

Her Twelve Year Old Boy

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[0 : 00] All right, well, Merry Christmas again to all of you. We are finishing up a series today we've been doing for this Advent season called Jesus, the Son of Mary, where we're looking at some of the big important passages in Luke, which is where we normally go to see all the Christmas texts, Luke, and seeing Mary's experience of Jesus and how she experienced her own son.

And so here we are, the last one we read from Luke 2, the story about Jesus getting left behind for three days at the temple in Jerusalem. And this is definitely not the most common Christmas text. He's 12 years past the Christmas story, but it's still very much part of the Christmas stories. And one of the reasons for that, well, there's a few reasons. One of them is that Christmas, oftentimes at Christmas, what you want to do is you want to think about who Jesus is.

And at Easter, you focus more on what he did. So Christmas really is a time where you think, who is this person? Easter is really a time where you say, what did he do? Now you can never separate the two of those.

They always go together. But this is a passage that really, really does focus on who he is. What about him as a person, as a human being? And the second reason that this is a good Christmas text is because 2024 is coming very quickly.

[1 : 27] The year of our Lord, 2024 is on the horizon. And so you're not just thinking about Christmas right now. All of you are already thinking about your 2024 and what it's going to look like. That's what we do at this time of year.

Who do I want to be in 2024? That's one of the important questions that we all ask. And this passage has a lot of pretty surprising things to say about that. Now the final reason, and this is what we'll focus on, that this is a helpful passage to look at on Christmas Eve, is because of the range of emotion that happens within it.

So Mary experiences deep distress here. She actually says in the middle of the passage when the parents saw him in verse 48, she said, son, why did you treat us like this?

And then she says, what every, you've heard this before, it says, behold, your father and I have been searching for you in great distress. Now she did not say, behold, no parent talks like that. They don't say, behold, my son, why did you do this? It was more like, look, we've been looking for you for three days. And she does what we all do.

[2 : 42] Your father and I have been looking for you. Meaning, you know, that's what we say when we want to up the ante a bit. It's not just me, it's your father and me.

This is the, right before you're in big trouble, sort of a comment. And she says, we were in distress. This Greek word is the word agony, actually. And so she says, you put us into a place of agony. And when your child's missing for three days, that is agony. But then it also says she was astonished by him in the verse before that. And then it says the verse after that she was confused. And then after that it says, then she treasured up everything, meaning she had contentment about it. And so Mary goes from astonishment to agony to confusion to contentment, all in this passage. And you know, that's what happens at Christmas. There's agony, there's astonishment, there's confusion, there's contentment. I mean, everything, the complex of human emotion happens to all of us in different ways.

[3 : 46] And it's exactly what takes place right here. Now let's just focus on two of those emotions this morning. Astonishment and confusion. So if you walk away today on Christmas Eve, astonished and confused, then it'll be mission accomplished.

Okay? And we don't normally say that, but that is exactly what we get from this passage. Astonishment and confusion. So I hope you'll be confused today. Let's think about that. Three ways Jesus brings astonishment and confusion at Christmas time.

They're all right here. Here's the first. Luke shows us who Jesus is, very simple. And that should bring some astonishment and confusion to your life today. It's in verse 40 and 52. Just look down with me. At verse 40 and 52, the book ends, the child grew, Jesus grew, and he became strong, filled with wisdom, and the favor of God was on him. Now jump down to verse 52. That was 40. 52, Jesus increased in wisdom and in stature and in favor with God and men. Now Luke, Luke, like all the gospel writers, uses an economy of words. [4 : 59] He's extremely selective. He doesn't say all that he could have said. How did Luke decide what to put in his gospel? Couple ways. One of the ways he decides is he tells us at the very beginning of the gospel, he only wants to include things that really happened.

He said, you know, I went searching for the eyewitnesses and I listened to only eyewitnesses and I'm giving you what I gave you because it happened. That's the only reason. And then from there, there was a lot of content of things that happened. So he has to be really selective. Now that means that in the midst of extreme selectivity, across 12 verses, verse 40 and 52, he says the exact same thing twice.

The exact same thing. He says Jesus grew in wisdom and in stature and in favor with God and man. And then 12 verses later, he repeats the exact same thing again. Now this is a gospel that's all about the economy of words.

And yet he's repeating himself so quickly, so frequently, he's wanting us to really focus on that and to think about what it means. And he tells us here these verbs, Jesus grew, Jesus became, Jesus increased, Jesus changed.

[6 : 15] All right. Now listen, if you've read through the Bible, if you've read through the Bible, you should know that God does not change, God does not become, God does not increase, God does not grow, he stays the same.

And Luke is saying that God became a human being in Jesus Christ and he wants to really press this home. Two times he repeats it, he grew, he changed, he increased.

And he's trying to get you to see something. He's trying to get you to see that Jesus Christ is a paradox. He's a growing boy and he's simultaneously God and that that shouldn't make sense, that that should be confusing, that that should be astonishing and confusing simultaneously.

And so for 400 years, in the first several hundred years of the church history after Jesus, people came to verse 40 and verse 42 and looked at this and said, how are we going to talk about this man?

And this is what they come up with. It took them 400 years and they said he is, quote, truly human. That's the language. It took them 400 years to really nail that down and say he's truly human.

[7 : 32] That's what we learn about here. He grew up, he was a boy that grew up. Now let me give you the context for that. In this story, he's 12 years old, he's not 13.

Luke writes about when he's eight days old and then jumps all the way to year 12. And there's a reason for that. And that's because when you turn 13 in this society and Jewish culture, you essentially were treated as an adult.

There's no adolescence. We made that up. Modern people made up adolescence. You go from 12, childhood to adulthood, 13. That's the transition.

So this is a really important year for Jesus. And he's entering into a full adulthood in the next year. And so what we're being given here is this very last year of his childhood.

And that's why Luke focuses on it. And we have this sense here, if you kind of read between the lines, that he's maturing and he's independent. And it's probably that he was allowed to roam Jerusalem freely.

[8 : 38] And that is why it makes sense that he got left behind. So you read the story and you think this child gets left in a big city for three days.

To our modern ears and eyes, this is outrageous. But in the first century, it's not exactly as it seems. Because what happens is that he's 12 years old.

He's got freedom to be in Jerusalem on his own as a 12-year-old, here and there roaming around. And then what would have happened is that when you're traveling to Jerusalem for a pilgrimage feast or leaving it, everybody from a certain region of Israel would all travel together in a big caravan.

So hundreds and hundreds of people, all from the north, from Nazareth area. And the men would travel with the men. The women would travel with the women. And the children with the children.

And they would go in a long, huge parade that lasted for miles and miles. And so it gives you that sense that the caravan was gathering. And Mary and Joseph are assuming what had always been the case.

[9 : 39] They had come and done this every single year. And Jesus had gotten in with the children every single year in the caravan on the way back. And so that's why it says that they went a day's journey out.

And then they searched for him amongst the acquaintances. Meaning they traveled a whole day in the caravan out, 20 miles or so. And then they made camp at night. That's when the children would gather back with the parents at night in the camp.

So when that happened, they looked for him and he wasn't there. And so it says that they went a day out. That's day one. It took them a day to come back. That's day two. And then it took them a day to search the city.

That's day three. And so for three days, he was missing because he didn't get included in the caravan. He got left behind. And that's what's taking place here. And when they come back, they find him, where is he?

He's in the temple court. And he is doing something incredibly normal. He's sitting at the feet of the teachers. These are the academics of the day, the scribes.

[10 : 37] These are the Bible nerds of the time. They love to read the Bible. They love to pour over. They love to argue and debate about it. And that's where he is. He's sitting in the outer court of the temple. And he's been doing this for three days, hanging out at the temple, sitting at the feet of all the different teachers and asking questions, talking to them.

That's what we're told here with all the Bible nerds that are hanging out around the temple. And where did he sleep? I don't know.

But again, you got to think like a pre-modern person, like a first century person. This is a first century 12 year old boy who has lived his life outside in a way that we can't imagine.

So he was fine. You know, he was used to things like that. So he hung around the city and he lived outside and he sat at the teachers' feet all day long outside the temple courts.

And when they find him, it says his parents were astonished because he was talking with the teachers. And the teachers were astonished.

[11 : 40] And the reason is because he was doing something very normal. The teachers every day would sit in the courts and they would ask questions of people and you could ask questions of them.

And it would be a dialogue, question response, looking at the Bible together, just like we would do like our kids do in Sunday school. This was incredibly normal. But the reason that they're astonished is because he is asking questions.

He's curious. And yet at the same time, he's authoritative. So he's 12 years old. And this is not some teachers will look at this passage today and they'll say, look, he's debating them, he's correcting them.

He wasn't. That's not what Luke says. It says he was just asking questions and responding to their questions. That's all. He was submissive and yet he knew the answers.

He was curious, yet he had a wisdom about him that seemed to come from old. He had two things together at the very same time.

[12 : 41] This curious boy, 12 years old, and yet this deep authority, not debating, not at all, completely submissive yet teaching.

They're exploring the Old Testament. That's what they're doing. And they're asking him questions and he's asking them questions. And yet the questions he asks shock them.

They can't understand his ability to grasp and put the pieces of the Old Testament together in a way that they've never seen before. And that's what they were astonished by.

And that means that he's submissive and teachable and curious boy and he knows he's authoritative and he teaches at the same time.

And verse 40 and verse 52, for 400 years the theologians came and said, what do we say about this? We say, this is the paradox. This is what's astounding and confusing simultaneously.

[13 : 37] He is truly God and truly human. And not only is he truly God, truly human, he's truly a boy. Now let's bring this on.

The teachers and his parents were astonished because they could not see his divinity. They looked at him and they saw a 12-year-old boy. He looks like a 12-year-old boy and yet he's teaching with a level of authority they've never seen before.

That's what they're astonished by. The teachers describes the academics, the Bible nerds, they cannot see the magnitude of his divinity. That's what's shocking them. We have actually, I think, the opposite problem as modern people.

We read this story and if you've been around the church for any given time, any time if you are a follower of Jesus today, the problem you'll come to this story with is that you know too much.

You know about the cross and you know about the resurrection and you know about the ascension and you know that's all that's going to take place and so you're going to have a much harder time seeing not his authority, not his divinity, you're going to have a harder time seeing his humanity and seeing in particular his boyhood and seeing in particular the astonishing and confusing idea that Jesus Christ, the God of the universe, became a little boy that had to grow up.

[15:04] That's what you're going to have a hard time really wrestling with. Now let me ask you today, do you have a theology? Do you have a vision of Jesus, a vision of the Savior of the world, the God of the universe that includes a little boy who had to grow up, who had growing pains just like all of us did and who had to be tucked into his bed at night and read stories.

He had to, how did he go to sleep? Mary read him books. She read him scrolls actually. That's how he went to bed at night. Do you have a theology that sees the humanity of Jesus truly human all the way to the point where you realize what he did to become like you?

He really did become a child and he became a little bitty boy. You know, here's another way to say it. He doesn't know everything.

He doesn't. He never did. He did not have a divine microchip implanted into his brain where he downloaded the divine content of the universe.

He wasn't like that. He was so human that he had to learn just like you had to learn. How did Jesus know how to do math? His mother Mary taught him.

[16:22] That's how. How did he learn to read? Mary and Joseph sitting at the table. When he was growing up, he memorized the Torah not because he's superhuman, but because every child did that.

Now we think what memorized Genesis to Deuteronomy? He could say it. At 12 years old, he could undoubtedly say the Torah out loud. He could sing it. That's how they learned it.

The reason we think that's astonishing is because we watch TV instead of memorizing the Torah. But if we tried it, we would do it too. But that's what he did, just like every other little boy and little girl that was alive in this time.

He was a baby. He was a toddler. He fell a lot. He had to get picked up by his parents and his knees got scraped up all the time. To some people, he was just Joseph's boy down the street. If you were his neighbor, you would have said, that's Joseph's boy, Jesus. I saw him at Passover last year. He was this tall. And boy, he came to Passover this year and he was this tall.

[17:24] I can't believe how much he's grown. That's what you would have said about him. He's that human. He had a boyhood just like every other boy did. And here's the amazing thing.

Because he was a baby, because he was a toddler, because he was a boy, he had a baby mind and a toddler mind and a child's mind. And that means he had to grow up into his awareness, into awareness of his own identity.

He had to realize, he had to grow into the consciousness of who he was and who he is and what he came to do. And I think that's one of the things that's happening here. We'll come back to this at the end.

400 years of theology, verse 52, he grew in stature. He had a real physical body growing pains and all of it. At 12 years old, at 12 years old, he could not lift weights like he would be able to at 18.

He had a real physical body and he had to grow in wisdom, meaning he had to grow in spiritual maturity and mental maturity. And yet he did it all without sin. Now, let's move on.

[18:31] But let me say this. At Christmas time, especially if you get on the internet, there is a lot of talk about Christmas, the Christian view of Christmas, of the incarnation of who Jesus is being just one of the myths out there like many other myths that have been written about in human history.

The myth of Osiris, if you've heard about that one. The myth of an ancient Egyptian who, God who became a human and who died and rose again, people say about Osiris, very old.

The myth of the Buddha, who was a child prodigy, who was in touch with the spiritual world in a way that no child has ever been, myths throughout all the centuries. And people come and they say, look, the Christian view of Christmas is the same thing.

Jesus, the incarnation, God become human, a man who died and rose again, it participates in this long history of world myths. Let me say, and we don't have time to get into it, but let me say that if you really look into it, if you never have before, and you study the myths, and then you come to Luke's gospel, and you read about the humanity and divinity of this boy, you will find out one thing and that there has never been anything in human history like this.

Never and not even close, not even close. No world religion has ever made a claim like this. God, here's the claim, God became a wiggly little baby, a stumbling little toddler, a growing child, and a curious 12-year-old who probably liked to play with rocks and chase worms and look up at the stars. [20 : 14] And I want to say, you know, was interested in diggers and spaceships, but that wasn't yet his time. No religion has ever made a claim that this is the savior of the world.

This is the God of the universe, the master. This is how human he became. He's ever said anything like this, and it was not part of Jewish expectation. You could not have written this.

You could not have written this unless it happened. It's that real. The creator of the universe had Mary's DNA, her genetic code, and how about this, he still does.

Think about that. And she tucked him into bed at night and she read him stories, and here he is as a 12-year-old boy. He's a human, and he became that human in order to get close to you.

That's the meaning of Christmas. Secondly, not only is this confusing and astonishing because of who he is, but it shows us here briefly who we are.

[21 : 15] And you'll see this in verse 49 in the way that he answers her. Okay, he's 12, and this is the year of really growing up as an apprentice of his father, his earthly father, so that at 13, 14, 15 he can start working.

He'll start working as a carpenter. So this is probably the year where Joseph is really, really, really training him to be a carpenter. And so he's been doing this apprenticeship, and he's also really delving into the scriptures at age 12, and he's learning and learning and learning.

And this is why everybody's so confused when Mary says to him, you know, why did you do this to us? Your father and I, we've been looking for you, and we've been utter agony.

You've been going for three days. And the reason that she is confused right after that, and everybody else is too, is because he says, why were you looking for me?

Did you not know that I must be in my father's house? And it says, and she was confused. Why? And here's why. They are 12 years in.

[22 : 24] 12 years into Jesus's life, his boyhood. And you know, she's been tucking him into bed every night and raising him up as a boy.

And when he said, don't you know I have to be at 12 years old, he's saying, I have to be here. Before I become an adult, this is where I've got to be, my father's house.

And everybody around would have said, wait a minute, Joseph's your father. And Mary thought that too. She had just said, your father and I have been looking for you. And she said, Joseph's your father.

And you've been going for three days. And that's why she's so confused. You know, but Joseph's your father, and you were supposed to be with him. And Jesus comes and says, no, think again. I'm on the precipice of becoming an adult, and this is where I have to be near my father. Now, there's a very earthly reason.

[23 : 24] She's just struggling to remember the reality of the one she gave birth to. That's one reason. But another reason is this. If you look at the Old Testament, and then you move beyond the Old Testament, and you look at the 400 years of literature we have, Jewish literature, between the time of the end of the Old Testament, which is technically Malachi, all the way to the time of Matthew.

Every single Jewish writing, every single text in the Old Testament, there is not a single instance. No one has ever found a single instance where anybody says these two words to God.

My father. This is the first time in human history. Did you know that? This is the first time in human history that anybody ever said, recorded, my father.

It's nowhere in the Old Testament. And she's realizing this boy has a relationship to God the Father, to God who is a father in a way that nobody else ever has in human history.

And then that's why I think at the end of the passage, though she was confused, though she was confused, it says then she treasured all these things, because she realized she remembered this is the Son of God.

[24 : 42] This is him. He has to be near to his father. This is where he has to be. Jesus shows us, you see. Here's the meaning.

Jesus shows us what it means to be human. At 12 years old, as Jesus was about to step into adulthood, he said to her, I need to be near to God my father.

And he's going to come just a few chapters later and say, now you can pray our Father. And listen, it's too routine for us.

It's too routine for every single one of us in here. If you've grown up in the church, if you're a follower of Jesus today, you are used to saying my father. You are used to it. You're used to saying our Father in heaven, how it would be your name.

And you can't see how astonishing and confusing it really is, this moment in human history, when Jesus Christ said my father. All the teachers, all the scribes, all the Bible nerds would have said, what?

[25 : 47] What is he saying to say my father? He changed the world in this moment when he said, you can say this. You can say my father. You can say our father. God can be your father. And here's the meaning of the passage.

He's saying to us, what does it mean to be human? He became so human, he came to show us what a true human is. The potential of humanity, it is to be near unto God and to be able to say my father, our father.

That's the meaning of this. He came to show us that. And that's why I think Luke adds this phrase at the end where it says, and he was submissive to them.

You know, we, with modernized come to this passage and say, was Jesus not being disobedient? You know, he didn't follow his parents on the caravan back to Nazareth.

And Mary, Luke just very subtly helps us here. He adds, and Jesus was submissive to her, to his parents. Why? And I think it's this, because Mary is realizing in the midst of her confusion, when he says, my father, she's all of a sudden realizing this is the God of the universe.

[27 : 02] This is the ancient of days, and I better believe that I'm going to be confused by his actions. I better believe that I shouldn't expect to understand him, to be able to put him into a box that I expect for him to act in a way I expect she, she's realizing this is the ancient of days.

This is the God of the universe. This is the master of the universe sitting right here. And he was submissive to her, meaning, meaning that if he was going to obey her, it was only because he chose to.

It's because he chose to become a baby. He chose to become a child. He chose this. And she's realizing that, that my son, my 12-year-old boy, is the God of the universe, the ancient of days.

And he has a relationship to God the Father like no one else ever has in human history. And here he is showing us what it means to be human. And here's what it means.

It means that you were made to draw near to God as your Father. It's the revolution of world history. Now lastly, this.

[28 : 13] How can we have that this morning, this Christmas? And how can we say my Father, our Father, and here's how? It's astonishing that this is a bit of speculation.

Let's end with a bit of speculation. This is Passover week. And Passover is one of the three annual feasts where you had to travel to Jerusalem to the temple for a pilgrimage.

And they did that every year. Mary and Jess were very faithful in that. It says it was their custom. They stayed all seven days for the whole Passover feast. And remember that the Passover is all about remembering the Exodus story.

So all week, everything is oriented to that. Remembering and thanking God for the Exodus story. And in the Exodus story, Israel was enslaved in Egypt.

They were slaves. And we're told in Exodus and Deuteronomy and Numbers that every single person in Egypt, Israelite and Egyptian deserve the same thing.

[29 : 23] And that's to die, actually. They were all stubborn. They all had rejected God. They all had forgotten God. And God said, in the midst of your stubbornness, Israel, I'm going to save you out of Egypt.

I'm going to rescue you. And so to do that, on the very final night of the 10 plagues, God sent an angel of death, remember, into Egypt, and death came to every single household.

And the only way that you are going to get out from underneath the pain of death is if you killed a lamb and spread the blood of the lamb across your doorpost. And if you did that, death would look at the sacrifice, the substitute, this blood and pass by you.

That's what the Passover meal was about. This whole week was about remembering that, that once death came for all, and if you had the blood of the lamb on your doorpost, God passed by you and showed you mercy.

And then the very next day, they went out into the Red Sea, and the sea is supposed to drown you. And yet, as Moses put his hands out, and the sea parted, it went in half, and they passed through safely.

[30 : 34] And when Moses pulled his hands down, the seas came upon the Egyptians, and they drowned. And so the chorus of the week, of Passover week, is simply one thing. Everybody would have been singing about it, saying it, remembering it.

If you have the blood of the lamb over your doorpost in your life, then God will pass by you and save you and rescue you. Now this was in Jesus' mind.

This was what was surrounding Jesus all the time. Now here's what I think happened. He's 12 years old. He's about to become an adult. He is really awakening to the reality of his mission.

And he stayed behind in the temple for three days because he realized fully, more fully than ever, what he came to do. That he came, he was realizing, this is what I exist for.

I came to be the Passover lamb. And that's why when the teachers were there with him in the temple, they were astonished at his understanding of the Old Testament.

[31 : 37] Because all of a sudden he was able to say, no, you see the whole Old Testament is about one thing. It's about the fact that one day there would be an anointed one who would come and be the sacrificial lamb of the Passover meal for humanity to redeem the world.

And he's sitting there showing them, no, look at this Old Testament passage. Look at this passage. Look at this passage. It's all about the Passover lamb that was to come. And at 12 years old, he's realized it's me.

That's what's happening to him. That's what's happening, what happened in your 12 year old life.

That's what's happening in his 12 year old life. On the brink of adulthood.

And oh boy, that's why he had to be in his father's house. He realized I am the boy that's come to die. And I've got to be near my father right now.

Prayer. Worship. Scripture, that's everything I need. This is why, well, what does Luke say? He says that Jesus Christ at 12 years old was lost for three days.

[32 : 42] You know, three days they couldn't find him. Three days he was lost. And on the third day he was found. And later on in Luke's Gospel, what does he say? He says, he tells the apostles, do you not know that the son of man must die?

You know, he said, I must be in my father's house. I have to be. And later on he's going to say the same language, I must die. And in three days the son of man will rise again.

And it's the exact same language that Luke uses here. He says three days he was lost and then he was found. And Luke's trying to say, don't you see that this 12 year old boy knows what he came for.

He knows his mission. And that's why he had to be near to his father. He had to worship. He had to prepare his heart. He was getting ready right here, right then and there.

He came. He came to show us what it means to be truly human. And it's to be near unto God. And he came to bring us near unto God.

[33 : 41] This little boy came to die. He came to be the Passover lamb for us and for you. Now let me close with this. This is everything. This is the meaning of Christmas.

This little boy came to reconcile you unto God. And he did it by going to the cross. Now look, if you are a follower of Jesus Christ today, it's time, this time of year, just one minute to think about this. It's this time of year where you say, you know, what was my 2023 like? And what is my 2024 going to be? And here's the question.

Did you grow near unto God in 2023? Jesus is saying here that that's the purpose of human existence. You were made by God to be near unto God. And he showed you how he made a way.

And let me ask you this morning, when you look back at 2023, was it a year where you can say, I drew close to the Lord and I grew and I realized more and more of who I really am before him? [34 : 44] Or is it a year where you say most of my year was stale and cold and I feel farther away from God than I did a year ago?

What did Jesus do? Jesus reconciled you to God the Father. He enabled you to say God the Father. But look, what else did he do? Then he turned and said, he for three days poured over the scriptures and he prayed and he worshiped.

He showed you exactly the way. He said, come through me and pour over the scriptures. Get near unto God this year, 2024. Pour over the scriptures and pray and dive in.

And if you have the problem that most modern human beings have of chronic busyness, start this week as you prep for January 1st, tear your schedule up and reshape it and remake it so that you make sure that you are drawing near unto the Lord.

It's the purpose of human existence and that's what Christmas is all about. Let's pray and ask God to help us. Lord, we pray and lift up our hearts before you and ask that you would teach us what it means to draw near to you.

[35 : 56] We thank you that we have a savior, a savior who was so near God the Son to the Father yet who was forsaken.

So we remember today, Lord, that Jesus said, my God, my God, why have you forsaken me? You were forsaken, oh, Jesus, our Lord, so that we could be accepted.

You were forsaken so that we could say our Father. And so we pray now and ask that some of us here would really believe that today and then from there we would seek to grow this year.

And so we look at him, we look at this boy, this 12-year-old boy that was growing and growing through the scriptures, through prayer. And we just ask and pray, Lord, that you would draw our hearts towards those disciplines, that our heartbeat in 2024 would be that we would be near unto God.

So we pray this and ask that you would make this our heart in Christ's name.