

# "Jesus at Twelve"

## Luke 2:41-52

Baxter T. Exum (#945)  
Four Lakes Church of Christ  
Madison, Wisconsin  
October 28, 2007



### Introduction:

One of the students in the Kindergarten-2<sup>nd</sup> Grade class downstairs has requested a lesson on the subject of "**Jesus when He was a boy.**" This morning I would like for us to study that request by going back and looking very carefully at the second chapter of the New Testament book of **Luke**. For some reason, Luke is the only Bible writer who gives us any information at all about the life of Christ between the time he was a baby and the time that He started preaching at the age of 30. That account is found in **Luke 2**, and it tells of a rather unusual event from a time when Jesus was only 12 years old. **\*\*PPT\*\***

This morning, as we go back to the only inspired account of Jesus as a boy and as we look at the very first words of Christ ever to be recorded in the Bible, I would like for us to consider several lessons that we will hopefully be able to apply to our lives today. So if you will, please look with me at **Luke 2:41-52**...

***<sup>41</sup> Now His parents went to Jerusalem every year at the Feast of the Passover. <sup>42</sup> And when He became twelve, they went up there according to the custom of the Feast; <sup>43</sup> 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, <sup>44</sup> 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. <sup>45</sup> When they did not find Him, they returned to Jerusalem looking for Him. <sup>46</sup> 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. <sup>47</sup> And all who heard Him were amazed at His understanding and His answers. <sup>48</sup> 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." <sup>49</sup> 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?" <sup>50</sup> But they did not understand the statement which He had made to them. <sup>51</sup> 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. <sup>52</sup> And Jesus kept increasing in wisdom and stature, and in favor with God and men.***

As we look at these eleven verses, please think with me about several lessons we can learn.

**I. First of all, we notice in verses 41-42 that JESUS' PARENTS DID WHAT WAS BEST FOR THE SPIRITUAL HEALTH OF THEIR FAMILY. **\*\*PPT\*\*****

In fact, we can even look back further, and we find that the spiritual emphasis was life-long. In verse 22, when Jesus was a little baby, we find that His parents acted, **"...according to the law of Moses,"** and **"...brought Him up to Jerusalem to present Him to the Lord."** In verse 23, we find that this commandment was, **"...written in the Law of the Lord."** In verse 24, this sacrifice was done, **"...according to what was said in the Law of the Lord."** In verse 27, Mary and Joseph brought Jesus to the temple, **"...to carry out for Him the custom of the Law."** And even when Jesus was a very small child, we find in verses 39-40, **"When they had performed everything according to the Law of the Lord, they returned to Galilee, to their own city of Nazareth. The Child continued to grow and become strong, increasing in wisdom; and the grace of God was upon Him."** Mary and Joseph, therefore, were doing everything possible for the spiritual health of their own family.

And then we come to our text for this morning—roughly 12 years later—and we find that the tradition had continued. According to verse 41, **"Now His parents went to Jerusalem every year at the Feast of the Passover."** In other words, Mary and Joseph were in the habit of going to Jerusalem every year for the Feast of the Passover. As I understand it, the custom of the time was that all Jewish men within 15 miles of Jerusalem were required to come in to celebrate the Passover. However, we know from looking at a map that Nazareth is roughly 65 miles north of Jerusalem. In other words, Mary and Joseph went above and beyond the bare minimum. We can only imagine that it would have been a very expensive journey. Today we don't think a whole lot about driving 65 miles. We have members who make that commute to Four Lakes on a regular basis—it takes maybe an hour and a half. But 2,000 years ago, 65 miles was a journey.

They made this journey every year, and in verse 42, we find that they bring Jesus, **"...according to the custom of the Feast."** Most scholars tell us that this was most likely the ancient equivalent of the Jewish Bar Mitzvah ceremony—the point at which a boy became a man—when a young man became a "Son of the Covenant"—when a young man became personally accountable to God.

What I find interesting here is that only Joseph was technically required to go to Jerusalem for Passover on a yearly basis, but we find here that Mary was also in the habit of going with him. Mary went above and beyond the minimum requirement and set an example for her Son. Over time, that example of faithfulness caught on. A few chapters later, as Jesus starts His ministry, we have another tiny peek into His past. In Luke 4:16, the Bible says, **"And He came to Nazareth, where He had been brought up; and as was His custom, He entered the synagogue on the Sabbath, and stood up to read."** Very interesting! At the age of 30, Jesus goes back home and goes to the synagogue to read, **"...as was His custom."** At the age of 30, Jesus was in the habit of going to the synagogue every Sabbath to read from God's Law. Certainly Mary and Joseph took Deuteronomy 6 seriously—that passage

that was read to us earlier this morning. Mary and Joseph took every opportunity to teach their Son the Law of God.

As parents, it seems there is a special lesson for us this morning—to commit ourselves to always putting our children in a position where they will respect and appreciate the word of God. Let us make the Lord’s Day a day to look forward to—the high point of the week. Let us get in the habit of making Sunday special. For the little ones, if that means always stopping for Culver’s on the way home—well, maybe that’s what it takes! But let us focus on making the first day of each week a highlight for the family. Perhaps we can sit down as a family and brainstorm for ways to make Sunday more enjoyable. But above all, as parents, we need to follow the example of Joseph and Mary. Both parents made it a priority to make sure their children were in the habit of respecting the word of God in an appropriate way.

**II. As we go back to Luke 2, we see a second lesson as we find (starting in verse 43) that JESUS GETS TO A POINT IN HIS LIFE WHERE HE STARTS TAKING PERSONAL RESPONSIBILITY FOR HIS OWN SPIRITUAL GROWTH. **\*\*PPT\*\*****

We know from history that the religious education of Jewish young men was divided into three phases. At around 5 years old, little boys would be sent to school for about five years to learn how to read and memorize the Law of Moses. There were no questions about the Law itself allowed—they were simply to learn how to read and memorize. In phase 2, young men would go for another five years or so in order to study and memorize the Talmud—basically, a commentary on the Law of Moses—the various interpretations about God’s Law, and during this time no questions were allowed. About halfway through this phase, most young men would reach the age of 12 or 13, where they would “become a man.” Most would quit school at this point and then go on to learn a trade from their father. Phase 3 was only for those who were especially gifted, and only in this phase were young men allowed to discuss, and ask questions, and argue, and interpret. We can imagine that after ten years of memorizing the Law and the commentaries on it, most young men were usually ready to ask some serious questions at this point. Most young men were ready to argue and debate and have a few ideas of their own.

And so we find that Jesus is right in the middle here—he is right at the point of reaching His own age of accountability, and in the middle of this process it appears that He takes some level of responsibility for His own spiritual growth. Up to this point, the burden has been primarily on His parents, but now He steps out on His own. He starts getting His information from another source. He starts looking beyond His parents and beyond the teachers at His local synagogue. He takes the initiative to ask questions and come to His own conclusions. We can almost see His mind processing all of this new information. As He gets to this age, and as he finishes his first Passover as a “man,” perhaps he realizes that in a number of years He will end up as the very last Passover Lamb ever slain. As He comes to that realization, and as His parents are wrapping up their visit to Jerusalem, Jesus decides that He has not had enough! And so without telling His parents, Jesus quietly stays

behind, he allows them to leave to go back home, and he continues studying with the leaders in the temple.

We can only imagine what His parents were going through. I don't know how many of you have lost a child for any length of time. Perhaps you have been separated at a ball game or maybe at the grocery store, but for most of us a little panic sets in, our minds race as we think of all of the terrible things that might happen—maybe there's even a little embarrassment that sets in. I mean, it's a day's journey—that would be like us leaving on a trip to Nashville and then noticing that one of our children is missing once we get there!

But please notice with me starting in **verse 43** that Jesus stays behind. According to **verse 44**, they assumed that he was in the caravan. They apparently traveled with a huge group of family and perhaps others from the Nazareth area. I have read that the women and the children would often start several hours before the men, and the men would break up camp and catch up somewhere along the way. And then at the end of the day they would all be together and camp out for the night, and then the process would start all over again the next morning. In my own mind, I imagine Mary thinking He was with Joseph and Joseph thinking He was with Mary, and when they get together for the night, they start to tuck in their seven children, and they realize that their oldest is missing! That's the end of Day #1. What a hard night that must have been—knowing that their 12 year old son is missing! They wake up the next morning and travel back to Jerusalem. That's Day #2 (another sleepless night, another day of panic). On Day #3 they wake up in the morning, they spend all day looking for Jesus all over Jerusalem before they finally find him in the temple.

Some of the commentaries seem to think that Jesus was teaching in the temple—that He was setting the religious leaders straight, that He was correcting them, but please notice what the Bible actually says in **verse 46**—we find that Jesus was, **"...both listening to them and asking them questions."** In other words, Jesus was learning! Jesus was soaking it up like a sponge! The Son of God was learning! Over the past twelve years, I am sure He heard a lot of sermons—like a lot of us have—and maybe (like today) not all of those sermons were the best He had ever heard—but the Son of God was learning from that experience.

From Mary and Joseph's point of view, we can certainly understand what Mary says in **verse 48**, **"Son, why have You treated us this way? Behold, Your father and I have been anxiously looking for You."** And we learn our lesson from Jesus' response in **verse 49**, as He says, **"Why is it that you were looking for Me? Did you not know that I had to be in My Father's house?"** Jesus was basically saying, "Based on what you know about Me, you should have known that I would be here." And so for the first time, Jesus identifies Himself with His Father in heaven instead of with His earthly step-father. It had been almost thirteen years since Mary and Joseph had been visited by the angel. A lot had happened in those thirteen years. Jesus had grown up. He was a normal kid. He did not sin, but far as we can tell from the Scriptures, Jesus would have played and gone to school just like anyone else. And yet here at the age of twelve, Jesus starts to take responsibility for His own spiritual growth. He realized that He was responsible to learn God's Law—not

just because His parents were teaching it, not just because His parents were taking Him or forcing Him to go to the synagogue and the temple, but because He wanted to learn it on His own. He was planning for His own spiritual future.

This morning, we hope and pray that our own children will get to that point. For some it happens around the age of twelve (like it did for Jesus); for others it comes a little sooner or a little later. But we learn from Jesus that a time eventually comes when children will hopefully become interested in their own spiritual growth.

**III. As we continue looking at Luke 2, we find another lesson in verse 51 as we see that JESUS ACCEPTED THE LIMITATIONS OF BEING HUMAN BY BEING SUBJECT TO HIS EARTHLY PARENTS. **\*\*PPT\*\*****

At first, it does not appear that Jesus is very obedient. After all, He quietly stays behind and allows his parents to worry. But think about His options. What if Jesus had said, "Mom and dad, I'd like for you guys to go on home while I stay here in Jerusalem for a few more days talking to the most brilliant scholars in Israel"? I am guessing that they might have denied that request! And so on one hand, Jesus was a 12-year old boy who needed to be with His parents. But on the other hand, Jesus was also God in the flesh, and as God, Jesus knew that He needed to study and ask some questions that He was not getting answers to in Nazareth. As God, therefore, Jesus literally had authority over His own parents. But even in such an unusual situation, Jesus never disobeyed. He simply did not ask permission!

Mary and Joseph were so upset because they failed to realize that as mere human beings their authority was hugely outranked by this 12-year old boy that God had very temporarily put in their custody. Jesus, then, had a right to stay in Jerusalem, and so Jesus had to very gently remind his own earthly parents that He was actually more concerned about his heavenly Father. He had a bigger job to do.

But even in the middle of all of this, please look with me again at verse 51. The Bible says, "***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.***" If there had ever been a child in the history of the world who had a right to outright disobey or disrespect his parents, it would have been Jesus. Can we even imagine how hard that would have been? For those of us as adults, maybe we could try to imagine taking our minds right now and being put back in the body of a 12-year old—being placed in a home having parents younger than we are—eating whatever they tell us to eat, going to bed before they do, being forced to take out the trash or do the dishes. It would be so hard! And yet verse 51 tells us that when Jesus made it home from Jerusalem, "***...He continued in subjection to them.***" In other words, He had always been in subjection to his parents, and He was continuing in subjection to them. What an example for our own children! The Son of God obeyed Joseph and Mary. He submitted Himself to two imperfect human beings. Jesus was an obedient child.

After the next phase of His schooling, we assume that Jesus was trained by His father to be a carpenter. So here we have the being who made the trees subjecting Himself to a common carpenter. And yet the ancient rabbis had a saying, "He who does not teach his son a trade, teaches him to steal." Joseph, therefore, apparently trained Jesus in the skill of carpentry. We know from **Mark 6:3** that Jesus worked as a carpenter. And from this point on we never hear from Joseph again. Most people assume that he died sometime before Jesus started His ministry.

Nevertheless, we find here that Jesus left Jerusalem to go back to the life of the working poor. He went back to the life of a commoner. He went back to living with an obscure family to learn about God through a common man's struggle. He became a man like us! We start to understand what Paul meant when he said in **Philippians 2** that Jesus, **"...who, although He existed in the form of God, did not regard equality with God a thing to be grasped, but emptied Himself, taking the form of a bond-servant, and being made in the likeness of men."** **Hebrews 5:8-9** also starts to make a lot of sense, **"Although He was a Son, He learned obedience from the things which He suffered. And having been made perfect, He became to all those who obey Him the source of eternal salvation."** Jesus has a right to tell us to obey and respect our parents, because He knows what it is like!

As we try to apply this to the children here this morning, maybe I should ask a question: Have any of us ever had perfect parents? I doubt any of us could honestly say that our parents are perfect. But generally speaking, most parents deserve an "A" for effort. Most parents are doing the best they can. This morning then, let's recommit ourselves to honoring and respecting and obeying our parents as we should. And as we grow up, if we have a question about something we maybe should or shouldn't do, let's ask our parents first. Let us get their advice and ask them what they think.

It is interesting to me that we do not hear about Jesus again until He is 30 years old as He starts His ministry. The next 18 years are missing. I have a theory on this: I think Mary might have been so mad that she grounded Him for the next 18 years! I don't know, I guess I doubt it, but we do learn that Jesus continued to honor and respect His parents.

#### **IV. As we come near the end, we have one final lesson as JESUS CONTINUED TO GROW IN EVERY IMPORTANT AREA. \*\*PPT\*\***

Jesus' growth was balanced. In **verse 52**, the Bible says, **"And Jesus kept increasing in wisdom and stature, and in favor with God and men."**

He increased in wisdom. In other words, He increased in His ability to make good decisions, to tell right from wrong and then to act on that information. He increased intellectually.

Not only did Jesus grow in wisdom, but He also grew in stature. In other words, He got bigger, He got stronger over time. He took care of Himself. He was healthy. The Bible teaches that our bodies are temples of the Holy Spirit. God cares about how we take care of ourselves. God cares what we eat. God cares how much we exercise. God cares whether we smoke or abuse our bodies in other ways. God wants us to grow in stature.

We also find that Jesus grew in favor with God and man. **"With God"** apparently means that Jesus grew in His understanding of God. He grew closer to His Father in heaven. His faith got stronger. I have read that when it comes to faith every child is home schooled, because faith is always taught in the home. We have learned this morning that Jesus learned the importance of faith from Mary and Joseph.

And then finally, Jesus also grew in favor with man. In other words, He grew socially. Jesus had the ability to make friends and get along with others. He learned compassion. He developed the ability to be kind and then to act on that kindness.

And all of this tells us that Jesus grew in a balanced way. He grew intellectually, and physically, and spiritually, and socially. All four areas work together. Today, our children should also be balanced. If our children stopped growing intellectually, we would be all over that. We would call in the experts and we would do something about it. The same thing goes for a weakness in physical growth, or social growth, or spiritual growth. All four areas are very important to us.

### **Conclusion & Invitation:**

This morning, then, we have studied a rather brief account from the life of Christ at only 12 years old.

- We learn that His parents did what was spiritually best for the family. We apply that to ourselves as parents—always putting God first in the family.
- We learn that Jesus eventually got to a point where He took personal responsibility for His own spiritual growth. We hope that our own children someday get to this point as well.
- We learn that Jesus obeyed His parents. Even though He was God, He lived by their rules and submitted His life to their leadership.
- And finally, we learn that Jesus grew and matured in every major area—His life was balanced from a very early age. Jesus grew in wisdom, and in stature, and in favor with God and man.

I am so thankful for the young woman who requested this morning's lesson! As I was preparing the lesson, I kept coming back to the question of who Jesus really was. If he truly was the Son of God, then the story makes sense—He had every right to stay in Jerusalem. But if Jesus was not the Son of God, then it is all pointless—life doesn't make sense, we are wasting our time. This morning, we are looking for people who believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of the living God. If you believe this but you have not yet become a Christian, we would like to study the Bible with

you. If you have doubts, we would encourage you to study the evidence. We have a number of excellent books and resources, and we would be more than willing to share.

The Bible requires that we believe the good news that Jesus came to this earth and died, He was buried, and He was raised from the dead on the third day. We respond to that sacrifice by turning away from sin—by changing our hearts—and being immersed in water for the forgiveness of our sins. If you are ready to take these steps into Christ this morning, we hope you will let us know as we sing the next song. Let's stand and sing...

To comment on this lesson: [church@fourlakescoc.org](mailto:church@fourlakescoc.org)