Since Lk. 2:39

Speculation In Infancy Gospels, //Infancy Gospel Of Thomas 19

1) v.40 GROWTH FORMULA: PHYSICAL, INTELLECTUAL, SPIRITUAL //1:80. Prodigy Tale

40 And the child (i.e. Jesus) GREW AND BECAME STRONG, True Human Body: Physical Development
Wise filled with WISDOM, True Human Mind: Intellectual/ Social
and the GRACE (charis) OF GOD was upon him. True Human Relations: Religious/ Spiritual
Some Denied Humanity = Gnostics (Body), Appolinarrians (Mind), Marcionites (Appeared Full Grown)

2) vv.41-51 THE FATHER'S SON IN THE FATHER'S HOUSE. Man At 13: Keep Law

Men, Not Women, Required To Attend

a) vv.41-43b Trip Up To Jerusalem/ Jesus Is Disobedient? Anticipates 9:51-22:38

41 Now his parents went to Jerusalem every year at the feast of Passover. Pious, Ex. 23:14-17, 34:23, T. 16:16
42 a And when he was twelve years old, Transition Age: Take On Yoke Of Kingdom At 13
43 b they went up according to the custom; Family/Friends On Pilgrimage, Take On Yoke Of Kingdom
c and when the feast was ended, 7 Days, Purification, Lamb, Passover, Unleavened Bread
b' as they were returning, Typically 3 Days Each Way, Two Week Total
a' the boy Jesus stayed behind in Jerusalem. I Sam. 1-2, His Choice, Is He Disobedient??? Sin?
Jewish Family: Propagate Race, Satisfy Needs, Carry On Faith (Prov. 22:6)

b) vv.43c-45 Parents Seek Him/ Did Not Know.

44 a His parents did not know it,
but supposing him to be in the company (caravan) they went a day's journey, Relatives, Friends
b and they sought him among their kinsfolk and acquaintances; Where Is Jesus?

45 b' and when they did not find him, They (parents), 8x, Partners At Least 12 Years
a' they returned to Jerusalem, seeking him. He Caused Them Pain
Frame/Center Agree: Jesus Is Wise One, 4:1-13, 16-21; 24

c) vv.46-47 Jesus In The Temple: Family Piety vs. Future Vocation.

46 After three days they found him in the temple, [Previews 19:47, 20:1, 21:37, 22:53]
Wise sitting among the teachers, Center (170 Words), Intellect, Spiritually Precocious
47 listening to them and asking them questions; Torah Debate, Josephus Life 2.9
and all who heard him were amazed at his understanding and his answers. WISE
Wise Interpreter Of Scripture//4:1-13-21, 7:26-27, 10:25-28

b') vv.48-50 Parents Reproach Him/Not Understand/Revelation Of Sonship.

48 a And when they saw him they were astonished; Jesus Responds With Counter-question!
b? and his mother said to him, "Son, why have you treated us so? Accuse Of Sin
c Behold, your father and I have been looking for you anxiously." Panic
First Speech! Evidence Of Filial Awareness, v.49b
49 b'? And he said to them, "How is it that you sought me? God Over Family, 8:21
c'? Did you not know that I must be in my Father's house (work)?" Necessity
50 a' And they did not understand the saying which he spoke to them. 2:35, Ignorance As Theme
Prodigy, Philo's Life of Moses 1.21, 5.348

a') v.51 Trip Down To Nazareth/ Jesus Is Clearly Obedient.

51 And he went down with them and came to Nazareth, His Parents Were Stretched! Estranged?
and was obedient to them; Obedience!! Ex. 20:12, Dt. 5:15, Eph. 6:2-3
and his mother kept all these things (sayings) in her heart. //2:19, Mary Must Also Progresses In Insight!
Anticipates Lost/Found Of Resurrection

1') v.52 GROWTH FORMULA: INTELLECTUAL, PHYSICAL, RELATIONAL. 1 Sam. 2:21, 26

52 And Jesus increased (progressed) in WISDOM, Is. 11:1-3, Frame/Center Agree, Jesus As Wise One//Sirach 45:1
AND IN STATURE, Luke Assumes Jesus' Real/Full Developmental Humanity, Heb. 2:14, 17; 4:15
and in FAVOR (chariti/ grace) WITH GOD and man. Prov. 3:3, God's Timing, 18+ Years Silence To Lk. 3:1

Not "Show me and I will obey," but, "I will obey, now please show me!"
[Family Influence And Personal Decision Both Matter, Spiritual Understanding Comes From Submission/Obedience, Jn. 7:17]

A Brief Treatment Of Luke 2:40-52

The scene of Jesus in the temple at aged twelve is in every children’s Bible story book and the subject of innumerable treatments in stained glass. Why the fascination? Answer: it’s our only window into the *silent years*, twelve before and eighteen or so after his event. Because of his later life, curiosity abounds about Jesus’ pre-public years. All Scripture says is they were decades of multi-dimensional development: physical and mental, in gracious relationship with God and others in a pious family in a backwoods Galilee. Jesus’ growth reports are more elaborate than John’s (1:80), as we would expect since he is greater at every comparison. Our Savior was a small town, single working guy, faithful to duty and waiting for a call. In the center of God’s purposes, there is no rush, though there may be tensions.

In second-temple Judaism the course of human and religious development had two parts, childhood and adulthood, with the transition roughly tied to sexual maturity for women and to age thirteen for males when they took on the yoke of the law. There was no interim period of adolescence as in modern, Western cultures where extended education is required for adult functioning. Jesus was 13, but never a teenager.

The text is a 7:1 concentric pattern with vv.46-47 at the center (1-2a-b-**c**-b’-a’-1’) and a clear three-part inclusion (*strong-stature, wisdom, grace*) in v.40 // v.52. Each layer includes parallel terms (a. *went up* // a’ *went down*, b. *did not know it* // b’ *did not understand*). Jesus divine sonship as well as his wisdom and independence just before adulthood foreshadow later dealings with Jewish religious leaders and a final temple appearance. This may be an echo of Isaiah 11:1-3 where wisdom is attributed to the Messiah. The family’s piety is again highlighted in their yearly Passover pilgrimage. Attendance was required of males but not women, so Mary’s participation goes beyond expectations. The trip south to Jerusalem was a common affair, a large caravan from Nazareth and surrounding villages. That Jesus stayed behind is not due to neglect but to the community atmosphere and shared responsibility for children, as noted in v.43c, “but assuming him to be *in the company*.” After all, Jesus is on the verge of manhood. A day out and a day back mean he’s found on day three. High anxiety is assumed in vv.43c-45, a parental nightmare.

When located, they find Jesus sitting with the Jewish theologians in an ongoing dialog over the interpretation of Scripture- their specialty. The Jerusalem elites are impressed, even bewildered, at his depth of insight. Jesus is not, as my mother would say, “dead in a ditch,” but having the time of his life. His future is larger than Nazareth. My question is, Where did he spend the night? Who fed him?

Relief and anger are combined in v.48, “But when they saw him they were astonished.” Mary speaks first in a veiled accusation of two questions, both of which focus on their worries, “Son, why have you treated *us* so? Behold, *your father and I* have been looking for you anxiously.” The fourth commandment to honor parents is invoked in front of the theologians by a worried Jewish mother. Talk about pressure. Is this child a sinner? Jesus’ first words in Luke are a question followed by a mission statement, “How is it that you sought me? Did you not know that I must be in my Father’s house?” A larger sonship and an independent future come to bear. One day he will be ripped away from hearth and home by God’s call, and this is a preview. Mom and dad did not understand. Jesus then leaves without argument, goes home as an obedient son, and Mary- as before- ponders mysterious events, as the hymn later inquires, *What Child Is This?* The second growth report (v.52) says the dynamic process continued. And if Jesus was this focused at age 12, what must he have become? Keep reading! It gets better!

GRACE BETWEEN THE GENERATIONS

“Son, why have you treated us so?”

Jesus had a Jewish mother!

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We have nothing written during his lifetime, meaning the years from his birth between 4 and 6 B.C. and his death as Pontius Pilate’s most famous victim around 33 B.C. Precise dates are unavailable; *Who* and *Why* were more important than *When*. In the case of Jesus, there is much that is vague where we would like specifics and much that is specific where we would much prefer he had remained vague! Jesus doesn’t so much satisfy our historical and psychological curiosities as shatter our worlds with his offer of the kingdom and pierce our hearts with his demands for holy living. To ask, *Who was he?* is legitimate curiosity. To have him ask back, *And who are you?* is the beginning of faith.

That nothing was written down immediately should not surprise us. Materials were expensive; manuscripts were copied by scribes on costly reed paper and scraped animal hides.¹ Only the educated could read and write; only the famous were written about, in most cases only after death. Literature was about the great exploits of heroes and philosophers, with perhaps a story of two from their younger years tossed in to foreshadow the greatness that was ahead and to answer the question, *If he was this famous as an adult, what was he like as a young man?*² All accounts were written later, with access to multiples eye witnesses so the accuracy is not in question.³

¹ Papyrus and vellum, respectively.

² For a review of ancient biographies and the pre-public careers of heroes, see Charles H. Talbert, *Reading Luke*, revised edition (Macon, GA: Smyth & Helwys, 2002.)

³ See Richard Bauckham, *Jesus and the Eyewitnesses: The Gospels as Eyewitness Testimony* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2006).

That fact bothers us; it did not bother them since they were experts in an art in which we have reverted to amateurs. We write because we can't remember; they remembered because most could not write. They were sophisticated in a different way from us. We read and forget; they heard and remembered. Our memories are coated with Teflon, theirs with velcro.

Memorization were more important than writing in first century Jewish culture. You knew what you knew *by heart*. What professional body builders do with muscles, they did with the ability to memorize and recite with accuracy. Proverbs strung together in long strings in the collective memory. Stories told and retold along a general time line. Scripture read in the synagogue and recited one to another within the frame of faithfulness. This was the setting in which the stories *of* Jesus and the ones *about* him were told and retold until written down in the Four Gospels. To read the Gospels you would think the parables were told only once since they appear only once. There was a first time Jesus told them, but there were repeat performances like a piece of music replayed for a new audience. The disciples heard the stories time and again. After a hundred exorcisms, you tell them all in the same form.

The wandering teacher and miracle-working-holy-man Jesus of Nazareth was the starting point of an oral tradition, first *from him* in his own voice, then *about him* in a chorus of Christian witnesses, and finally written down in texts when it looked like the earliest witnesses were about to die. As long as eyewitness are around, who needs written texts? "Let Peter tell us; let John tell us; we know the people who knew the Lord himself. But when Jesus did not immediately return and bring the fullness of the kingdom, and when the founders begin to pass off the scene- as with the crucifixion of Peter in the mid-sixties of the first century- someone had to collect and inscribe the stories to save them from distortion by friends and enemies.

So Mark organizes the preaching of Peter; Matthew and Luke rewrite Mark a decade or two later and add additional materials to fill out the story; John preserves something of a third stream of tradition. Compiled, researched, written down, edited, copied from originals, copies passed between churches till later on the leaders said *these four and no more*. Other stories may be interesting, but only these go on the official reading list.⁴ Our Jesus is bigger than any one storyteller, but four is perfect: Matthew, Mark, Luke and John, like the four points of the compass.

⁴ For a collection beyond the canonical four, see Bart Ehrman, *Lost Scriptures* (Oxford, England: Oxford Press, 2003).

The way the process of gospel formation works is highly selective; much is forgotten, much omitted. Lots of film remains on the editor’s cutting table. What is used is remembered; what is not used is forgotten. You can only put so much on a single scroll. It also explains why we only have one brief story about Jesus between the stories of his birth in Luke chapters 1 and 2 and the beginning of his public ministry thirty or so years later in Luke chapter 3. These are the *hidden years of Jesus*, and all we have is this one story. Everything else about the youth of Jesus is historical reconstruction. And where evidence is thin, speculation takes over.⁵ But if the purpose of the four gospels, indeed of the whole Bible- as the church teaches, is not to tell us all we would like to know but to offer us enough of a picture to trust ourselves through Jesus Christ to God his Father and to have the Holy Spirit bring new life into our dead souls and new light into our darkened minds, then what is here has to be enough.⁶ Indeed it has been enough for two thousand years. People are brought back to God in reading this material and in entrusting themselves to the Savior here presented. These are life-giving stories over which the Spirit of God is constantly brooding. We start reading them, then find them reading us!

We Christians believe one day we will know all about Jesus that can be historically known, and more besides, but for now four gospels are enough. And since the Lord is not dead but alive and in our midst, there is more to him than even these stories can contain. They are pointers to his character and his ways, but he is still alive and has the right to illumine his stories as he chooses. We do not serve a paper Jesus locked up in a Bible but a living Lord whose character is displayed in the writings the church has preserved about him. There is more to Jesus than is in the book, but not less! There is new insight into old revelation, but no new revelation.

⁵ E.g. *Infancy Gospel of Thomas*, accessed at www.earlychristianwritings.com/infancythomas.

⁶ In the U.M. Articles of Religion, note that the purpose of Scripture is *salvation*: “Article V- Of the Sufficiency of the Holy Scriptures *for Salvation*, “The Holy Scripture containeth *all things necessary to salvation*; so that whatsoever is not read therein, nor may be proved thereby, is not to be required of any man that it should be believed as an article of faith, or be thought *requisite or necessary to salvation*. In the name of the Holy Scripture we do understand those canonical books of the Old and New Testament of whose authority was never any doubt in the church. The names of the canonical books are...” (BOD 2102, 64-65).

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The Book of Mormon is out! The Koran is out! Your favorite TV astrologer is out! So if it doesn't square with the gospels, it's not the Lord Jesus, no matter how many supposed gurus claim fresh insights from channeling higher powers! His life and work is here displayed in four public documents.

The gospels, therefore, and each of the stories preserved in them, are not records of a long dead hero but pointers to a risen and available Lord. They clue us as to who he is and what he expects. Scholars read for historical information; we in the church read for that and more. We meditate together for deeper insight into the one who is even now our Savior! We never tire of more learning and more following and more loving. We pray to *See thee more clearly, love thee more dearly, and follow thee more nearly, day by day by day*. If the church did not meet Jesus as alive after his crucifixion, they never would have gone back and preserved his stuff. Only at the resurrection did his life take on the glorious status that confirmed that in this one life we have the true and ultimate revelation of God within the limits of history. It was God's surprise, and it sent the church scrambling for all they could remember and eventually write down after the fact. Biographies were written because he was the church's living hero and constant companion in the Spirit. You can now understand, in light of what happened at the extremity of his life, namely death and resurrection, why everyone later wondered, *What was he like as a boy? Was he smart? Did he ever disobey his parents? Was he a good student? When did he first feel the tug to the larger world and a special vocation?* Inquiring minds want to know! And so Luke says, "I have one story, but only one."

There was in that world a type of story that dealt with the boyhood of a famous leader, many of them when the youth was twelve to fourteen. We delight in the story of George Washington and the cherry tree and its famous line, "I cannot tell a lie." The Greek historian Plutarch relates the following tale about Alexander the Great:

"When delegates sent by the king of Persia came to Philip's court during his absence, Alexander his son served as their host and engaged them in conversation. Such *wisdom* did he display that he put to them no petty questions. He inquired rather about distances and means of transport in the upper regions of Asia Minor. He expressed curiosity about the king of Persia, especially how he treated his enemies.... So *impressed* were they that they concluded that the legendary shrewdness of Philip was nothing when compared to the zeal and thirst in this *young lad* for the

performance of great deeds.⁷

The first century Jewish historian Josephus writes of himself with no modesty at all:

"When I was a child, about fourteen years of age, I was commended by all for my attachment to *learning*. For this reason *high priests and leading men of the city* came frequently to me in a body, to determine my opinion about precise interpretations of the law."⁸

The similarity between these stories and that of Jesus in the temple at age twelve is apparent. As a biographer Luke chose to include such a story about the youthful Jesus at the doorway to adulthood. It was good literary form, was expected in the life of a hero, and gives us a glimpse into the hidden years. It is a delightful story found in every children's Bible story book. But it is more than a story for children. It is the bridge between the stories of Jesus' conception and birth and the beginning of the public ministry, and it is set amidst long silences. Twelve years of no report between his birth and this story, followed by eighteen or more years of silence till he emerges from Nazareth to be baptized by John in the Jordan. Oh, there was much was going on during our exclusion; Luke says he was *growing in wisdom and in stature and in favor with God and man*, but of the specifics we know nothing.

THE GROWTH FORMULA (vv. 40, 52)

A group of tourists once visited a picturesque English village. As they walked by an old man sitting beside a fence, one of them asked in a patronizing way, "Were any great men born in this village?"

"Nope," the old man replied, "only babies"⁹

There are no instant heroes, and God did not provide us an instant Savior. If the incarnation is real, if God the Son truly assumed flesh, then it starts where we start. Jesus was home grown in Nazareth. He did not just appear as a grown man as

⁷ Quoted in F.W. Danker, *Jesus and the New Age* (St. Louis, MO: Clayton Pub., 1976), 39.

⁸ Idem.

⁹ "To Illustrate: Spiritual Leadership," *Leadership*, Spring 1984, 45.

the second century false teacher Marcion thought. First a foetus, then an infant, then a child, then a boy, then a man, then a dead man, then a risen Savior. Neither did he have a complete divine mind grafted on top of a human body as Bishop Apollinarius taught. Jesus did not contain all wisdom pre-loaded on the hard-disk; rather *he progressed in human wisdom* and was dependent on the Holy Spirit for illuminations of divine insight.¹⁰ His humanity, including the capacity to suffer and die, was not an illusion or disguise as some Gnostics taught. Despite what Greek philosophers taught about God not being capable of suffering, Jesus did suffer, and if the church is right about his deity, then in him God the Son did truly suffer. His full humanity was not a disguise or illusion. Two clear proofs are that he was born of a woman and went through the same stages of physical, psychological, intellectual, emotional, social, and spiritual development as we do. One with us in every way except sin; he had no heart of distrust towards God; the torment of guilt was not a part of his consciousness. Jesus was not naive, but he was thoroughly innocent. Alike us in all the ways that matter, unlike us in the one way that lets him help us the most.

When a biblical author repeats an idea, it's a signal something important is being communicated. At the beginning and ending of our story we find a repeated growth formula. Verse 40, "And the child grew and became strong, filled with wisdom, and the grace of God was upon him." Verse 52, "And Jesus increased in wisdom, and in stature, and in favor with God and man." If we remove the frame, we still have the picture of Jesus in the Jerusalem temple, but with the frame we have a clue to the meaning. It's about Jesus' growth, about a turning point, when he, as a Jewish lad on the verge of manhood, symbolically broke with his family of origin for a greater destiny. He is now a person in the individuated sense, not just an extension of his parents' wishes. He is growing, and they are being stretched as well. It's painful for all involved. Jesus leaving the stimulation of Jerusalem intellectual life; his family utterly bewildered by his behavior and words.

Every teenager knows awkward moments of transition, as do parents. Our children are not property; not everything they do is about us. In three days everything changes. Guidance? Yes. Coercion? No. Time to loosen the reigns. This boy-about-to-be-a-man has a mind of his own and a destiny beyond Nazareth.

But back to the frame itself. It's not something Luke created out of the blue.

¹⁰ For a full treatment, see Gerald Hawthorne, *The Presence & The Power: The significance of the Holy Spirit in the life and ministry of Jesus* (Waco, TX: Word, 1991).

In his Bible, what we call the Old Testament, Luke found the story of Samuel who'd been given to his mother Hannah in answer to prayer. And in Samuel's story we find two growth reports: 1) "And the boy Samuel grew in the presence of the Lord,"¹¹ and 2) "Now the boy Samuel continued to grow both in stature and in favor with the Lord and with men"¹² Hear the echoes? Luke went to his Bible and borrowed language from the story of Samuel because Samuel was a prophet, and Samuel heard from God as a boy. This is Luke's way of presenting Jesus as the fulfillment of Old Testament hopes. He was like Samuel the prophet, only greater.

But there is another level here. Luke is making a theological statement about Jesus' identity. He was truly human and not like one of the Greek gods who came to earth in disguise. Jesus had a body that grew and developed from conception onwards, "And the child grew and became strong... And Jesus increased in stature."

Jesus had to have his diapers changed and be potty trained. He was not immune from childhood diseases. He went through puberty with all that means. He smelled like a sweaty teenager after a day in the carpenter's shop, and yes, he wrestled with emerging sexual feelings as he learned to honor the energy of a masculine gender identity that matched his biology. "Are those whiskers on your chin, Son?" his mother might have said. From infancy to adulthood, Jesus passed through all the developmental phases modern studies have so well documented. Jesus had a human body. To deny this is to fall into the ancient and ever-tempting error of Docetism which teaches that Jesus only *appeared* to be human, when he was really purely divine and walked a few inches off the dusty road. But if he was not like us, the church fathers said, then he cannot save us. Whatever else you say about Jesus, and there is much more to say, he was fully human, but without our inherited moral infection of rebellion against God. He was what we were meant to be, unmarred reflectors of God's image. In him we see the best about ourselves and the deep goodness hidden beneath the accumulated crud of the long history of sin. He is not less than us because he is without sin but more. Jesus has the only mind and emotions that work correctly. He alone hears from God without static and interrupted signals. Because he alone is whole, he alone has the power to make us whole.

Luke is careful to teach that with a human body went a human mind that made

¹¹ I Sam. 2:12.

¹² I Sam. 2:26

progress in learning, "And Jesus *increased* in wisdom." His knowledge was limited and growing. He did not have a human body and a divine mind. Although he had access to the thoughts of God through the mediation of the Holy Spirit so that during the ministry he could read the thoughts of others, his mind was human.

Luke's third interest is to embed Jesus firmly within human community and to note his horizontal relations to other people and his vertical relationship to God, "and the grace of God was upon him... and Jesus increased... in favor *with God and man.*" I'm thankful Luke paused between the miracles of the birth and the miracles of the ministry to emphasize Jesus' humanity. He passed through the seasons of life that he might redeem each: pre-born, newborn, infant, child, youth, young adult, mature adult. If he has touched it, then it is sacred for Christians, which is an additional argument against convenience abortion. Jesus is Lord of every age and stage along the way. At some point physical growth stops and the decline of aging sets in, but we need never stop growing in wisdom and in favor with God and others. To be spiritually or mentally static, to allow our mental muscles to atrophy or for our spirits to become calloused is a sin against grace, which is the invitation from God to grow ever deeper into the "measure of the stature of the fullness of Christ."¹³

So with Luke's encouragement, we see Jesus nursing at Mary's breast, toddling round the carpenter's shop, playing ball, learning his letters, having a crush on a girl down the street, learning his father's trade, looking at the night stars in wonder. It's a mistake to think we compromise his divinity by insisting on his full humanity. It is not like two buckets in a well so that as one goes up as the other goes down. Orthodox faith has always insisted that both are true, fully and at the same time. That is good news. Jesus understands our struggles from the inside.

Ours is an olive-skinned, callous-handed Jesus whose broad shoulders you can lean on and whose warm breath you can feel against your cheek. Whatever your struggle, hear him say, "I understand. That's why I came. Follow me, and I will show you God." My teacher Charles Talbert sums up Luke's intent: "Jesus grew and developed: in body, in mind, religiously, and socially. Jesus is truly human. Only thereby can he be the pioneer of salvation, the legitimate model of Christian existence."¹⁴

¹³ Eph. 4:13.

¹⁴ *Reading Luke*, first edition, (New York: Crossroad, 1982), 38.

Whenever God seems far away and the faith unreal, draw near to the humanity of Jesus. Meditate on his birth, his development, his words and deeds, his death and resurrection using Scripture and your imagination.¹⁵ His Jewish flesh, born of Mary, broken on the cross, glorified in heaven, is the doorway into the presence of the Father. Jesus is the living sacrament of God, the final means of grace, our truest friend and closest ally. He wants to be near to you, and he can, precisely because his warm humanity is enlivened by God in the resurrection from the dead.

If the frame highlights Jesus' development, then the story inside the frame focuses on the complimentary truth that Jesus is uniquely in touch with the heavenly Father so that when he says *my Father* it is an exclusive claim. Later theologians will use the language of Greek philosophy and speak of two natures united in one person. Luke communicates the same truth by wrapping this frame around this story.

THE FATHER'S SON IN THE FATHER'S HOUSE (vv.41-51)

It was not the first time his parents made the trip. Jews within fifteen miles of Jerusalem were required to come to Passover every year. Others came less often, but Jesus' family came every year; they took their obligations seriously. That Mary went when only Joseph was required to says something about their shared faith.

Passover commemorated the Exodus from Egypt and lasted eight days. With the journey there and back nearly two weeks was consumed. Think of it as a cross between a family vacation, a trip to Washington, the state fair, Christmas and Easter all rolled into one. A two week sabbath of travel, visiting, attending temple, preparing Jesus to take on the yoke of the law. An exciting time, a family memory builder. This may have been Jesus' first trip; no other children are mentioned. With the last part of verse 43 the plot thickens; anxiety is injected, "And when the feast was ended, as they were returning, the boy Jesus stayed behind in Jerusalem." Uh-oh! Losing the Son of God is a big sin!

When I was an infant my parents bought a powder-blue 1954 blue Buick Special with running boards. The transmission was slung below the car so that there

¹⁵ For a treatment of the method of spiritual reading, see Richard J. Foster, *Life With God: Reading The Bible For Spiritual Transformation* (San Francisco, CA: HarperOne, 2008); also his *Sanctuary of the Soul: Journey Into Meditative Prayer* (Downer's Grove, ILL: IVP, 2011).

was no hump in the back floorboard. The back bubble window was big enough to lay under. It was a great car to travel in. Three boys: one asleep on the floorboard, one on the seat, the other in the back window. Once we stopped at a station for gas, then hit the road again. About fifteen minutes later my mother glances back, "Tony, Tony, where's Tony? O my God, Jim, we left him at the service station." High anxiety. High speeds. Headlines in the next day's *Charlotte Observer*: "Child Kidnaped After Abandoned By Parents At Service Station." When we screeched back into the station, there was four-year old Tony without a worry, swigging on a Nehi the owner bought him and talking to the attendant. *How could you?* quickly becomes *How could we?* Turn your head and they're gone. Luke builds the emotional tension:

"His parents did not know it, but supposing him to be in the company they went a day's journey, and they sought him among their kinfolk and acquaintances; and when they did not find him, they returned to Jerusalem, seeking him."

Just this week we had a creative retelling of the story in our children's music class. In her own words, Joyce says this is how it went:

"I was dramatically relating the story about Mary and Joseph taking Jesus to Jerusalem and how HUGE the crowd was. All his cousins and aunts and uncles and neighbors and friends and strangers and EVERYBODY..... and Jesus got lost.....and they searched for 3 days. Reeves Barrineau said, "He needed a walkie-talkie and then they coulda found him sooner." Daniel Leuthner said, "Yea, that woulda done it. We always use a walkie-talkie when it's gonna be a crowd." See the Barrineau family for further information!

A day out, a day back. No police help or amber alerts. Frantic days, sleepless nights. "After three days they found him in the temple, sitting among the teachers, listening and asking questions; and all who heard him were amazed at his understanding and his answers." That is the center of the story, and it agrees with the frame. Jesus is wise. When you think about it, it was a profound commentary on the quality of his home, that a kid from backwoods Nazareth has deep insight into Scripture. At the time it did not seem so to Mary. We only have the words and not the music, so add the tone of your own mother's scoldings, "Son, why have you treated us so? Your father and I have suffered pain looking for you." What will he answer? Is Jesus a sinner? Does Jesus he to repent for dishonoring his parents?

Mary and Joseph are astonished to find him there, and after he speaks they do not understand. Jesus gives no apology, shows no sense of guilt or shame. No, "I'm so sorry, Mother; I promise it won't happen again." He responds not with answers to her agenda but with probing questions of his own: "How is it that you sought me? Did you (of all people!) not know that I must be in my Father's house?" or as others translate it "about by Father's work?" When your child responds to your accusing question with a probing one of their own, it's a new day.

Years later there will be another trip to Passover, not with his old family but with his new one: Peter, and James and John and Mary Magdalene and the rest. Again he will teach in the temple, but this time the reception will not be so kind. Again he will be lost for three days. Women who seek him will be asked a question by an angel, "Why do you seek the living among the dead?"¹⁶ Again, astonishment and lack of understanding will be the response when he is taken to his father's house through resurrection. Even this childhood story hints at the great mysteries ahead.

Note the play on words. Mary says *your father*, meaning Joseph. Jesus shifts the word from horizontal to vertical- *my Father*, meaning God. She defines her son by family and blood; he now defines himself on a transcendent axis. That ninety-degree shift is the key to Jesus' identity. He is the one so uniquely related to God that the temple is *my father's* house. The gift of faith his family gave him is now taking on a life of its own as Jesus' reaches out beyond his family to grasp his unique vocation as the one who speaks and acts for God without any consciousness of guilt or shame. The torch of religious faithfulness they have carried for him now flares in his own hand with a larger light. Who he was by conception and who he was by family heritage is now owned by the Jesus who stands on the verge of Jewish manhood. God the Son cannot be contained or controlled by any human tie, even the closest. But once that's clear, Luke answers our question, *No, Jesus is not a sinner*. He returns to Nazareth and is obedient to the duties of a Jewish son, "And he went down with them and came to Nazareth, and was obedient to them; and his mother kept all these things in her heart." There now follow eighteen more years without a word. Silence. Normalcy. The grind of the ordinary and the joy of the everyday. That was his training ground. When God came in Jesus, he came into a family and a village and a job and to sweat and to friends and to prayers.

CONCLUSION

¹⁶ Lk. 24:5b.

There is a season of life in which we are to obey our parents within limits. Ephesians 6:1, "Children, obey your parents *in the Lord*, for this is right." Parents are never to ask their children to do anything that is sin. Obedience is always *in the Lord*. But unless a separation is made, and that is what adolescence and young adulthood are all about in our culture, we remain forever dependent children instead of adults. Jesus pushed back against the demands of his mother and father, and so must we; it is a developmental task God has built into the unfolding of our lives. There is no real maturity until the Self finds its identity in the God who creates us in family and yet calls us beyond family. You don't want to marry someone who is not willing to leave home emotionally and financially.

How many marriages are compromised by partners who never left home? A man who is a *momma's boy* cannot be good husband. To cave in repeatedly to the neurotic and crazy demands of parents because of guilt is deadly to maturity. This is not of God. As long as parents use guilt and fear and money to shape their offspring, there can be no rich and deep love between the generations. We honor our parents best, not by remaining dependent children, but by standing alongside them as Christian adults who are ever-growing in wisdom and in favor with God and others. Sometimes it means saying a firm No to the messages that begin, "You always or your never." It is a hard thing to coach- for instance a daughter- to say to her mother, "Get a life; quit trying to live your life through me. I'm thirty years old, for God's sake! I'm sorry you made a bad choice in marriage and stayed with a drunk. I don't care what you bought at the grocery store yesterday. Make some friends, join a bowling league, go on a trip, go to Al Anon, read your Bible, join a gym, go see a counselor, just quit calling me three times a day. I love you, but today the rules change forever." I make them write their speech on a 3x5 card so it's ready at all times! You think I'm kidding? Occasionally I have to instruct adults on what it means to honor their parents because they're neglectful, but for most it's the reverse: how to be an adult with good and healthy boundaries. For some it will come in a critical incident, as in the story before us, whereas for others it will be a more graceful transformation.

When Jesus went back to Nazareth, everything was the same and everything was different. Rules changed. As God's free son, he was free to love and obey till the day his larger ministry began. Have you found the freedom that is yours as a son or daughter of God? Have you been re-parented by your heavenly Father? There is a word of grace here for parents and children, and that's all of us, isn't it?

STUDY AND APPLICATION QUESTIONS

2:40, 52

1. Why did Luke take such great care writing these parallel growth reports?
2. Why do you think modern people have trouble seeing Jesus as fully and truly human, only without sin which distorts everything?
3. Jesus matured physically, intellectually, spiritually and socially. Which of these do you have the most questions about?
4. What's wrong with Jesus' humanity being an illusion or clever disguise?
What's wrong with Jesus having a divine mind on top of a human body?
What's wrong with the idea that Jesus appeared full grown as a man?

2:41-51

5. What does the trip to Jerusalem say about Jesus' family?
6. How do you deal with the fact that Jesus never was psychologically a teenager?
7. How are vv.46-47 a preview of coming attractions.
8. How does Jesus establish new boundaries and new rules in vv.48-50?
9. How does v.51 resolve the tension of the story? Why the long, silent years?

PRAYER OF CONFESSION AND PARDON

The Lord be with you. **And also with you.** Let us pray:

Almighty God, our heavenly Father,

**look with mercy on the families from which we have come,
the ones we have formed, and the ties between us.**

**You alone know our complicated histories, woven of sin and sacrifice,
and how they have both blessed and cursed us all.**

**It is hard for us sinners to live together in peace across the generations.
and there are no perfect families despite the hopes we cherish.**

**You have rightly commanded children to obey their parents in the Lord,
but you command adults to honor their parents, not obey them.**

How easily we fall into gossip, manipulation and shaming one another.

**That you do your work across the ages through people like us
is a tribute to your great providence and the great price you put upon us.**

**We thank you for Jesus, his mother Mary and father Joseph,
and we are in awe of the task you gave them to shape our Savior's life.**

Forgive us for the sins we commit against those who are closest to us.

Open our eyes to the grace you give to live together in love and freedom.

Amen. (Silence is kept for confession. Pardon is announced.)
