

Jesus in the Temple
Luke 2:39-52

Today is the first Sunday of Advent. The term advent simply means “coming.” During the four Sundays of Advent we celebrate the incarnation, Jesus coming to earth to become one of us. For this year’s Advent sermon series we are going to consider four events in the life of Jesus between His infancy and His public ministry. These events each reveal something significant about Jesus: His identity, His calling, His priorities, His example. These events educate us on how we should relate to Him and what we should expect from Him.

Today we are going to consider Luke 2:39-52 which describes Jesus’ experience at the temple in Jerusalem when He was twelve years old. This incident points to some very specific ways that we can and should relate to Jesus. We’ll consider the text of Luke 2, then we’ll discuss two insights about relating to Jesus.

An Incident from Jesus’ Childhood (Luke 2:39-52)

39 When they had performed everything according to the Law of the Lord, they returned to Galilee, to their own city of Nazareth. 40 The Child continued to grow and become strong, increasing in wisdom; and the grace of God was upon Him.

Joseph and Mary were devout Jews who “performed everything” that the Law demanded. Earlier in chapter 2 Luke describes how they brought Jesus to the temple to “present Him to the Lord” at eight days old. They eventually returned to the city of Nazareth. Luke doesn’t mention the events recorded in Matthew 1 about the visit of the Magi from the east, the journey to Egypt, and the “slaughter of the innocents” (Matthew 2:1-21).

Luke simply tells his readers that they returned to Nazareth where “the Child continued to grow and become strong, increasing in wisdom; and the grace of God was upon Him.” Jesus matured physically, mentally, morally, and spiritually. Jesus made this progress because the “grace of God was upon Him.” God’s blessing was evident in Jesus’ life. [Luke’s description reminds us of descriptions of Samson (Judges 13:24) and Samuel (1 Samuel 2:21).]

Beginning in verse 41 Luke describes Mary and Joseph’s annual trip to Jerusalem at Passover. Passover was the festival that celebrated God bringing the children of Israel out of slavery in Egypt.

41 Now His parents went to Jerusalem every year at the Feast of the Passover. 42 And when He became twelve, they went up there according to the custom of the Feast; 43 and as they were returning, after spending the full number of days, the boy Jesus stayed behind in Jerusalem. But His parents were unaware of it, 44 but supposed Him to be in the caravan, and went a day’s journey; and they began looking for Him among their relatives and acquaintances. 45 When they did not find Him, they returned to Jerusalem looking for Him.

Apparently everyone from Nazareth (or the surrounding area) travelled back home in a caravan which could have stretched out a mile or more. Some sources tell us that the women and children might have traveled in the front, with the men and young men behind. It's not hard to imagine that Joseph thought Jesus was ahead with Mary and that Mary thought Jesus was behind with Joseph. Whatever the case, after a day's journey they realized that Jesus was nowhere to be found. So they spent the second day traveling back to Jerusalem.

If you've ever lost track of a child in a crowd, you know how fearful it can be. This very thing happened to Brenda and me with our daughter Rose when she was about 5 years old. We were at a K-State football game. I didn't realize she was following me when I left our seats to go to the concession stand. When I got back Brenda was like, "Where's Rose?" That's when the panic set in. We eventually found her at the Red Cross station. Mary and Joseph found their son in the temple.

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

Jesus assumed the posture of a student among the teachers. Jesus interacted with the teachers by "listening to them and asking them questions." Sometimes a question can be so insightful or interesting that you want to inquire of the questioner to find out what is behind a question or a perspective. That apparently happened with Jesus; we know that Jesus fielded questions because in verse 47 Luke writes that "all who heard Him were amazed at His understanding and His answers." This is more evidence that Jesus was "increasing in wisdom" and that "the grace of God was upon Him" (v. 40).

Jesus' mother had a similar reaction initially, which quickly gave way to hurt and disappointment.

48 When they saw Him, they were astonished; 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."

Mary's response is fully appropriate for a mother who had been fearing for her son's safety for the past two days. When she found out that Jesus hadn't been robbed or kidnapped or harmed in any way, but that He had willingly stayed behind without letting them know, she was hurt. And so she asked Jesus, "Son, why have You treated us this way?" If she were expecting an apology, she was sorely disappointed.

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

Not only did Mary not get an apology; she got questions that implied that **she and Joseph** were the ones who lacked understanding. I don't think Jesus was "playing dumb" when He responded as He did. Jesus was legitimately surprised that they had

been looking for Him; in His mind, they should have known that He would be in the temple.

How Jesus expresses Himself is significant: “Did you not know know that I **had** to be in My **Father’s** house?” Jesus was saying that His relationship with His heavenly Father took precedence over His relationship with His earthly parents. On one level Mary probably knew this; the angel had been very clear about Jesus’ identity as the “Son of the Most High God.” But on another level it was a shock to realize that Jesus’ identity would require her to relinquish the normal expectations of a mother.

At least two things are significant here. First, Jesus had a **strong sense of calling** - even at age twelve. He “had” to be in His Father’s house. This same “divine necessity” is reflected in many of Jesus’ subsequent statements recorded in Luke. A couple of examples:

- “The Son of Man **must suffer** many things and be rejected . . . and be killed and be raised up on the third day.” (Luke 9:22)
- “. . . I **must journey** on today and tomorrow and the next day; for it cannot be that a prophet would perish outside of Jerusalem.” (Luke 13:33)

Even at age twelve Jesus had a strong sense of His own calling that is reflected in His comment that He “**had** to be in [His] Father’s house.”

Second, it’s significant that Jesus speaks of the temple as “My **Father’s** house.” Luke had already gone into great detail about Joseph not being Jesus’ biological father (see 1:26-38). Now Jesus declares that **God** is His “Father.” Because God was Jesus’ Father, Mary and Joseph should have known that He had to be in His Father’s house; that’s where the Son was most fully at home - in His Father’s house.

I suspect that if we had to choose sides, most of us would probably side with Mary. She was only being a good mom by being anxious about her Son’s safety. But this is one of the core reasons that we have the gospels: so that we might understand the mind of Christ. Specifically Jesus’ comment here shows us that devotion to our heavenly Father must eventually eclipse our devotion to our earthly families (see Matthew 12:46-50).

50 But they did not understand the statement which He had made to them.

Mary and Joseph’s reaction foreshadowed the reaction Jesus would get as an adult. Even those closest to Him didn’t understand many of the things that Jesus taught. Two times in this gospel Luke will tell us that Jesus’ disciples didn’t understand when He told them that He would be delivered over to the authorities and crucified (9:45, 18:34). It wasn’t until after the resurrection that their eyes were opened and they understood in retrospect the things Jesus had taught them.

51 And He went down with them and came to Nazareth, and He continued in subjection to them; and His mother treasured all these things in her heart.

Jesus submitted to Mary and Joseph’s parental authority. And Mary “treasured all these things in her heart.” Even though she didn’t understand it all, she continued to dwell

upon Jesus' words and actions. In this way Mary is a great example for us to follow. Finally, we read this about Jesus.

52 And Jesus kept increasing in wisdom and stature, and in favor with God and men.

As in verse 40, Luke mentions that Jesus "kept increasing in wisdom." He got more and more skillful at living His life. He also "kept increasing in . . . stature," which could either refer to your height or to your maturity (which is probably what is meant here). Consequently, He also kept increasing "in favor with God and men." Not only did Jesus find favor before His heavenly Father; He also found favor with other people. He had a good reputation in His hometown; the way He lived His life invited people to have a favorable opinion of Him.

Luke's description of Jesus' childhood provides a bridge between His infancy and His public ministry at age 30. During those years Jesus grew up in all the ways that mattered and became more and more devoted to His Father and His will. This devotion would ultimately lead Him to the cross as our substitute.

Two Insights from this Incident:

Jesus' childhood development confirms that He became "fully human" for us. (Luke 2:40, 52, Hebrews 2:14-18, 5:8-10, etc.) We saw in the bookends of this passage (verses 40 and 52) how Jesus grew in grace throughout His childhood. Such statements confirm that Jesus was fully human. He developed normally as any human child.

Whether or not Jesus was fully human was a topic of great debate in the early centuries of the church. The issue was settled at the Council of Chalcedon in 451 by concluding that Scripture teaches that Jesus is "truly God and truly man," both natures coming together "to form one person." This faithfully reflects what is taught in Scripture about Jesus. He was (and is) fully God and fully man in one person. Reading the gospels you never get the sense that Jesus has two centers of consciousness - as if His humanity and divinity debated back and forth between each other. No, we get the sense that Jesus' divine and human natures are united in one person.

The book of Hebrews emphasizes that Jesus became fully human so that He might fully ***identify*** with humanity, die as our substitute, and then serve as our great High Priest. Hebrews 2 tells us this:

17 Therefore, He had to be made like His brethren in all things, so that He might become a merciful and faithful high priest in things pertaining to God, to make propitiation for the sins of the people. 18 For since He Himself was tempted in that which He has suffered, He is able to come to the aid of those who are tempted.

First, because He was fully human Jesus was qualified to die as our substitute, "mak[ing] propitiation for the sins of the people." Second, because He was fully human, He knows experientially what you and I go through when we are tempted. Hebrews 4

adds that Jesus “has been tempted in all things as we are, yet without sin.” This means that because Jesus successfully negotiated every temptation He faced without sinning, He is perfectly qualified to come to our aid when we’re tempted.

For example. . . Some of you are still young enough to be living in your parents home; some of you may even be twelve years old. Like Jesus, you might find it challenging to submit to your parents’ demands; you may think that what they ask you to do is completely unreasonable and that you are much wiser and clued in to how this world really works than they are. You may be tempted to be unkind and disrespectful and ungrateful (and about 30 other things) toward your parents.

Honestly, if you let Him Jesus can really help you relate to your parents without sinning against them and against God. Jesus actually **was** wiser and more clued in to how this world works than His parents, but He submitted to them anyway. He went home to Nazareth and accepted His parents’ God-given authority over His life. Jesus understands what you’re experiencing; He “gets it” and He can help you if you let Him.

This is really true for every single believer: Jesus really understands our temptations and will help us if we let Him.

Jesus’ devotion to His heavenly Father informs our discipleship. (Luke 2:49, John 4:34, etc.) We’ve seen today that Jesus’ highest devotion was to His heavenly Father. Even at age twelve Jesus **had** to be in His Father’s house. During His public ministry Jesus made explicit what was becoming increasingly clear during His childhood: Jesus’ devotion to His heavenly Father trumped every other relationship in His life.

You may remember what Jesus told His disciples in John 4. Jesus had been talking with the Samaritan woman about her life, about living water, and about His own identity as the Messiah. When the disciples urged Him to eat something, John records this:

32 But He said to them, “I have food to eat that you do not know about.” 33 So the disciples were saying to one another, “No one brought Him anything to eat, did he?”
34 Jesus said to them, “My food is to do the will of Him who sent Me and to accomplish His work.”

Food is what nourishes you and keeps you alive. Food is essential, not incidental. By saying, “My food is to do the will of Him who sent Me and to accomplish His work,” Jesus was saying that the will of God was at the core of His life. Because God had sent Him, doing God’s will was essential, not incidental to His life.

Everyone who wanted to become a disciple of Jesus would learn from Him this same devotion to the Father’s will. Even Mary would need to apprentice herself to Jesus and learn from Him the centrality of the Father’s will in all of life. Of course for Mary this involved accepting that Her Son was the Lamb of God who would be sacrificed for the sins of the people. As Simeon the high priest had prophesied, “a sword would pierce [her] own soul” (Luke 2:35). Making the transition from being Jesus’ mother to being

Jesus' disciple was difficult, but that's a transition she made. This is a transition that you and I continue to make throughout our lives.

For example, it is the will of God that we "clothe ourselves with humility toward one another" (we're told that in 1 Peter 5:5). Therefore, our discipleship involves learning humility from Jesus, the most humble person who ever walked on this earth. His incarnation itself was an expression of humility. He humbled Himself by submitting to Joseph and Mary. He humbled Himself by becoming obedient to the point of death. If we let Him, Jesus will teach us how to be humble toward each other. John Stott made the following statement:

*"At every stage of our Christian development and in every sphere of our Christian discipleship, **pride is the greatest enemy and humility our greatest friend.**"*

John Stott

Where do you need to learn humility in your discipleship as an expression of the will of God? In the way you think about others? In a relationship? In a circumstance? As followers of Jesus, we need to be willing to say, "Like Jesus, my food is to do the will of God . . . which involves clothing myself with humility."

But perhaps you find yourself thinking, "But you don't understand how hard it is to be humble toward people who are proud. . . toward people who are wrong . . . toward people who are inferior to me in their thinking and their behavior. . ."

This is why we need to let **Jesus** teach us humility. Jesus was surrounded by people who actually were inferior in their thinking and acting and commitments. And yet He remained humble. Jesus was **always** right and yet he remained patient and kind and gentle and humble in heart. . ." Humility isn't a function of being inferior to people; humility is a function of love. If we love people, we will be humble toward them.

Because of His devotion to the Father's will, Jesus is uniquely qualified to teach us how to walk in humility in this life. The question is whether or not we're willing to learn.

If I could urge one thing upon you this Advent season, I'd urge you to consider how you relate to Jesus. Specifically, I would urge you to relate to Jesus as One who fully understands your life, as One who can help you negotiate the temptations your face, and as One who can not only teach you to **do** the Father's will but also to **love** the Father's will.