

“I Must Be in My Father’s House” (Luke 2:41–52)

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Do you ever wonder what famous people were like when they were children? Do you ever watch Patriot games, or Patriot press conferences, and wonder what Bill Belichick was like as a child? Did he ever smile? If you asked little Billy Belichick how what he got for Christmas, he probably would say, “I’m just focused on preparing for New Year’s.” Did you ever wonder what Donald Trump was like as a kid? Did he have that hair? Did he wear a long red tie? We can thank God that Twitter didn’t exist back then.

It’s natural, then, to wonder what Jesus was like as a child. What was he like as a boy? People have made up stories about Jesus as a child. There are stories of him that came a century after the Bible was written, stories about him making birds out of clay, for example.¹ Others who are into eastern religions or New Age spirituality claim that Jesus went to India as a child. We have no evidence of this and it would make no sense for a Jewish boy to travel there. The only early, detailed, and reliable documents concerning Jesus are the documents of the New Testament. And the Bible hardly tells us anything about Jesus before he was a man. We have the stories of Jesus’ birth in the Gospel of Matthew and the Gospel of Luke. But there is only one story of Jesus as a child. And that is the story that we’re looking at today, in Luke 2:41–52. This is the end of the beginning of Luke’s Gospel. The rest of his biography of Jesus describes what Jesus did when he was in his thirties. The one story that we see today gives us an indication of who Jesus is and what he came to do. It also shows us that when we rightly prioritize things in our lives, people will not understand.

Before we read today’s passage, I want to read again the last verse of the passage that we read last week. Here is what Luke 2:40 says: “And the child grew and became strong, filled with wisdom. And the favor of God was upon him.”² Like any other child, Jesus grew. The next time we meet him, he’s 12 years old. And, for the first time in the Gospel of Luke, Jesus speaks. Let’s hear what he says to say. We’ll read Luke 2:41–52:

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

¹ See “The Infancy Gospel of Thomas,” <http://gnosis.org/library/inftoma.htm>.

² Unless otherwise noted, all Scripture quotations are taken from the English Standard Version (ESV).

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 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.

Here's some context to help us understand this passage. Jesus and his parents live in Nazareth, in the region of Galilee, roughly an 80-mile journey north of Jerusalem (if they went around Samaria). ³ That would take about four days to walk. Jewish people were supposed to go to the temple in Jerusalem three times a year, to attend the three major feasts: Passover, Pentecost, and the feast of Tabernacles (Exod. 23:14–17; 34:22–23; Deut. 16:16). People who traveled to Jerusalem often went in caravans, in part for safety's sake; those who went alone or in small groups were vulnerable to highway robbers. We see that Jesus' parents were faithful, making their annual trip to Jerusalem for Passover.

On the way back, Joseph and Mary didn't realize that Jesus wasn't with them. This may seem strange, but we have to remember he was twelve. In the eyes of Jewish people, he was one year shy of being a man. Perhaps Joseph and Mary thought Jesus was with some of their relatives or among other travelers in their caravan. For whatever reason, they didn't notice Jesus wasn't with them until the end of the first day. They took another day's journey to go back to Jerusalem, and then, on the third day, they found Jesus in the temple. (He would have been somewhere in the temple complex, not in the temple building itself, since only priests could enter that holy building.)

When Joseph and Mary find Jesus there, he is "sitting among the teachers, listening to them and asking them questions." These would be teachers of the Hebrew Bible, our Old

³ Darrell L. Bock, *Luke: 1:1–9:50*, vol. 1, Baker Exegetical Commentary on the New Testament (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 1994), 264.

Testament. The way Jesus was interacting with them astonished them: “all who heard him were amazed at his understanding and his answers.” He was wise beyond his years.

Jesus’ parents were astonished, too. But they weren’t pleased. When they find him, Mary says, “Son, why have you treated us so? Behold, your father and I have been searching for you in great distress.” That last word is used to describe the rich man who was in “anguish” (Luke 16:25) in Hades in the famous parable of Lazarus and the rich man, which comes later in Luke’s Gospel. It’s understandable that Joseph and Mary would be in distress, not knowing where their son was. Last week, we found out that Jesus would cause a “sword” to pierce Mary’s soul (Luke 2:35). This is one of those times when Jesus caused her distress.

But Jesus was not sinning. He tells Mary, “Why were you looking for me? Did you not know that I must be in my Father’s house?” I have to explain that second question. In the original language, which is Greek, Jesus says that he had to be “in the . . . of my Father.”⁴ Luke actually doesn’t provide us a noun. Grammatically, it can’t be “house” or “temple,” because the first “the” is plural. The King James Version has Jesus saying, “I must be about my Father’s business” (so also the New King James Version). It could be that Jesus had in mind the “things” or “affairs” of his Father. The point that Jesus is making is that he is concerned with the business of God the Father. Shouldn’t his parents understand by now that he needed to be at the temple, doing the work of discussing the meaning of Scripture with the teachers there?

He also says that he “must” be doing this work. That could also be translated “it is necessary for me to be doing the things of my Father.” Several times in Luke’s Gospel, he has Jesus saying that he must do things. This means these things are part of God’s eternal plan. Later, Jesus will say that he had to preach the gospel (Luke 4:43), that he had to suffer, die, and be raised (Luke 9:22; 17:25; 24:7, 26), that he had to do this in Jerusalem (Luke 13:33), that he had to stay with Zacchaeus (Luke 19:5), that he had to be numbered among the transgressors (Luke 22:37), and that it was necessary that Scripture about him be fulfilled (Luke 24:44). There were certain things that Jesus had to do, tasks that his Father gave him. And Jesus did them. He was perfectly obedient to the Father.

Jesus’ words about his “Father” must have been a bit surprising to Joseph and Mary. Of course, Joseph knew he wasn’t Jesus’ biological father. Still, I wonder if these words stung him a bit. But what is surprising is how closely Jesus identifies himself with God. The Jews as a whole

⁴ “ἐν τοῖς τοῦ πατρὸς μου”.

could refer to God as “Father” (Deut. 32:6; Isa. 63:16; 64:8), but we don’t have a record of individual Jewish people talking about God as “my Father.” Jesus clearly identifies himself with God in the most intimate of ways. This is particularly clear in John’s Gospel. At one point in the book of John, Jesus says he must heal on the Sabbath because his Father is always working. (God never takes a day off. He is always busy sustaining the universe.) Jesus says, “My Father is working until now, and I am working” (John 5:17). Then, in the next verse, John explains the result of this statement: “This was why the Jews were seeking all the more to kill him, because not only was he breaking the Sabbath, but he was even calling God his own Father, making himself equal with God” (John 5:18). Later in John’s Gospel, Jesus will say, “I and the Father are one” (John 10:30). Again, that causes some Jewish leaders to want to kill him (John 10:31). In many ways, the Gospels show that Jesus is divine. He is the Son of God. He truly is God.

And yet Jesus was and is also truly man. He truly was a boy who submitted to his parents. We’re told that he “Jesus increased in wisdom and in stature.” He not only grew in size, but he grew in wisdom. He had to learn. He had to study the Old Testament and grow in his understanding of it.

Now that I’ve explained the text, I want to point out some important theological principles. The first is that Jesus came to reveal more clearly who God is. He did this in part by further explaining the Old Testament. It makes perfect sense that he would be at the temple learning from the teachers of Scripture there. And it seems that his questions challenged those teachers. It’s quite possible they were learning as much from him as he was learning from them.

This is now the second time that we see Jesus at the temple. Last week, we saw that the baby Jesus was brought there (Luke 2:22–40). The next time that Luke talks about Jesus at the temple is during Satan’s temptation of Jesus (Luke 4:9). The fourth time that Jesus is at the temple (in Luke’s Gospel) is when he comes to it during the passion week, the week that includes his death. He cleanses the temple (Luke 19:45–48), he teaches at the temple (Luke 20), and he says a time is coming when the temple will be destroyed (Luke 21:5–24). In part, that was because many Jews failed to see that their Messiah, their long-awaited anointed King, had come. But the temple had to go because Jesus came to replace the temple. He was and is the true meeting place of God and his people. He is our “place” of worship. His death on the cross replaced the whole system of animal sacrifices that could never really atone for human sins. Jesus came to the temple during this Passover to learn and, perhaps, teach. The next time he

comes to the temple at Passover, he comes to die. Though he was and is perfect, never having done anything wrong, he died for the sins of anyone who would trust him. All who realize they have rebelled against God, that they have sinned, and who realize that Jesus' perfect life and sacrificial death are the only way to be right with God, have the penalty of their wrongdoing paid for. We can be forgiven for the worst sins if we trust Jesus, because he died for us.

The second principle we should see is that Jesus was aware of who he was and he had his priorities right. He knew he had to honor his father and mother. But he also had to do what his Father in heaven wanted him to do. Mary didn't understand this. And this isn't the last time that Jesus' family wouldn't understand him (Mark 3:20–21, 31–35).

The third principle we should see is that Jesus is not only God, but he is also human. Though he has always existed as the Son of God, over two thousand years ago, he also became a human being. He was conceived—supernaturally—in a womb. He grew there. He had a real birth. He had to grow and learn. He had to eat, drink, sleep, and go to the bathroom. He was and still is truly a human being, though one who also happens to be God.

It's hard to understand this amazing fact, that God became man. This is what we call the incarnation, which literally means “enfleshment.” Jesus, the “Word of God,” became flesh (John 1:14). That means he had a human body, a human soul, and a human mind. He wasn't just “God trapped in a body.” He was and is truly human and it's important to know this (1 John 4:2–3; 2 John 7).

It's hard for us to comprehend how one person could have two natures, a divine nature and a human nature. It's difficult for us to fathom that Jesus is God and man. It seems like it involves contradictions. As one theologian, Mark Jones, says,

In Christ we see eternity and temporality, eternal blessedness and temporal sorrow, omnipotence and weakness, omniscience and ignorance, unchangeableness and mutability, infinity and finitude. All of these contrasting attributes come together in the person of Jesus Christ.⁵ . . . Jesus learned and Jesus knew all things; Jesus died and Jesus gives life to all living creatures; Jesus drank from his mother's breasts and Jesus provided his mother with the milk to feed him.⁶

⁵ Mark Jones, *Knowing Christ* (Carlisle, PA: Banner of Truth, 2015), 31.

⁶ Mark Jones, *Knowing Christ* (Carlisle, PA: Banner of Truth, 2015), 32.

I think it's particularly hard to understand how Jesus could be both God, which means he is omniscient, and also human, which means he doesn't know all things and would have to learn the way that you and I learn. It's true that Jesus had the Holy Spirit, "the Spirit of wisdom and understanding" (Isa. 11:2). But Jesus also had to do the hard work of learning. He had to learn how to walk and speak. He had to learn how to read and write. He had to learn the Hebrew Bible.

So, how can Jesus be both God and man in his understanding? Well, the answer is that he had two minds. This might at first seem nonsensical, but it's not. I want to read one explanation of how this works. It's a bit technical, but I'll explain. These are the words of the theologian John Feinberg:

[I]n Christ there were two minds (two distinct ranges of consciousness), one divine and one human. Christ possessed the eternal mind of God the Son, which knows all things. But he also possessed a "distinctly earthly consciousness that came into existence and grew and developed as the boy Jesus grew and developed." The relation between the two minds was asymmetrical. That is, the divine mind knew and had access to everything the human mind knew, but the human mind has access to the divine only when the divine mind allowed it access. What Jesus knew through his human mind alone and apart from any access it had to his divine mind was only what was available to any other human living at that time. But since he was not merely human, Jesus had access to information that no mere human could know apart from divine revelation.⁷

To use an imperfect analogy, Jesus is like a computer that has two processors and two hard drives. One processor is so fast that it takes no time to process information. One hard drive has unlimited storage space. The other processor is more modest, and the other hard drive has limits. As a man, Jesus uses the more modest processor and the limited hard drive. Every once in a while, he could switch processors and hard drives. According to Jesus' divine nature, he never had to learn anything. He knew everything. But according to his human nature, Jesus had to learn and didn't know everything. Most of the time while on earth, it seems that Jesus functioned according to his human nature. But he always has access to his divine nature, and when he knew what people were thinking or their secrets, and when he performed miracles, he was accessing his divine powers.

⁷ John S. Feinberg, "The Incarnation of Jesus Christ," in *In Defense of Miracles: A Comprehensive Case for God's Action in History*, ed. R. Douglas Geivett and Gary R. Habermas (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1997), 234. Feinberg is here describing the view of Thomas V. Morris, *The Logic of God Incarnate* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1986), 103. The quotation is Morris's (also page 103).

Another way of thinking about this is to imagine a star athlete playing with children. Let's imagine Kyrie Irving, the star of the Celtics, playing with some children on a playground. In order to let the kids play with him, Kyrie might tone down his game. He might not run and dribble as fast as he can, or jump as high as he can. But every once in a while, to show the kids that he is indeed an NBA All-Star, he might pull out some of his famous dribbling abilities or dunk the ball. In that scenario, Kyrie never lost his basketball superpowers, he just decided not to use them.⁸

In order to learn more about how Jesus can be both God and human, I would encourage you to listen to the sermon, "Jesus Was a Man," that I preached three years ago. You could find it on our website under the "Who Is Jesus?" sermon series.⁹

What's important for us is to know that Jesus needed to be fully and truly human in order to save us. As Mark Jones explains, "If he did not have both a human body and a human soul, then the incarnation did not entirely take place, and some aspect of our humanity could not be redeemed. As the early church father Gregory Nazianzen famously declared: 'For that which He has not assumed He has not healed.'"¹⁰ Jesus needed to fulfill God's expectations for humanity. He needed to live the perfect human life in our place in order to satisfy what we might call God's positive demands. And he also needed to die as the perfect, eternal, infinite sacrifice, to fulfill what we might call God's negative demands. God is a perfect, righteous judge, and any righteous judge will have the crimes of criminals punished. In order to gain freedom, we need to have the penalty for our crimes paid in full, and that's what Jesus does for us.

Augustine, a famous theologian and pastor who lived sixteen hundred years ago, summarized the mystery and wonder of Jesus' incarnation. He once wrote,

Man's maker was made man,
that He, Ruler of the stars, might nurse at His mother's breast;
that the Bread might hunger,
the Fountain thirst,
the Light sleep,

⁸ This idea comes from Douglas Groothuis, *Christian Apologetics: A Comprehensive Case for the Biblical Faith* (Downers Grove, IL: IVP Academic, 2011), 525–526. Groothuis uses Michael Jordan in his hypothetical situation.

⁹ See "Jesus Was a Man," January 4, 2015, <https://wbcommunity.org/jesus>.

¹⁰ Mark Jones, *Knowing Christ* (Carlisle, PA: Banner of Truth, 2015), 51. Gregory's quotation is found in "To Cledonius the Priest against Apollinarius," in *A Select Library of the Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers of the Christian Church, Second Series*, ed. Philip Schaff and Henry Wace, trans. Charles Gordon Browne and James Edward Swallow, vol. 7 (New York: Christian Literature Company, 1894), 440. The full sentence is, "For that which He has not assumed He has not healed; but that which is united to His Godhead is also saved."

the Way be tired on its journey;
that the Truth might be accused of false witness,
the Teacher be beaten with whips,
the Foundation might be suspended on wood;
that Strength might grow weak;
that the Healer might be wounded;
that Life might die.¹¹

Now that we've thought about some of the theological principles that are on display in this passage, we have to think about how it should direct our lives.

The first thing we should do is thank God for sending his Son. We should wonder and be thankful that Jesus would become a human being, to teach, to live a perfectly righteous life, and to die in our place. He does what we cannot and do not do. The whole message of Christianity could be summarized as "Christ for us." Salvation is a free gift, and we should never think, "Be like Jesus in order to be acceptable to God." We simply need to trust Jesus in order to be right with God.

If you're here today and you don't understand what it means to put your faith in Jesus, I would love to help you know more about it. But I will say this clearly: Jesus is the only God-man, the only mediator between God and sinful human beings. He is the only Savior. He is the only one who would leave his glorious position in heaven and descend to earth, to live humbly. He is the only God who would ever endure shame, pain, suffering, and death. He is the only one who lay down his life to pay for your sins. There is no other way to be right with God, to have eternal life, and to truly be wise than to know Jesus. And knowing Jesus starts simply with trusting him.

But we should also follow Jesus' example. We should ask ourselves three questions: Are we about our Father's business? Are we growing in wisdom? Are our priorities right?

Now, we can't do all the work that Jesus did. We don't need to. He had a very special mission, to save his people from sins. You or I cannot do that. Again, we don't need to. Jesus already did the work. But we should be doing the work that God has called us to. He calls us to repent of our sins and put our trust in his Son. He calls us to worship him, to glorify him through everything we do, whether it's part of a worship service, our service to the church, our love for

¹¹ Augustine, *Sermons 184–229* (Hyde Park, NY: New City Press, 1993), 191.1, quoted in Mark Jones, *Knowing Christ* (Carlisle, PA: Banner of Truth, 2015), 33–34.

our neighbor, or our obedience in all of life. We exist for God. We were made to reflect his glory and his attributes. Are you living for God or yourself? Are you representing God well?

Are we growing in wisdom? We should be growing in wisdom and knowledge (Col. 1:9). True wisdom and true knowledge starts with the fear of the Lord (Prov. 1:7; 9:10). That means we must understand who God is and we must respect him. And we must read the Bible and meditate on it. There are several resources to help you read the Bible that are available on our website and also on the table in the back of the room.¹² Take advantage of those resources. There are no excuses not to read the Bible. But understanding the Bible is more than reading it. It is doing the hard work of thinking about its meaning and understanding how it applies to our lives.

The first Psalm begins this way:

- ¹ Blessed is the man
 who walks not in the counsel of the wicked,
 nor stands in the way of sinners,
 nor sits in the seat of scoffers;
- ² but his delight is in the law of the LORD,
 and on his law he meditates day and night (Ps. 1:1–2).

Jesus is the perfect example of a man who delights in God's word and meditates on it day and night. He meditated on it and he acted according to it. That is what we are supposed to do. This comes only through work.

Finally, do we have prioritize things rightly? When we are truly following Jesus, there will be some people who don't understand why we do the things we do, just as Mary didn't understand why Jesus stayed behind in Jerusalem. When we are following God's word, we'll be accused falsely. People won't like it when we don't follow traditions, or conventional wisdom, or the prevailing opinions of the day. But we must follow Jesus. That may cause some tensions in our lives. We may feel torn between our service to the Lord and our work, or our service to the Lord and our obligations to our families. We must navigate these choppy waters with wisdom. But that wisdom is acquired only through faith, through reading God's word and meditating on it, and through the power of the Holy Spirit. Let us endeavor to be wise, to rightly order our lives, and to be about our Father's business.

¹² See <https://wbcommunity.org/bible>.