

## **Northwest Community Evangelical Free Church**

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Sermon manuscript

### **Sermon Series: In the Fullness of the Times...**

## **Meet the Young Jesus**

(Luke 2:21-52)

### **Introduction: Moments of supreme insight...**

We can refer to events that rewire our understanding of ourselves or our world as “*moments of supreme insight*.” These moments let us see how things really are. They transform us.

The NBA has had a “*moment of supreme insight*” as the league has seen what a 7’4” (or, as some say, 7’7”) Victor Wembanyama can do with a guard’s agility, dribbling ability, and shooting touch.

The prophet, Isaiah, got a glimpse of God’s holiness that changed how he viewed the world. (Isaiah 6) And Jesus’ disciples had several of these “*moments*” as they watched Him perform countless miracles, often prompting, “*Who is this Man, anyway?*”

In these “*moments*” things that were not clear become clear.

Today, God offers us a change to have our own “*moment of supreme insight*” about Jesus as we explore category-busting interactions He had with His parents...when He was twelve...

*Review of the Christmas season...*

In recent weeks, we have anticipated the birth of Jesus.

We have rehearsed the story of the birth of John the Baptist and watched as Joseph processed the news of Mary’s pregnancy.

Last Sunday, we went to Bethlehem, heard angels, saw shepherds, and rejoiced at the birth of Jesus in a cave, as He was then laid in an animal’s feeding trough.

When we left Mary and Joseph and the Baby, they were recovering from the intensity of childbirth and the shepherd’s visit.

Eight days later, while still in Bethlehem, Joseph and Mary obeyed the command of the Law to circumcise and to name their Son.

### **Early Witnesses to Jesus (2:21-38)**

#### **The Witness of the Day of His Naming (2:21)**

***[2:21] And when eight days were completed so that it was time for His circumcision, He was also named Jesus, the name given by the angel before He was conceived in the womb.***

Unlike the joyous celebration at the naming of John the Baptist, Joseph and Mary were in a big, strange city with no friends, observing a simple, private ceremony during which He was named, “Jesus.”

With that naming, His destiny was set. Jesus will grow up to be the Savior.

After the naming, Joseph and Mary returned to their temporary lodging in Bethlehem before making yet another trip to Jerusalem for another very special event.

#### **Witnesses on the Day of His Dedication (2:22-38)**

*Joseph’s and Mary’s obedience (vv. 22-24)*

***[22] And when the days for their purification according to the law of Moses were completed, they brought Him up to Jerusalem to present Him to the Lord.***

In the Law, Moses had written (Leviticus 12) that thirty-three days after the birth of every first-born male, the parents were to make an offering to the Lord.

They could offer a one year old lamb or, if they could not afford a lamb, two birds (turtledoves pigeons).

Joseph and Mary offered the two birds, which speaks both to their poverty and to their devotion.

While they were sacrificing and dedicating Jesus to God, Luke shifts our attention to an old man and to an old woman who lived in Jerusalem and were there in the temple on that day.

*The blessing by Simeon and Anna (vv. 25-38)*

Their names are Simeon (whom you met on Christmas Eve) and Anna. They both spoke about Jesus, giving testimony to who He was and what kind of a Man He would become.

Next Sunday, Charlie will fill you in on the significance behind Simeon's blessing and Anna's prophecy.

After His naming day and His dedication day, Joseph and Mary settled down in Bethlehem for a while, maybe for as long as two years.

Then (we know this only from Matthew's Gospel) there was a visit of magi from the east who worshipped Jesus and gave Him gifts.

The upshot of that visit was that King Herod tried to kill Jesus by having all the male children in and around Bethlehem killed.

To escape that slaughter, the First Family fled Bethlehem to go to Egypt for safety until Herod the Great died.

Most scholars believe it that they stayed in Egypt for three to four years and then returned to Israel when an angel told Joseph that it was safe.

**The Witness of Jesus' Developing Maturity (2:39-40)**

***[39] And when His parents had completed everything in accordance with the Law of the Lord, they returned to Galilee, to their own city of Nazareth.<sup>1</sup> [40] Now the Child continued to grow and to become strong, increasing in wisdom; and the favor of God was upon Him.***

This is the only record we have of Jesus from year five or six to year twelve.

Sure, there are legends from extra-biblical stories of Jesus' childhood exploits.

There are reports of miracles telling how He turned clay sparrows into live birds, miraculously expanded a board Joseph needed lengthened in his carpentry shop, or how He punished people who offended Him with curses and even death.<sup>2</sup>

These stories are all out of character with the biblical witness of Jesus and have no historical credibility.

What is clear from Luke's Gospel is that Jesus grew up normally and not supernaturally fast. He became strong, but not super strong. He grew in wisdom. He passed the normal milestones of normal growth, normally.

Luke adds that "***the favor of God was upon Him.***" Again, there is nothing divine about this. It's a comment about the general blessing of God in His life.

These two sentences are all we have in Scripture about Jesus, ages five to twelve. Jesus' life prior to age thirty when He was baptized by John was "under-the-radar"...for the most part.

What we read today is the one exception to that rule.

<sup>1</sup> They returned to Nazareth, the village where everyone knew them and where everyone knew of Mary's out-of-wedlock pregnancy.

<sup>2</sup> These come mainly from The Infancy Gospel of Thomas. Dates from mid- to late-2<sup>nd</sup> century.

What we have in front of us now is a fascinating look at a twelve-year-old Jesus. The setting is the annual visit that all Jews - including Joseph and Mary - took to Jerusalem to observe the Passover.

### **The Witness of Jesus to Himself in Jerusalem (2:41-52)**

#### **The Crisis of a Missing Jesus (2:41-43)**

*Joseph's and Mary's tradition (v. 41)*

***[41] His parents went to Jerusalem every year at the Feast of the Passover.***

Note: Referring to Joseph and Mary as Jesus' parents...

First, a note on Luke's reference to "***His parents.***"

No, Luke was not contradicting the miracle he just recorded (Luke 1:26-38) that Jesus was conceived by the Holy Spirit and that Joseph was not, actually, Jesus' father.

Luke didn't need to replay that miracle every time he referred to Joseph. In practical terms, Joseph did serve as Jesus' earthly father.

#### **Tradition and command about going to Jerusalem**

The Old Testament Law required Jewish men to present themselves before the Lord to observe the three feasts of Passover, Pentecost, and Tabernacles.<sup>3</sup>

Once the nation was established in Jerusalem, that meant that men were required to go there to observe the feasts.

Then, once Babylon destroyed Jerusalem and the temple, when it was much more difficult for Jews to go to Jerusalem, they were encouraged to at least try to go to Jerusalem during Passover.

<sup>3</sup> The Law said nothing about women needing to go to the festivals. But women were always allowed to attend.

<sup>4</sup> The longer route avoided Samaria. We assume Joseph took that longer route.

#### **The piety and devotion of Joseph and Mary**

So, that Joseph and Mary regularly made the eighty to one hundred mile trek from Nazareth to Jerusalem spoke volumes about their devotion to God.<sup>4</sup>

This visit, though, was a special one. It was special because on this visit, Jesus was twelve years old.

*The independence of the twelve-year-old Jesus (vv. 42-43)*

**Jesus was twelve years old (v. 42)**

***[42] And when He was twelve years old, they went up there according to the custom of the feast.***

To the Jewish way of thinking, at twelve, Jesus was on the cusp of adulthood.

Evidently, the Jews didn't recognize a transitional age of "teens" between childhood and adulthood. You were a kid until you weren't. At that point, a boy started taking steps into manhood.<sup>5</sup>

Among those steps was that a boy was required to observe the Jewish festivals and feasts.

We assume that Jesus had travelled to Jerusalem with Joseph and Mary every year of His life and that this wasn't His first Passover.

But, as a Jewish boy, Jesus would have approached THIS Passover differently. His stature in Jewish society was changing. He was no longer going to be considered a child or a kid.

He was maturing, nearly grown.

<sup>5</sup> Today, twelve is the year before the Bar-mitzvah, when a boy became "a son of the Law." There was no "Bar-mitzvah ceremony" at the time of Jesus.

After spending the entire week at the feast (as was required by the Mosaic Law<sup>6</sup>) the caravan made up of wagons from a bunch of families from the same village that had travelled together to Jerusalem, loaded up, and started the journey back to Nazareth.<sup>7</sup>

Luke provides a critical detail.

Jesus' decision (v. 43)

***[43]...the boy Jesus stayed behind in Jerusalem.***

Jesus knew full well that Joseph and Mary had left with the caravan for Nazareth. And Jesus - "***the boy***" - chose to stay behind as the caravan pulled out.<sup>8</sup>

The key thing here is that His staying was a completely unilateral decision.

***[43]...the boy Jesus stayed behind in Jerusalem, but His parents were unaware of it.***

It wasn't that Joseph and Mary had intentionally left Jesus behind. They had every reason to assume that He was with them or friends or neighbors or relatives somewhere in the caravan.

Nor were they negligent. Jesus just didn't consult with His parents. He didn't ask their permission. He acted independently.<sup>9</sup>

**The Urgency of Searching for Jesus (2:44-45)**

His parents weren't used to this independent streak in Jesus, so ***[44]...they thought that He was somewhere in the caravan, and they went a day's journey; and then they began looking for Him among their relatives and acquaintances.***

***[45] And when they did not find Him, they returned to Jerusalem, looking for Him.***

This scene brings to mind those times when parents have come to church in separate cars, because they each had responsibilities during the morning.

They both pull into the driveway at home after church and both mom and dad look at each other and say, "*I thought you had her / him.*"

Imagine panic. Imagine a frantic search for Jesus when they realized that He wasn't anywhere to be found in the caravan.

That unsuccessful search on the evening of Day One led to a quick return to Jerusalem on Day Two and a search of the city on Day Three, which led to a find.

**The Relief at Finding Jesus (2:46-47)**

*Jesus with the teachers of the Jews (v. 46)*

***[46] Then, after three days they found Him in the temple, sitting in the midst of the teachers, both listening to them and asking them questions.***

In the temple with the teachers

It isn't clear where Jesus and "***the teachers***" were in the massive Herodian temple. No doubt it was in one of the outer courts.

<sup>6</sup> Evidently, some families spent only a portion of the Passover week at the festival in Jerusalem. (Exodus 12:15, 6; Leviticus 23:6-8)

<sup>7</sup> There was safety from robbers in numbers, and there was fun in numbers, too, as the families would sing and play while traveling together.

<sup>8</sup> Luke doesn't tell us what prompted Him to stay. Maybe it was something about His experience of the rites and rituals of the feast. Maybe it was the Passover meal itself that stirred something so deeply in Him that He decided to stay.

<sup>9</sup> This act tells us that Jesus was self-aware at age twelve, as will become clear.

But there was the twelve year old Jesus with these teachers, showing up for instruction.<sup>10</sup>

He was seated (maybe on the ground), signifying that He was there as a Learner, not as a Teacher.<sup>11</sup>

He was looking to grow in knowledge and wisdom from the most learned rabbis of the day. We wonder if Nicodemus was there? Or Caiaphas or Annas or Gamaliel, or Joseph of Arimathea?

### Interactive

Historians tell us that these Jewish teaching and learning sessions were very interactive.

Teachers asked learners questions and interacted with their answers. Learners asked questions of the teachers and might get asked a pointed follow-up before getting an answer.

And catch this: Jesus wasn't teaching. He was on the receiving end. Remember. He was twelve. He had very limited life experience and a limited knowledge base.

He was a growing Boy with a thirst to understand spiritual truth.

And while He wasn't teaching, there was something about the way He interacted with the teachers that blew everyone away.

*Jesus amazed those who heard Him (v. 47)*

***[47] And all who heard Him were amazed at His understanding and His answers.***

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<sup>10</sup> Luke says nothing negative in this passage about the Jewish teachers. He does not refer to them as “*no Mikos*” or “*grammateus*” which were the typical words Luke used to refer to Jewish teachers in the rest of his Gospel, but as “*didaskolos*,” which was Luke’s typical word for describing Jesus as a Teacher.

<sup>11</sup> The apocryphal accounts make Jesus’ teaching the point of the event. The Infancy Narrative of Thomas portrays Jesus’ comments as silencing the teachers.

This is not to say that they recognized Jesus’ divinity. What they saw was a level of comprehension and a depth of insight way beyond what they would have expected from a twelve year old boy.

I picture Jesus asking perceptive questions. And He was asking questions because He wanted to know things that He hadn’t had the chance to learn.

He wasn’t trying to trick or trip up the teachers. He was honestly hungry for truth from God’s Word.

And then the teachers were peppering Jesus with questions, too. That’s what happened during these sessions.<sup>12</sup>

And in all of it, Jesus displayed an unusual maturity, poise, and eagerness.

This was the scene Joseph and Mary encountered when they finally found Jesus after a couple of days of panicky searching.

### **The Challenge of Parenting the Lord Jesus Christ (2:48-50)**

*A complaint against Jesus, born of concern (v. 48)*

#### An admission of bewilderment

***[48a] When Joseph and Mary saw Him, they were bewildered.***

Parents get bewildered at times at the behavior of their children. Take heart, parents. Jesus’ parents got bewildered, too.

And the Arabic Infancy Gospel (50-52) has Jesus instructing the teachers from the prophets and about medicine and astronomy, physics, and more. This is not what happened.

<sup>12</sup> It is still what happens in Jewish training centers. The engagements were and are very Socratic.

They were bewildered at what was, for Him, unusual behavior. He had done this thing - abandoned them to spend time in the temple - apparently without giving any thought to what they thought.

They had twelve years of experience with Jesus. This was, for them, un-Jesus-like.

Hold that thought about bewilderment in the parent-child relationship, as we'll return to it in a minute.

We aren't surprised that it was His mother, Mary, who had some very mother-some words for Jesus.

#### An accusation of mistreatment

***[48]...and His mother said to Him, "Son, why have You treated us this way? Behold, Your father and I have been anxiously looking for You!"***

Of course, they were concerned about what could happen to Him - an unprotected twelve year old boy in the big city was definitely at risk.

But Mary's questions tell us that she thought Jesus was being unthoughtful / not submissive / disrespectful / insensitive by what He has done TO THEM.

She was both relieved...and frustrated. Her questions paved the way for a key teaching about Jesus' identify. From Jesus. To His parents.

*Jesus' first words - in Luke's Gospel (v. 49)*

***[49] And He said to them, "Why is it that you were looking for Me? Did you not know that I had to be<sup>13</sup> in My Father's house?"***

<sup>13</sup> We find Jesus' words "*I had to be...*" often in Luke's Gospel. It translates the Greek word "*dei*" which signifies divine necessity. Luke used it to refer to Jesus' mission, His suffering, fulfilled prophecy, and acts of discipleship. See here and at Luke 24:26; 24:44; 19:15. Also, at John 4:4 where we read that Jesus "*had to*" pass through Samaria, to meet and to evangelize the Samaritan woman.

#### Breakthrough communication from Jesus

These are Jesus' first words. Not His first words ever. He was a normal twelve year old, so He had been talking for years.

But these are the first words Luke decided to include from Jesus in His Gospel. We expect them to be significant. And they are.

And while these aren't Jesus' first words ever, these ARE, it seems, His first words to His parents about His special relationship with His FATHER.

I think Luke wants us to imagine twelve years of silence on Jesus' part with respect to His heavenly Father.

Joseph and Mary were "bewildered" by this breaking of a long silence.

It was not that they had not forgotten His virgin birth or the angels.

Rather, this was the first time Jesus acted or spoke in a way consistent with what they knew of His beginning.

It took them by surprise. So, Jesus responded. In His response, I think that there are at least three things going on.

#### Parsing Jesus' questions

First, there is a gentle but clear correction of His mother's words, "*Your father and I...*" Jesus replied, "***I must be in My Father's house / about My Father's business.***"<sup>14</sup>

He was reminding His parents, "*Mother, father. You know full well that I'm not the son of Joseph.*"

<sup>14</sup> Yes, locating Jesus was primary in Joseph's and Mary's mind, so I can see the possibility of translating "*in My Father's house.*" However, the larger point from Jesus was that He was always going to be putting priority of the affairs of His Father over that of His father I prefer to translate, "***I must be about My Father's business.***" (or, more literally, "***I must be about the things of My Father.***")

At it's most basic level, this is the twelve-year-old Jesus calling His parents to wake-up to who they knew He was.

Second, Jesus was affirming His uniquely intimate relationship to God.

Have you ever wondered when Jesus became aware of Who He was?

I don't think it was in the birth cave in the manger, and I don't think it was in His toddlerhood. So, when?

Well, there is no place in the Bible where we see Jesus see the light to understand that He was the Word become flesh / God of very God / the eternal Son of the Father.

But it seems to me to be clear that by this point (age twelve) Jesus knew that...

...He was more than a God-fearing Jew.

...He was more than simply one of God's faithful followers.

...He was distinct from other Jews.

Here, He claimed Sonship to God, a unique connection to God the Father. Unique by nature. Organically, one with the Almighty.

Third, we see here that Jesus knew that He was also unique in that He had a unique call from the Father on His life.

This was the "*moment of supreme insight*" - the aha" moment - for Joseph and Mary.

His message to His parents was that His life's vocation was not dependent on their guidance and direction. It depended on God.

His highest priority was not to be aligned with their plans and wishes. His highest priority was to be in alignment with His heavenly Father's plans and purposes.

To this point, throughout His childhood, He had given His full attention to what His parents wanted Him to do.

At this critical juncture (twelve years old), Jesus claimed that He - of necessity! ("***I must be...***") - was entering a new phase of life which will impact the nature of His relationship to them.

*"Mom. Dad. You're right in thinking that a child should be about His father's business. That was exactly what I was doing in the temple."*

We can say it in different ways, but the reality is now, "*My first allegiance has shifted. I don't answer to you. You're not the boss of Me.*"

And then Luke tells us that His parents didn't "*get it.*"

*His parents still don't "get it" (v. 50)*

***[50] And yet they on their part did not understand the statement which He had made to them.***

They didn't "*get*" that Jesus wasn't dependent on them for life direction, that He was more connected to God than to them, that He was independent from them.

Now, do you know what's funny? It's funny that we who come to this verse may not "*get it.*"

There are scholars who would tell us that it was only Joseph who was not understanding. Mary "*got it.*"

Or they suggest that it was bystanders who were confused, but not Mary and Joseph.

Still others believe that verse fifty is a gloss, a mistake. Fictitious. It couldn't have happened that Joseph and Mary didn't understand what Jesus was saying.

To which we say, "*Really?*"

Why is it hard for us to accept that it would have been hard for them to accept that their Twelve-Year-Old had a unique relationship with God Almighty that would have Him fulfilling a world-altering life mission?

The verse is true. And the more we think about it, the more it rings true that Joseph and Mary would have had a hard time with this new ground that Jesus was breaking.

Why be surprised at those who were slow to realize fully who Jesus was...and the implications of who He was.

I mean, I'll bet that Luke 2:50 would have been a huge help to believers way back in the first century who sometimes doubted or were confused by the Person and work of Jesus.

Right?

People who "got" that His birth fulfilled prophecy, that He was born of a virgin, that He was announced by angels and worshiped by magi might still have a hard time "getting" the course that His life would take as God's Messiah, or the demands He might make on their lives as the Son of God.

Luke ends the episode with Joseph, Mary, and Jesus settling down again in Nazareth. For now, it's life as usual, and the status is quo.

### **Mary Treasures (again) as Jesus Matures (2:51)**

***[51] And He went down with them and came to Nazareth, and He continued to be subject to them; and His mother treasured all these things in her heart.<sup>15</sup>***

The incident at the temple was a game changer, but it was evidently an isolated event. It was not repeated.<sup>16</sup>

Jesus continued to be subject to His parents as long as He lived under their roof.

### **Summary: Jesus' years 12-30 in Nazareth (2:52)**

***[52] And Jesus kept increasing in wisdom and stature, and in favor with God and people.<sup>17</sup>***

Before this, there had been silence about Jesus for about seven years. After this, there is silence for another eighteen years.

So, what do we do with the scene we have seen today?

### **Conclusion:**

The Jesus we meet in the earliest parts of Luke's Gospel is a Baby in Mary's womb, a Baby in a manger, a Baby dedicated in the temple.

He is the Son of God, but manageable.

What we have seen today is the transition from manageable to not.

Keep reading in Luke and you'll immediately find a Jesus who...  
...shows Himself superior to the temptations of the most malign force in the universe.

...proclaims Himself "***the Anointed***" upon Whom the Spirit of the Lord rests.

...heals and calls and preaches.

...reproves misguided Jewish rulers.

...took upon Himself the sins of the world.

...conquered death.

Earlier, we saw Jesus' parents' bewilderment at His decision to stay behind in Jerusalem. We got that.

<sup>15</sup> Mary did here what she also did after the shepherds visit at the cave. (Luke 2:19)

<sup>16</sup> Joseph is not mentioned again in Luke's gospel, not anywhere else as an active presence after this scene. It is usually assumed that he had died.

<sup>17</sup> There is similarity here to the concluding words about John's growth. (Luke 1:80) But Jesus' commendation is superior to John's.

Sure. Parents are often bewildered by their children's behaviors and attitudes.

Far more often, though, children are bewildered by their parents' strange rules ("*No running out into the street!*"), strong discipline when those rules are broken, their control over their children's lives, and the decisions their parents make, as they say, "*for your own good.*"

This morning, we've seen a striking transfer in the relationship between Jesus and His parents.

Now, it is Jesus - in the role of Parent - behaving in a way that the children - Joseph and Mary - didn't understand - but had to accept.

It had to be accepted because Jesus (the Firstborn of all creation, the eternal Son, according to Isaiah 9:6, the Everlasting Father), knows what is best for us. He requires the obedience He does and allows the hardships we experience "*for our own good.*"

When we hear Jesus calling to deny our own desires, take up our cross, and love Him so much that everything else looks like hate in comparison, we hear that as an invitation to abundance.

When we hear Him commission us to spread the Gospel and to make disciples, everywhere, and to give ourselves to loving the way Jesus loved, we eagerly obey, like children do who know that His commands are "*for our own good.*"