

NOT THE JESUS WE EXPECTED

Luke 2:41-52

INTRO

Today is the Day after Christmas and the final Sunday of Advent. I asked myself, what comes in Scripture right after the first Christmas? In Luke's account, he jumps from newborn Jesus to twelve-year-old Jesus visiting Jerusalem with his parents for the Passover Feast.

At twelve years old, Jesus gives a taste of his ministry and message – a kind of foreshadowing of what's to come.¹ And what's to come, we'll discover, is not on people's radars. With Mary and Joseph, we'll see that this is not the Jesus we expected.

I. Jesus is Not Where We Expected Him To Be

First, we need to set the scene:

1. Jesus had awesome parents!

(2:41) "Now his parents went to Jerusalem every year at the Feast of the Passover." This is a big deal – their yearly consistency speaks to Mary and Joseph's character – they were godly parents. In addition, Mary's attendance is noteworthy as only Jewish males were required to attend the feasts.

2. (2:42) Jesus going to Passover at twelve years old is significant. As one commentator explains, "Jewish custom specified that a boy should be taken to the feast a year or two before he was thirteen, when he would be made a 'son of the commandment' (bar mitsvah) and become an adult member of the Jewish religious community."² While there, Joseph and Mary likely showed Jesus around the city and the temple to prepare him for future visits.³ Everything is going great, until something goes very wrong.

¹ Darrell L. Bock, *Luke 1:1-9:50*, p. 263.

² *Reformation Study Bible*, p. 1787.

³ R.C. Sproul, sermon on November 6, 2021.

3. When Mary and Joseph make camp on the first night of their return journey to Bethlehem, they realize something is not right. “Is Jesus with you?” Mary says. “No,” Joseph says, “I thought he was with you.”

They would have traveled by caravan with others from their hometown for safety, and families would reunite at the evening encampment if they had gotten separated during the day.⁴ Joseph and Mary found each other, but not Jesus.

They made a quick decision to return to Jerusalem. By the time they got there and started scouring the city, it had already been two days since they last saw Jesus.

On the third day, they enter the temple and, ... “Mary, could that be him??”

4. There Jesus was, “sitting among the teachers.” This is not where they expected him to be. When they saw him, “they were astonished” (2:48), likely a combination of shock, relief, and exasperation.

Can you relate to Mary and Joseph? Have you found that Jesus is often not where you expect him to be and in the way you expect him to be there? Like when waves filled the disciples’ boat while Jesus was down below, fast asleep on a cushion (Mark 4)? Or when he stopped by a well outside Samaria to converse with a woman of scandalous repute? Or when his dinner party in Jericho was with Zacchaeus and not the religious elite?

What about you? Have there been times when you’ve needed Jesus and he seems to have vanished?

Mary’s words upon finding Jesus reveal a hint of anger: “Son, why have you treated us so?” Have there been times when you can’t sense Jesus near and resentment builds? “Jesus, where were you when _____.”

Jesus is at times not where we expect him to be. Or perhaps he is there, but not in the way we expected him to be.

II. Not What We Expected Him To Be Like (46a-51)

⁴ Bock, p. 265.

We see three qualities that those present were not expecting:

1. Twelve-year-old Jesus is **wise**

Remember where Mary and Joseph found him?

- (2:46) “In the temple” – during Passover season, it was “custom for the Sanhedrin (body of religious leaders) to meet in public in the temple courts to discuss...religious and theological questions.”⁵
- Jesus was “sitting among” these teachers – teachers would sit with their students in the ancient world,⁶ and there would have likely been some famous teachers in town due to Passover.⁷
- What was Jesus doing there? “listening to them and asking them questions” – it was common in Judaism for students to enter into question-and-answer dialogue with mentors.⁸

In this setting, “all who heard [Jesus] were amazed at his understanding and his answers” (2:47). The word translated “understanding” refers to the ability to “penetrate to the heart of an issue.”⁹ Jesus was not simply smart – he understood things to their very core.

Jesus possessed a depth of wisdom far beyond his years;

2. he also displayed **divine intimacy**

This comes out in the dialogue with his parents after they find him.

Mary is clearly distraught: “Son, why have you treated us so? Behold, your father and I have been searching for you in great distress” (2:48).

Another way to say that is: “Son, why have you been so uncaring? You have no idea the deep mental pain and trauma¹⁰ you have put your father and I through.”

Jesus answers their question with questions of his own, which reveal the heart of his mission: “Why were you looking for me? Did you not know that I must be in my Father’s house?”

⁵ William Barclay, *Luke*, p. 29.

⁶ Bock, p. 267.

⁷ William Hendriksen, *Luke*, p. 184

⁸ Bock, p. 267.

⁹ Bock, p. 268.

¹⁰ Bock, p. 268.

Jesus is making several seismic statements here:

- a. Intimacy with God – Notice, both Mary and Jesus use the word “father,” but they mean different people.

Mary spoke of his earthly, legal father (Joseph).¹¹

Jesus speaks of his heavenly, eternal Father. Jesus was claiming to be God’s Son, a claim that later gets him killed (22:70-71).

There’s a sense of divine intimacy here. He and God the Father have a one-of-a-kind relationship. We sing of it at Christmas: “Veiled in flesh the Godhead see; hail Incarnate Deity.”¹²

- b. Jesus is also certain about his purpose on earth. “Mom, you should have known where to look; I **must** be in my Father’s house.” Jesus has an urgency to do his Father’s will, so much so that he stayed in Jerusalem when his parents left Passover.

Jesus is shockingly wise, he has an intimate relationship with the Father, and he is certain of his purpose. Which together make the final quality surprising:

3. Jesus was **submissive** to his parents.

(2:50-51) His parents did not grasp the earth-shattering statement Jesus just made, and yet we read “he went down with them and came to Nazareth and was submissive to them.”

Jesus, the eternal Son of God, obeyed his parents. The Law-giver fulfilled the fifth commandment to honor his father and mother.

Jesus is not where we expect him to be, he is not what we expect him to be like, and

¹¹ Hendriksen, p. 185.

¹² *Hark, the Herald Angels Sing*

III. Not Doing What We Expected Him to Do

Among all the expectations and hopes for the coming Messiah, this picture of Jesus sitting in the temple discussing theology is not one of them.

Perhaps the expectations of the Messiah fell in line with Old Testament examples where God saved his people from their enemies through warrior judges and kings. No one expected a king who would defeat his enemies by transforming them into friends.

With thousands of years of prophecy and foreshadowing, how could even those closest to Jesus not get it?

Think of Jesus' cousin and forerunner, John the Baptist who grew up with Jesus and called him the Lamb of God who takes away the sins of the world. Early in Jesus' ministry we find John in prison having second thoughts. So much so that he sends two of his followers to ask Jesus, "Are you the one who is to come, or shall we look for another?" (7:18-23).

Or what about the twelve disciples – Jesus' closest friends and students who ate, slept, traveled, and suffered with Jesus for three years? By the final week of his life, Jesus had already explained twice what would soon take place; both times going over their heads. So he gave it one more shot:

(18:31ff) "And taking the twelve, he said to them, 'See, we are going up to Jerusalem, and everything that is written about the Son of Man by the prophets will be accomplished. For he will be delivered over to the Gentiles and will be mocked and shamefully treated and spit upon. And after flogging him, they will kill him, and on the third day he will rise.'"

It's hard to get more clear than that. Surely this time it sunk in.

"But they understood none of these things. This saying was hidden from them, and they did not grasp what was said" (18:34).

What about his own mother? The angel literally told her: "The Holy Spirit will come upon you, and the power of the Most High will overshadow you; therefore, the child to be born will be called holy – the Son of God" (1:35)

And yet when Jesus said he must be in his Father's house, (2:50) Mary and Joseph "did not understand the saying that he spoke to them."

The Son of God – could it be? God himself, come to save us from our sins and close the path to death and tears by his own suffering? Not what anyone expected.

While they did not understand at the time, we are told that Mary "treasured up all these things in her heart" (2:51). Mary held onto Jesus' words, knowing that one day, they would all make sense. She knew all along that there was more to Jesus than anyone dared to hope.

Her understanding of Jesus' identity deepened over the years, so that by the wedding at Cana when the wine ran out, she could tell the servants, "Do whatever he tells you" (John 2:5).

She knew he is not the Jesus we expected but the Jesus we need.

- She knew he is not where we expected him to be because he had to be in his Father's house, showing us the way to the Father.
- She knew he is not what we expect him to be like – he is much more: Wisdom in flesh, one with the Father, submitting himself unto death.
- She knew that he would not do what we expected him to do. Years later, she must have wondered what it was like for twelve-year-old Jesus to travel to Jerusalem on the Passover, knowing that one day, he would be the spotless Passover Lamb to fulfill them all.

All the blood of all the previous lambs pointing to his blood; the temple pointing to his body; the teachers who sat amazed perhaps some of the very ones calling for his death twenty years later.

Whatever questions Mary still had are all answered now. So will it be with our questions: "Jesus, why have you treated me so? Where were you when _____?" He will say, "I never left."

And we will find him in the heavenly temple – the New Jerusalem – the teacher seated on a throne with his students gazing on. And we will be amazed at his understanding and his answers, and it will all make sense

– he had to be in his Father’s house so that we might be brought in to taste the same intimacy with the Father.

And with Mary we will never finish treasuring all these things in our hearts.

He is not the Jesus we expected. He’s far better.

“Hark, the herald angels sing,
Glory to the [risen] King!”¹³

¹³ Charles Wesley, *Hark, the Herald Angels Sing*