

Jesus Freaks Out His Parents

Luke 2:41-52

Pastor Tom Anderson

One year our family was making an eleven-hour drive back to our former home in the Upper Peninsula. My daughter had the second back bench and had been out of sight the entire trip, working on her laptop and sleeping. My son was in the first back bench plugged into his iPod and residing in an alternative universe. About a half hour from home, we stopped for gas. Karen, Craig and I stepped out to use the bathroom, came back and drove away. Unpacking the car when we got home—no Sarah! Quietly she had slipped out of the car at the gas station to use the restroom, and when she came back we were gone. Fortunately it was the end of the holiday and a long procession of college students were headed back into town. She grabbed a ride with one of them at the gas station and that was as close as our family has come to living today's scripture.

There is one, and only one, story from the childhood of Jesus, and this is it. We know almost nothing of Jesus' life in the first thirty years. It is nearly a total blank. In the second and third centuries, imaginations ran wild fabricating stories to fill this void. There are stories about Jesus using his supernatural powers on the playground often to fatal effect on those foolish enough to tease him. But these stories have no grounding in fact or history. And compared to them, Luke's one story is a very mild and ordinary event. It gets its authenticity from Mary. Luke identifies her as his source in Luke 2:51, "his mother treasured all these things in her heart."

Luke 2:41 reads, "Every year his parents went to Jerusalem for the Feast of the Passover." The Old Testament law required the Jews to appear before the Lord in the temple three times each year: the festival of the Passover; the festival of Pentecost and the Festival of Booths in the fall. Many families simply did not have the time or the money to do this and so settled on making the trip once a year at Passover. Thus we learn that Mary and Joseph were poor but determined to be as faithful as they could. Never let poverty or moods or house guests or any other excuse keep you from appearing before the Lord each Sunday. Let the joy of the Lord be your strength and resolve to claim your place in his church on every Lord's day.

Luke 2:42 tells us that Jesus was twelve years old when this happened. This is significant for a number of reasons. First it means that children belong in church. Jesus came as a child, and we should bring our children as well. God wants children in his house. They should come to learn of his love and his commandments. They should come so that they can rub shoulders with people of faith. Before they are allowed to boot up the computer, turn on the TV, or even crack their homework, they should be brought to church with their parents. It should be a weekly spiritual discipline for the entire family.

At the end of their twelfth year, Jewish boys are bar mitzvahed. That is to say, they become adults. Their word is legally binding, and they are responsible to keep the commandments for themselves. The Bar Mitzvah involves an intense oral examination between the Rabbi and his young students. He asks them questions about the Torah and they answer. It is not dissimilar from what Jesus and the teachers were doing in the temple. The difference was that Jesus was also asking questions and giving answers that demonstrated an amazing understanding of the scriptures. It is ironic that only 18 years later some of these same teachers would be listening to Jesus answer their questions and be so outraged with his answers they would vote for his execution.

Luke 2:43-46

After the Feast was over, while his parents were returning home, the boy Jesus stayed behind in Jerusalem, but they were unaware of it. Thinking he was in their company, they traveled on for a day. Then they began looking for him among their relatives and friends. When they did not find him they went back to Jerusalem to look for him. After three days they found him in the temple courts, sitting among the teachers, listening to them and asking them questions.

The three days are easy to account for. Mary and Joseph traveled a day out from Jerusalem, it took a second day to get back, and then sometime on the morning of the third day they found him. Imagine losing Jesus! I confess to being embarrassed that I left my own daughter in a gas station but that is nothing compared to losing Jesus, the Son of God. But that is exactly what is happening in so many places. Families are losing Jesus; he is not the center of their marriages and homes any more. Some churches have lost Jesus and do not know who he is anymore. Our nation has lost Jesus as we have drifted further and further from our moral and religious foundations. This is not good, and we are paying a heavy price.

The renowned New Testament scholar and Bishop of Durham, England, Tom Wright, tells the story of teaching a class in West Africa about the scholarly quest to find the historical Jesus, which has so preoccupied Biblical studies in nearly every European and American university for a hundred years. A young African man raised his hand and asked, “If you please sir, Jesus is not lost, we have him in our church.” There is a reason why Christianity in Africa is exploding, while in the West the faith flounders. Africans have Jesus, and European and American Christians seem to have lost him.

But Mary and Joseph had the good sense to jump up and run back to Jerusalem in a sweat and anxiously search for him. This is the best thing you can do for your family: get up and start earnestly looking for Jesus and keep looking for him until he is a part of your life. Look for him on your knees. Look for him in his Word. Look for him at his table. Look for him in his temple, the church. Everyone who seeks will find. Everyone who asks will receive. To everyone who knocks, the door will be opened. Jesus is not running from you or hiding from you. Jesus wants to be found.

In Luke 2:49, Jesus says, “Why were you searching for me? Didn’t you know I had to be in my Father’s house?” There is a foreshadowing here of the angel’s words to the women at the empty tomb on Easter morning: “Why do you look for the living among the dead? He is not here: he has risen!” (Luke 24:5) This verse is the climax of the story and it is probably the reason why Mary remembered it and Luke re-told it. Mary just got done referring to “your father and I” but Jesus asserts God as his father. (Luke 2:49) He is first the son of God before he is the son of Joseph and Mary. He is twelve years old and he has now become aware of who he really is—even if his earthly parents do not really understand it.

When God became a man in Jesus Christ, the Bible says he emptied himself. (Philippians 2:7) To become truly human, God temporarily set aside his wisdom and his omniscience, but kept his personality and character. God restrained these very qualities and forced himself to learn and grow and develop self-awareness as a human being. Jesus learned who he was in the temple, studying the word of God. It is possible that on that day they were discussing the book of Isaiah which became one of Jesus’ most frequently quoted books. Eighteen years later, Jesus would stand up in a synagogue to read from Isaiah: “The Spirit of the Lord is upon me because he has anointed me to preach good

news to the poor...” (Luke 4:18) Then he had the audacity to add, “Today this scripture is fulfilled in your hearing.” (Luke 4:21)

The good news is that Jesus wants to be found. He is not hiding. He is right here in his Word. Here you will not only find him, but you will also find yourself. Take; read; live.