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Did you not know?

Luke 2:40-52

Fr. William Klock

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During Christmastide we often sing a profound question in the form of a carol:

What child is this, who laid to rest,
on Mary's lap is sleeping?
Whom angels greet with anthems sweet,
while shepherds watch are keeping?

We read the story of that scene in St. Luke's Gospel: Mary and Joseph and their baby with the shepherds gathered to watch and give him praise. We've heard the announcement of his birth. We've heard the announcement of the angel as to who this baby is. We've seen him greeted by Simeon, the prophet, and Anna, the prophetess. And so we sing the answer to the question too:

This, this is Christ the King,
whom shepherds guard and angels sing:
haste, haste to bring him laud,
the babe, the son of Mary.

This Jesus is "Christ the King". Mary knew that, Joseph knew that; the angels and the shepherds knew that; Simeon and Anna knew that. He was the promised and long-awaited Messiah; he was the King of the line of David. He was to be the light to gentiles and the glory of Israel. They all knew that. *But what does all that mean? How will Jesus be a light to the gentiles and how will he be the glory of Israel? How do we get from the poor baby in the manger to the Davidic King and Messiah? How do we get there from here?*

In verses 40-52 of Chapter 2, Luke gives the first glimpse into how we get from here to there. This is the only report the gospel-writers give us of

Jesus as a youth, but even here he's *almost* a man, at least by his cultural standards. The story is familiar to us already so we may miss Luke's more subtle points, but they're here. And what Luke writes challenged everybody and should challenge us. We'll come back to this at the end. First, Luke introduces this story in verse 40 as he tells us about Jesus:

And the child grew and became strong, filled with wisdom. And the favor of God was upon him.

Statements like these are often how Luke shows us time passing while also making it clear that the story is unfolding under God's sovereign and watchful eyes and according to his purpose. He made a similar statement about John the Baptist at the end of Chapter 1 and he makes a lot of similar statements in the book of Acts. As we'll see, twelve years have passed. We don't know the details of Jesus' life during those twelve years, but Luke makes it clear that God was just as active over their course as he was when Jesus was born. The baby grows up. Not only is he developing physically, but he's wise—he's filled with insight into the things of God and it's clear to everyone that God is has something special planned for him.

With that as an introduction, Luke jumps into the story in verses 41 and 42:

Now his parents went to Jerusalem every year at the Feast of the Passover. And when he was twelve years old, they went up according to custom.

The law obligated the men of Israel to travel to Jerusalem every year for the feasts of Passover, Pentecost, and Tabernacles. By Jesus' day the requirement to travel to Jerusalem for the feasts of Pentecost and Tabernacles had become less important, but *everyone* still went there every year for Passover. That was the biggest feast of the year. It was when the Jews remembered their

rescue from Egypt. And so here Luke shows us the faithfulness and the piety of Joseph and Mary. Every year they made the trip to Jerusalem to celebrate the Passover. And Luke emphasizes that *they* went—*both* of them. Only Joseph was required to go, but Luke says that Mary went to. He reminds us that Jesus was being raised in a family that understood the importance of God's laws and commandments and obeyed them, not legalistically, but enthusiastically and by going over and above the requirements. Luke doesn't say whether or not they took Jesus with them each year, but it's probably safe to assume that he did. The rabbis debated over who was obligated to attend and at what age a boy *had* to be there, but the evidence from the First Century says that for most people the Passover was a happy time of feasting and that it was normal for men to bring their families with them.¹ And so Luke says, as was *the* custom—and as was *their* custom—they went up to Jerusalem.

From Nazareth, the trip to Jerusalem was about 130 kilometres. It was a long trip, mostly because Samaria lay in between and "good" Jews avoided Samaria and went the long way around. This was at least a three- and probably a four-day journey. This time everything went as usual, at least until the trip home.

And when the feast was ended, as they were returning, the boy Jesus stayed behind in Jerusalem. His parents did not know it, 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, and when they did not find him, they returned to Jerusalem, searching for him. (Luke 2:43-45)

Joseph and Mary left for home, but Jesus stayed behind in Jerusalem. Think about that for a bit. Think

¹ E. P. Sanders, *Judaism: Practice and Belief 63 BCE-66 CE* (Philadelphia: Trinity, 1992), pp. 129-131.

about what we know of Jesus already. Luke has stressed that Joseph and Mary are godly and faithful parents. They're "in tune" with God's plan. We see this not only in their obedience to the law, in their "above and beyond" obedience, and in the amazing fact that both of them had accepted and submitted to God's plan twelve years before to bring about the birth of Jesus. Again, they're godly and faithful parents. It's not like they told Jesus that they weren't going to Passover that year and he had to disobey them and go to Jerusalem by himself in order to be obedient to the law. As parents they were raising him to know his place in God's covenant and in his Church. And consider Jesus. This is the divine Son of promise. He's the King and the Messiah. He should be the ultimate "good kid". He's the perfect son. And yet he ditches his parents when it's time to go home. Why would he do that? Brothers and sisters, right *here*, Luke is pointing us to the fact that *Jesus' mission is bigger than even the ties of a faithful and pious family*. Jesus himself will make this point in a few verses.

It took until the end of the first day before Joseph and Mary realised that Jesus was missing. It's not that they were bad parents. The trip probably took four days. The road went through dangerous country and so people would travel in large groups with extended family and with friends from the same town. On the way to Jerusalem Jesus may have been walking with the other boys from Nazareth and so his parents assumed he was doing the same on the way home. It might have been that Joseph was with the men and Mary with the women and each assumed that Jesus was with the other. And so it's not until they're ready to set up their camp the first night that they notice he's missing. We can imagine how frantic they were. He was a good boy; he wouldn't just wander off, they thought. As they asked around they discovered that no one had seen him

that day. And so they concluded that he must still be back in the city and in the morning they set out to go back and look for him.

In verse 46 Luke writes:

After three days they found him...

After *three* days. It might have been that they spent three days searching Jerusalem for Jesus, but Luke's wording seems to be counting from the time they left Jerusalem. The travelled for one day before missing him, then they spent the second day travelling back to Jerusalem, and then on the third day they found him. Luke doesn't say how long they spent searching on the third day or how many places they looked. Even if they found him in the first place they looked on that third morning, we can imagine how upset and stressed-out they would have been. I've never lost my own child for more than a few minutes, but that was frightening enough. They lost Jesus for *three* days!

But notice where they found him. Again, verse 46:

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

From the rebuke that Mary will give Jesus, it doesn't sound like the temple was the first place they looked. Again, he was a good boy. They no doubt expected obedience of him because he'd always been obedient; he'd never caused them any trouble. I don't think it would have occurred to them that he'd wander off on his own, so they were probably thinking the worst and assuming he'd been kidnapped or assaulted. Eventually, however, they find their way to the temple. Maybe they went there in desperation to pray because they couldn't find him. Whatever the case, they arrive at the temple and there he is. Luke says that he was sitting with

the teachers, listening and asking questions.

There's a popular idea out there that Jesus was teaching the teachers. He may well have been, but only indirectly. What Luke is describing is Jesus in the position of a *student*. The teachers would gather in a place like the portico of Solomon and their students would sit at their feet. And the teaching would happen as the teachers engaged the young men in a dialogue of questions and answers. That's exactly what Jesus was doing—learning from the great teachers at the temple. Luke gives us an image of a young man with a powerful hunger and thirst for discussing the things of God and learning from the elders.

And yet as much as Jesus had humbly submitted himself to the role of a student, Luke tells us in verse 47:

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

They were amazed by his wisdom and his understanding. No doubt he knew the Scriptures, but not only that, he had *insight* into them that they never would have expected for someone his age or from his low social standing. Luke may have had the words of Ben Sira in mind as he wrote these words.

The wisdom of a humble man will lift up his head, and will seat him among the great. (Sirach 11:1)

That's Jesus: humble and yet, in his humility, so wise that he amazes the great as he sits among them. Joseph and Mary are amazed too, but their amazement is a different kind. Think of losing your own child for three days and then finding that he *chose* to ditch you. Joseph and Mary were no doubt overjoyed and full of relief. They'd found their son and he was okay. But they had to be angry too. And that shows through in Mary's response.

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.” (Luke 2:47-48)

Every parent whose child had run off has a sense of both Mary’s relief and Mary’s anger. “Son, What have you done?” Luke phrases her question in the same kind of language that Abimelech and Pharaoh used to rebuke Abraham when he had lied to them and put them in compromising situations. It’s the same language Abimelech used to rebuke Isaac: “What have you done to us?” But more importantly, as she rebukes Jesus she makes the point the she and his father had been searching for him and were “in great distress”. She and his *father*; she and *Joseph*. And that’s when Jesus responds with something very telling:

And he said to them, “Why were you looking for me? Did you not know that I must be in my Father’s house?” (Luke 2:49)

After all, he was their miraculous son. His birth was heralded by angels. The angels, not to mention Simeon and Anna, had proclaimed him the Messiah. And Luke told us that over these twelve years Jesus had grown in wisdom and in favour with God. Jesus is a little perplexed as to why his parents had trouble finding him. “Mom, You know me. Did you *really* think I stayed behind just to hang out at the video arcade?” But more importantly are his words, “Did you not know that I must be in my Father’s house?” Mary had just rebuked him, telling him how distressed she and his *father* had been those three days and Jesus says, “I was here all the time in my *Father’s* house—in my *real* Father’s house.”

When Luke wrote this he wasn’t concerned about the debates over the Incarnation and the Trinity that took place three and four centuries later. In

hindsight, Jesus’ statement points to his divinity as the Son of God, but the immediate point here in the story is one of Jesus’ priorities. This is all about Jesus mission. And this is why he’s surprised by Mary’s frustration with him. He and his mother and Joseph all knew that he had a special calling to fulfil God’s promises. And here, as a boy—almost a man—was his chance to spend time in his Father’s house and to spend time with the teachers of Israel, discussing the Scriptures with them and learning more about his own mission—even more about who he is. And that mission overrides every other priority for Jesus here and it will for the rest of his life. Even having faithful, God-fearing, obedient, and pious parents who seek to do God’s will and to submit to his plans, Jesus will find that the priorities of his mission and ministry will take him away from his family. Here Simeon’s prophecy that a sword will pierce Mary’s soul is fulfilled in part. This scene foreshadows that later scene when his disciples came to tell him that his mother and brothers had come and wanted to see him and Jesus responded, pointing to his disciples: “No. Here are my mother and my brothers: all those who hear God’s word and do it” (Luke 8:19-21). The kingdom is of such great importance that it overrides even the priorities of family. These are the first words that Jesus speaks and in them he declares his mission: “My greatest priority is to do the will of my Father.” And in those words he suddenly forces his parents to re-evaluate everything they thought they knew about him. But this will be the norm for Jesus in his ministry as, in everything he says and does, he calls everyone to re-evaluate what they expected of the Messiah and of his kingdom. What child is this? He’s Christ the King, but a very different Christ the King who challenges everything people expected of him and thought they knew about him.

Of course, Mary and Joseph respond as so many did to Jesus at first:

And they did not understand the saying that he spoke to them. 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. (Luke 2:50-51)

They didn’t understand. No one understood Jesus at first, not even his disciples. And yet his parents continued to support him as their child and in his ministry and, Luke says, he submitted to them as they went home. But he tells us, even though Mary didn’t understand, she “treasured up all these things in her heart”. Other translations say she “pondered” them. She thought on them, trusting that in time God would make sense of them. And in those words Luke invites us to treasure all these things up in our own hearts and to ponder them. This is the prelude to the great story. As it unfolds our insight and understanding into Jesus mission and ministry will grow just as it did for Mary.

In the meantime, Luke finishes this prelude the way he started it. Look at verse 52:

And Jesus increased in wisdom and in stature and in favor with God and man.

Again, time passes, but it passes under God’s watchful and sovereign eye. Things may be quiet in Nazareth for another seventeen years, but that doesn’t mean God has forgotten his plan.

Brothers and sisters, as we ponder that question, “What child is this?”, and as we think on the answer, “This, this is Christ the King”, we have an advantage over Mary, the disciples, and over First Century Israel. We have St. Luke’s account of Jesus’ life and ministry. We have the accounts of the other evangelists. We have the Spirit-inspired insight of the rest of the

New Testament. And yet we often find ourselves in the same place of not understanding. We make a lot of assumptions about who Jesus is, about what he's called us to do, and about what he expects of us. We all need to be confronted by Jesus anew and, like Mary, we all need to ponder on these things.

Here as a prelude to Luke's account of Jesus ministry we read about Mary and Joseph losing Jesus for three days. They were frantic during that time. They didn't know what had happened. They didn't know where to find them. But at the end of three days they found him in the most natural place for him to be. But they didn't look there first, because they didn't understand. When they met Jesus on that third day, he shook-up everything they thought they knew of him and he shook-up everything they thought they knew about what it meant to support his coming ministry.

It's interesting to consider that Luke ends his account of Jesus ministry with another meeting with Jesus after a three-day loss. Jesus had been crucified. His disciples were distraught. They were afraid. They were uncertain. They'd been following the one who is Christ the King, but now he was dead. Their hopes and their dreams were crushed. But then on the Emmaus Road, the risen Jesus met them. Like Mary, they didn't understand. To Mary he'd asked, "Why were you looking for me? Did you not know?" And to those two disciples on the Emmaus road he said, "O foolish ones, and slow of heart to believe all that the prophets have spoken!" They thought they knew who Jesus was and what he was all about, but even when they met him, risen from the dead on the third day, they didn't recognise him. And so too with us. Too often, even having studied the Scriptures, we live with misconceptions of who Jesus is and what he expects of us. An awful lot of time we worship a Jesus stripped of everything that would challenge us: a

Jesus who condemns the sins of others, but not ours; a Jesus who affirms us in our lack of maturity and understanding and doesn't push us to understand more deeply; a Jesus who doesn't challenge us to trust him more and to trust the world less; a Jesus whose politics and national loyalties look just like our own; a Jesus who doesn't push us to use our time, talent, and treasure for the kingdom anymore than we already are; a Jesus who wants to sit on the sofa and talk "spirituality" with us instead of a Jesus who calls us to go out and get our hands dirty in ministry.

The disciples didn't understand or recognise the risen Christ on the road that day. The stranger they met wasn't who they expected. He didn't fit with their assumptions. Luke says it was as they sat at dinner with him and as he broke bread, blessed it, and gave it to them that they suddenly understood. As a result of that act of Jesus, a wave of understanding washed over them. In response, they ran to Jerusalem to tell the other disciples: "The Lord has risen!" Jesus blessed them with grace that opened their eyes and that brought understanding.

Brothers and sisters, today Jesus comes and offers us bread at his Table. Here he offers us the sign and seal of grace and life, the sign and seal of our union with him in the power of the Holy Spirit. As you come to his Table this morning, ponder the knowledge that this is the sign and seal of grace Jesus gives to know him, to trust him, and to follow his calling in faith. As you come to the Table, be open to his grace and be ready to be confronted, challenged, and called. Be ready to know, not the comfortable Jesus we've constructed for ourselves, but the real Jesus—the Jesus who calls follow him, even to the Cross. And as we leave the Table this morning, let us, like those disciples on the Emmaus road, run out into the world to declare that the Lord is alive.

Let us pray: Father, in the Collect we asked that you would give us knowledge—understanding—into those things we ought to know and that you would us the grace and power needed to act on that knowledge. We ask for that grace again. Open our eyes to your Son. Challenge our misconceptions about him and what he expects of us. Teach us what we ought to know of him as we meet him in your Word and at your Table; challenge us we pray, and then give us the grace and power to live out his calling in the Church and in the World. We ask this through him who lives and reigns with you for ever and every. Amen.