

Teen Jesus

Luke 2:39-52

Introduction

Teen Years: What were you like as a kid? Teenager? Teen Mark (“teenager you” social media challenge; time is undefeated). Whitney says she’s glad we didn’t meet in high school because (quote) she “wouldn’t have liked me”.

- Do you ever wonder what teen Jesus was like? How did he navigate puberty? Did he make the middle school basketball team? Etc.

Infancy Gospels: There are a few apocryphal books that took up this question, but they were always known to lack authenticity. In fact, when they first appear on the scene, they are immediately understood to be inauthentic.¹

- In the *Infancy Gospel of Jesus* he comes across as a punk who doesn’t know how to control his powers (like *The Amazing Spider-Man* playing basketball or something). He seems fanciful and malevolent, like he still hasn’t learned how to use his powers for good.
 - He kills a child who accidentally bumps into (or throws stone, punches, etc.) him.
 - When neighbors complain about his behavior he strikes them blind.
 - He speaks “from the cradle” to Mary and tells her: “I am Jesus, the Son of God.”

Criteria of Inclusion?: In reality, there is only one story in all of the Bible that covers Jesus between his birth and his public ministry. **Why only one and why this one?**

- (1) True. It really happened. If it wasn’t true and you were making up a story, you’d be unlikely to include this one, this way. **Luke doesn’t make things up.**
 - -BUT- lots of things happen that he doesn’t include. The focus is not on the details of Jesus’ upbringing but his **identity** and **mission**.
- (2) Purpose. Luke includes *this* scene because it illuminates **who** Jesus is and **why** he is here. That’s the way the Bible works. It doesn’t tell you everything, it tells you what you *need to know*. Namely, how to have a relationship with God through Jesus, **how to meet Jesus** (who he is and what he’s doing).

When we recognize Jesus’ identity and mission, we can treasure him even when we don’t understand why he’s doing what he’s doing.

³⁹ And when they had performed everything according to the Law of the Lord, they returned into Galilee, to their own town of Nazareth. ⁴⁰ And the child grew and became strong, filled with wisdom. And the favor of God was upon him. ⁴¹ Now his parents went to Jerusalem every year at the Feast of the Passover. ⁴² And when he was twelve years old, they went up according to custom. ⁴³ And when the feast was ended, as they were returning, the boy Jesus stayed behind in Jerusalem. His parents did not know it, ⁴⁴ but supposing him to be in the group they went a

¹ Iraenaus of Lyon (ca. 180) describes *Infancy Gospel of Thomas* as spurious and apocryphal. The Quran picks up some of these spurious stories.

day's journey, but then they began to search for him among their relatives and acquaintances,⁴⁵ and when they did not find him, they returned to Jerusalem, searching for him.⁴⁶ After three days they found him in the temple, sitting among the teachers, listening to them and asking them questions.⁴⁷ And all who heard him were amazed at his understanding and his answers.⁴⁸ And when his parents saw him, they were astonished. And his mother said to him, "Son, why have you treated us so? Behold, your father and I have been searching for you in great distress."⁴⁹ And he said to them, "Why were you looking for me? Did you not know that I must be in my Father's house?"⁵⁰ And they did not understand the saying that he spoke to them.⁵¹ And he went down with them and came to Nazareth and was submissive to them. And his mother treasured up all these things in her heart.⁵² And Jesus increased in wisdom and in stature and in favor with God and man.

1. Lost Jesus (vv. 39-45)

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Transitional Unit: ³⁹ And when they had performed everything according to the Law of the Lord, they returned into Galilee, to their own town of Nazareth.⁴⁰ And the child grew and became strong, filled with wisdom. And the favor of God was upon him...⁵² And Jesus increased in wisdom and in stature and in favor with God and man.

- This (v. 39) is a transitional statement from 8 day old Jesus at the temple (cf. Simeon and Anna) to his baptism "in his 30s" (Lk 3:23). And this entire section is bracketed with his growth in wisdom and grace (v. 40, 52), making it a self-contained textual unit. **Bookends.**
- Does it go with the birth (previous) or adult ministry (following). Like most pre-teen it goes with **both** and **neither** (no such thing as adolescence in Biblical thinking).
- Apropos of pre-teens (like a toddler with a mustache).

Faithful Parents: ⁴¹ Now his parents went to Jerusalem every year at the Feast of the Passover.

- Just like their faithfulness in taking him to the temple at 8 days old, they again are shown as faithful parents traveling to Jerusalem for Passover (and associated Feast of Unleavened Bread) every year.²

² The OT technically commanded three trips to Jerusalem annually for three different feasts but one would've been *more* than most faithful Jews accomplished.

- This is a huge ask. 70+ miles is now easy journey in a day without Amtrak or interstates. Even at a brisk 25 mph (how many of you have walked 25 miles in a day), it would take three days to make get there (and three days to come back).
 - Some people read this passage and imply that Mary and Joseph did something wrong when the text makes it clear that they are faithful, they didn't do anything wrong.
- We sometimes imagine that, because the Bible commands certain things all first century Jews did them (that would be like thinking all Christians attend church weekly 😊).

Specific Age: ⁴² And when he was twelve years old, they went up according to custom.

- This is a detail that would be unnecessary if it wasn't important. **Biblical details are not incidental but instrumental.** So what does it mean? At 13 a Jewish **boy** becomes a Jewish **man** (e.g., Bar Mitzvah; *Bat* Mitzvah at 12 because girls are more mature earlier, duh!?).
- On the cusp of manhood, a boy would spend his 12th year apprenticing under his father both in **vocational training** (Jesus would learn the tools of the ~~carpentry~~ construction trade) and in **religious education** (cause being a man is not making money but knowing and following God). *Hold this detail.

Left Behind: ⁴³ And when the feast was ended, as they were returning, the boy Jesus stayed

- This is the detail that too many people miss. Jesus wasn't left – he stayed.
 - Yeah, his parents didn't know where they were for a moment (at least they left him at church).
 - But it was his choice to stay: “No one takes [my life] from me, but I lay it down of my own accord. I have authority to lay it down, and I have authority to take it up again” (Jn 10:18). This isn't the story of forgetful parents or a wandering kid, but of the Messiah on a mission.
- **Humanly speaking**, he's 12. This isn't an accident. This isn't like a 6 year old getting lost at the park.
- **Divinely speaking**, this isn't an accident, he knows what he's doing. He might have been lost to his parents, but he wasn't lost to himself. This was a choice, not an accident.

Turn Around: ⁴⁴ but supposing him to be in the group they went a day's journey, but then they began to search for him among their relatives and acquaintances, ⁴⁵ and when they did not find him, they returned to Jerusalem, searching for him.

- They, apparently (as was the custom), traveled in a large caravan (support, safety, etc.) and assumed their 12-year-old was with family or friends (a reasonable assumption). *Contra* helicopter parenting, cf. W. Africa 10-year-old goat herders.
- Like any good parent, they turned around to get him (a time-consuming endeavor) when they realized he was gone.
 - Life Rule: When you lose Jesus, turn around and search for him.

2. Found Jesus (vv. 46-47)

⁴⁶ After three days they found him in the temple, sitting among the teachers, listening to them and asking them questions. ⁴⁷ And all who heard him were amazed at his understanding and his answers.

Pious Activity: ⁴⁶ After three days they found him in the temple, sitting among the teachers, listening to them and asking them questions.

- After three days (either since they left him behind or three days of searching in Jerusalem), they found him in the temple.
- **Where?** In the temple.
 - If you're going to leave your kid, church isn't the worst place 😊.
 - We don't know where he slept, what he ate, if he did any sightseeing, but we know he spent time in the temple. The way the story is told, that was the place he spent *all* his time.
- **Who?** Among the teachers.
 - He was sitting with the religious teachers.
- **What?** Listening to them and asking them questions.
 - He was learning. Not passively, but actively.
 - He was questioning them but not arguing with them.
 - Sometimes (many times?!), questions are the best way to learn about something or someone.
 - Stop trying to argue and start asking questions. Notice that Jesus' main method of interacting with his opponents in his public ministry was through questions.
- They found Jesus, but it is clear that he was never lost.

Amazed: ⁴⁷ And all who heard him were amazed at his understanding and his answers.

- They were amazed. Even at this transitional age, he has insight that pierces the heart of those who listen, a reminder of the prophecy of Isaiah: "and the Spirit of the LORD shall rest upon him, the Spirit of wisdom and understanding, the Spirit of counsel and might, the Spirit of knowledge and the fear of the LORD" (Is 11:2).
 - Amazement isn't enough, it has to get you to belief. The insight that amazes them when he is 12 will get him crucified in his thirties. If Jesus is never a threat and you never surrender, then his teachings might only be a novelty.
- The term "amazed" might not do full justice to the sense of the original. "To be so astonished as to almost fail to comprehend what one has experienced" (L&N).
 - This is and should be the normal response to experiencing Jesus. I can't believe that really happened. It needs to grow into more than amazement but it should start at amazement and that's something we should never lose.
 - **Are you amazed by Jesus?** Is Jesus only ever someone to be dissected, explained, categorized, or does he still amaze you?
 - Do you know the annoying science-splaining astrophysicist Neil DeGrasse Tyson? He has the most patronizing, nit-picky movie takes. He loves to point out why *Star Wars* (laser swords in space), *Armageddon* (Steve Buscemi riding a space nuke like a horse), and *Arrival* (school

shootings, etc.). Whether simply pomposity or something else, he can't simply be enraptured in a good story or amazed by a cinematic achievement.

- **Don't lose the ability to simply be overwhelmed and amazed by the majesty and love of Jesus.**

Hypostatic Union: We see the beauty and the challenge of understanding Jesus in moments like this. He is astonishing in his insight and authority. As God, he is the source of all wisdom, yet as a human, he is growing and learning (even obediently submitting to his earthly parents: ⁵¹ And he went down with them and came to Nazareth and was submissive to them).

- He grew like a human boy. He was a teenager with all of the hormones a teenager has. For we do not have a high priest who is unable to sympathize with our weaknesses, but one who in every respect has been tempted as we are, yet without sin (Heb 4:15).
- These are two truths that are clearly and undeniably taught in Scripture, anchored firmly as completely divine and completely human (when held in tension, it is meant to produce the beautiful melody of the gospel).

Remaining the eternal God, he took on flesh and blood so that he could pay our sin debt on the cross and secure our salvation.

- It matters that he is both God and man (i.e., 100% God, 100% man). If he's not man, he can't take our place. If he's not God, he can't save us. **He is the God-man.**
- "Simply, without ceasing to be what he was, he assumed what he was not. Christ is true God, with all the divine attributes fully and eternally actualized, but at the same time, he is true Man, with genuine human limitations and frailty." He has a full divine nature and a full human nature in one person. Jesus is truly and fully man, yet without ceasing to be truly and fully God. Scripture affirms both in beautiful tension (the tension of a perfectly tightened stringed instrument singing in beauty, not the tug of war of competing teams in which one must win and one must lose. So, In his incarnation, he took on the limitations of human flesh that he might learn obedience (Heb 5:8) and grow in wisdom (Lk 2:52).
 - This is the mystery and logic of the Jesus' power to save us. The miracle of miracles. "What we see in the incarnation is the coeternal, coequal, coessential second person of the Trinity, in the form of a servant. He eternally stands with the Father on God's side of all authority and with us on the creaturely side" (Sanders).
- This leads to a couple of points about interpreting the person and work of Jesus:
 - (1) When you mistake an aspect of Jesus' divinity for his humanity or vice versa you will misunderstand his identity and mission.
 - (2) The humanity and deity of Jesus are undeniable truths to be held in tension. When you say more than you should about one or the other you end up in heresy. "Good theologians know when to speak and when to be silent" (Gregory of Nazianzus).

3. Confounding Jesus (vv. 48-52)

⁴⁸ And when his parents saw him, they were astonished. And his mother said to him, “Son, why have you treated us so? Behold, your father and I have been searching for you in great distress.” ⁴⁹ And he said to them, “Why were you looking for me? Did you not know that I must be in my Father’s house?” ⁵⁰ And they did not understand the saying that he spoke to them. ⁵¹ And he went down with them and came to Nazareth and was submissive to them. And his mother treasured up all these things in her heart. ⁵² And Jesus increased in wisdom and in stature and in favor with God and man.

No Box In Which to Put Him: This is Jesus, the highest of authority and truest humility, majesty, and meekness; traits which cannot coexist in any other person in complete measure.

- If you can perfectly wrap your head around him, then you’ve probably reduced him to less than he is.
- Jesus confounds the world.
 - Even unbelievers would love to imagine him as an insightful prophet, compelling teacher, or moral guide. He is, but he is more! He shatters human categorization.
 - “He is tenderness without weakness, strength without harshness, humility without the slightest lack of confidence, unhesitating authority without self-absorption, unbending convictions without lacking approachability, power without insensitivity, enthusiasm without fanaticism, holiness without legalism, passion without prejudice. Nothing he does falls short. In fact, he’s always surprising you and taking your breath away because he’s so incomparably better than you could image him to be” (Tim Keller, *adapted*).
- He doesn’t just confound the unbeliever, he confounds the believer. He often confounds me.

Mistreated: ⁴⁸ And when his parents saw him, they were astonished. And his mother said to him, “Son, why have you treated us so? Behold, your father and I have been searching for you in great distress.”

- When they found him, they were confounded. If not at his teaching, his behavior. How could he be so holy in the temple while they are searching all over for him (kids behave at school).
- If you know the Torah so well, whatever happened to “honor your father and mother”?
- Mary is confused, “How can you treat me like this?”
 - God must treat us like this. He must confuse us, disappoint us, frustrate us, or we would be God.
 - “God is God. If He is God, He is worthy of my worship and my service. I will find rest nowhere but in His will, and that will is infinitely, immeasurably, unspeakably beyond my largest notions of what He is up to” (Elisabeth Elliot).
- I’ve found that God has to keep me off balance in a loving reminder that I am wholly dependent on him. He frustrates me to force me to trust him alone.

Who Is Your Daddy and What Does He Do?: Behold, your father and I have been searching for you in great distress.”⁴⁹ And he said to them, “Why were you looking for me? Did you not know that I must be in my Father’s house?”

- She says your father, but he replies **my Father**. She is thinking of his earthly relationship, he is thinking of his heavenly one.
 - The Hebrew Bible speaks of God as Father but usually in terms as the source of the nation of Israel, never in personal terms (i.e., **my Father**).
 - Jesus is the unique and beloved Son of God.
 - His relationship to God relativizes his relationship to all things on earth, including his family.
 - When his mother and brothers visit him in ministry, he reminds them that his true family are those who do the will of God (Mk 3:31-35). He doesn't sever his earthly family, but he prioritizes his heavenly one.
- The **central phrase** that I must be in my Father's house is a little ambiguous. Because it is said while in the temple some translate it as "in my father's house" other's more generically say "about my Father's business" (lit, in or about the thing or place, Dat, Pl, Neut, ἐν τοῖς τοῦ πατρὸς μου δεῖ εἶναι με). **The point is that Jesus' purpose and identity are linked to his relationship to God and the purpose for which God has sent him.**
 - Mary, understandably, that Jesus should be apprenticing under Joseph for his job as a contractor, but Jesus is reminding her that he is apprenticing under his heavenly father for a much different vocation, one that will take him on a difficult but essential mission. Jesus' true father was training him, not to celebrate the Passover but to be the perfect, Passover lamb; not to learn in the temple, but to be the temple through which God's people meet him.

Mission: Because he is the unique Son of God he has an essential mission that must be accomplished. This singular word in the Greek (δεῖ) is often translated as "must" or "necessary."

- Jesus "**must preach the good news of the KoG**" (Lk 4:43). He must "**suffer**" and die (Lk 9:22, 17:25).
- This is what confused the disciples after his resurrection, they couldn't understand his mission involved suffering (Lk 24:26), so they were confused by what happened (until he explained it to them).
- The mission of Jesus is not an option. The strategy isn't just one of many. He has come to give his life as a ransom for many, to glorify his heavenly Father, to seek and to save the lost. **He must do these things, in this way.**

We're Like Mary (and Joseph): Because Mary doesn't fully grasp his identity, she doesn't fully grasp his mission, and his behavior, in turn confuses her. ⁵⁰ And they did not understand the saying that he spoke to them. Like many of us, she is an enigma, a mix of faith and fear, of worship and worry.

- This should encourage and guide us. The nature of Jesus and his unique mission continues to allude even those closest to him until the very end.
- **Maybe you are worried, overwhelmed, and confused by Jesus' behavior**, you're in good company. **The goal of discipleship is not to understand everything perfectly but to follow Jesus faithfully.** "**We walk by faith, not by sight**" (2 Cor 5:7).

- What do you do when Jesus confounds you? Do what his mother did: [treasure] up all these things in [your] heart. The NT does not ask us **why** we don't have more faith but **where** our faith (no matter how big or small is placed).
 - Jesus will confuse you, but you can trust him anyway.
 - I think true love looks a lot more like committed trust than overt emotionalism (e.g., marriage; I will walk in love whether I feel it or not).
 - My friend sent me a meme that said: "When God called you, he already factored in your stupidity – most comforting thing I've ever heard."
 - Jesus is absolutely committed to serving, to the point of death, the people he confuses.
 - He doesn't abandon us in our doubts or deficiencies. He doesn't leave us to walk through our storms alone. **He isn't asking you to know everything, simply to know him.**
- I think this is more often than not what faith looks like: **not really understanding what Jesus is up to but trusting and treasuring him anyway.**
 - There's a beauty to this relationship. The more you treasure him, the more you trust him. Your heart grows as you invest in him and his mission.
 - **Treasure and trust.** When Jesus is not your treasure, his actions will frustrate you.

Conclusion:

Because of his unique identity as the divine Son of God and because of his loving mission to bring into relationship with God, to conform us to his image, and to use us for his glory we can **trust and obey him**. Or maybe, **treasure and obey**. Because we **treasure him deep in our affections** we can walk in obedience even when we don't understand.

- In what area of your life has God you to obey even though you don't understand?
 - Moving to a new city to plant a church.
 - Ending an ungodly relationship.
 - Forgiving a person who hurt you.
 - Stepping into a ministry role that feels beyond your comfort zone.
 - No longer trying to prove yourself to the world.
 - Having a difficult conversation.
 - Continuing to pray for something that seems impossible.