

Realization!

Good News of Great Joy, Part 6

Luke 2:39-52

Manuscript and Discussion Guide for January 17, 2021
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Summary: Did you know that there is only one Biblical story of Jesus' life between age 3 and age 30? The gospel writer Luke is the only person to tell this story, and he does so at the end of Luke 2. Join Stephen and discover this remarkable story when Jesus had discovered His true identity.

As Luke records his gospel account, he wants the recipient, a Gentile aristocrat by the name of Theophilus, to have certainty that Jesus isn't just one of many gods; that the gospel isn't just one more version of how to appease the gods and one day go to live with them.

Remember, the Greek and Roman world was incredibly religious; this world was filled with gods and goddesses. They all believed in the afterlife; the spirit world; the supernatural. There were statues and festivals and temples and priests dedicated to the gods and religion.

And Luke doesn't attempt to school Theophilus on why they are wrong. He's simply going to describe who Jesus is.

And by the way, to this day, that's a wonderful approach to take.

We live in a world with major world religions, followed by billions of people. But to reach them, you don't necessarily have to provide an answer to their beliefs, you just need to get Jesus right.

You don't have to be an expert in Buddhism. Just ask your Buddhist friend questions about who Jesus is, and they will tell you that Jesus was an enlightened man who found happiness through compassion.

You don't need to be an expert in Hinduism; just ask questions about Jesus and they will tell you with respect that Jesus was a holy man who demonstrated humility and non-violence.

You don't have to be an expert in Judaism; they will tell you He was a man and that He died and that's the end of it.

Your Muslim friend will tell you respectfully that Jesus was just a man — in a long line of revered prophets followed by the prophet Muhammed.

You don't even need to be knowledgeable of minor religions, or cults — just ask questions about Jesus.

And your coworker who's into Scientology will tell you that Jesus is one of many Messiahs who provided people with some direction in life.

Your Jehovah's Witness neighbor will tell you that Jesus was obedient to God but not equal to God.

Your Mormon friend will tell you that Jesus was one of many sons of Elohim, born to one of Elohim's multiple wives.

Our religious world is really no different than the world of Theophilus.

And for the last 2,000 years, the key question remains the same — who is Jesus?

Now part of the challenge is the simple fact that we don't have a detailed biography of Jesus during His early years before beginning His ministry.

The 2nd and 3rd century produced a number of so-called gnostic gospels that twisted the gospel; like the Gospel of Thomas that included legends of Jesus as a boy that have Jesus doing things like making sparrows out of mud and then breathing on them so that they would come to life and fly away.

Another legend has a bully in the neighborhood who threw a rock and hit Jesus, and Jesus turned and pronounced a curse on the bully and he died instantly.

Stories edited from "The Apocryphal Infancy Gospel of Thomas; M. R. James – Translation and Notes (Oxford, Clarendon Press, 1924)

These legends make Jesus out to be some sort of super powerful child who uses his powers as a little boy to have fun with or get even with or make life a little easier.

What we do know from Scripture is that Jesus was anything but selfish or vengeful:

- in fact, He never sinned — Hebrews 9:14 tells us;
- even as He grew up, He fulfilled the law (Matthew 5:17);
- He will qualify by His sinless life to be the unblemished Lamb able to die for the sins of the whole world (I John 2:2).

God might not have recorded everything we would like to know about the early years of Jesus, but He recorded everything we needed to know, in order to have certainty as to who Jesus really is.

In fact, between the early weeks and months of His infancy to the days of His ministry, 30 years later, we only have a few events of His infancy and childhood given to us.

If you take your copy of Luke's gospel and turn now to where we left off — Luke chapter 2, we're told in **verses 39 and 40**

that Jesus grows up in Nazareth, and as He's growing up, He's growing in wisdom and grace.

If you look down at **verse 52** for a moment, we're told that:

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

Luke 2:52

That is, He grew intellectually, physically, spiritually, and socially.

Luke highlights here that as Jesus grows up, His life is marked by demonstrating wisdom and graciousness toward those around Him.

Had you met Jesus as a young boy or a teenager or young adult, he would have struck you as wise beyond His years, gracious and kind.

You would have left his company saying to yourself, "There's really something different — something pure and unique about that young man."

Now with that as a backdrop, Luke happens to be the only gospel writer to tell the only story we're given during the boyhood of Jesus.

It takes place when Jesus is 12 years old, and it's loaded with the truth of who Jesus really is.

Look at verse 41:

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.

Luke 2:41-42

Let me stop here long enough to point out the spiritual devotion of Joseph and Mary.

We know from the Old Testament that every male was required to attend three festivals in Jerusalem, from the age of 13 and older.

Kent Hughes, *Luke: Volume 1* (Crossway, 1998), p. 99

As a thirteen-year-old boy, Jesus would have become officially what they called a son of the commandment — or a son of the law — and this would have made him a full member of his local synagogue.

Ibid

The Mishna — a collection of laws and commentary — encouraged fathers to take their sons to Jerusalem a year or two before they turned 13 in order to inspire them by celebrating Passover in Jerusalem.

However, by the time Jesus was born, any Jewish male living more than 15 miles away from Jerusalem, didn't have to make the lengthy and costly journey to Jerusalem, but could celebrate Passover back in his own village.

William Barclay, *The Gospel of Luke* (Westminster, 1975), p. 29

Nazareth is 65 miles north of Jerusalem. So, Joseph has a free pass; he doesn't have to take 2 weeks off from work. But notice — they are determined to go to

Jerusalem — **verse 42** says this was their custom.

And one more thing to add here: women were not required to go at all. In fact, in this culture, they would have typically remained behind to care for the homestead, and more than likely, other children.

So, for a woman to go along revealed her own determination to make this tremendous effort in organizing the homestead in their absence; to make preparations for the entire family; “to take a difficult and even dangerous journey through unfriendly territory known for highway robbers, which is why they typically traveled in caravans.”

Adapted from Darrel L. Bock, Luke: Volume 1 (Baker Academic, 1994), p. 264

So, when you read here in verse 41:

Now his parents went to Jerusalem every year...

Luke 2:41

This isn’t just because Jesus will soon turn 13. This poor peasant couple is deeply devoted to God, and thankful for His redemption. They desire to be in the middle of this great celebration over God’s deliverance.

When they got to Jerusalem, the streets would have been packed, historians tell us, with nearly one million people crammed into Jerusalem to celebrate Passover; the streets and alley ways would have been lined with merchants selling supplies; the most intense activity would have been at the sheep stalls

where the pilgrims bartered for sheep to sacrifice at the temple.

Hughes, p. 100

Jewish historians record that more than 200,000 sheep would have been herded into Jerusalem for Passover, guided by shepherds on the Temple payroll; these were sheep destined for this annual sacrifice and they had arrived from all around that region, including the fields of Bethlehem.

I can’t help but wonder if some of those shepherds driving sheep into Jerusalem were the same ones, 12 years earlier, to whom the angel had announced that the Savior had been born.

Each family would offer the blood of the lamb to the priest and then roast the lamb and eat it together to remember their deliverance from Egypt centuries earlier.

This was the high point for Israel of celebration and joy.

Now verse 43:

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...

Luke 2:43-44a

The word here for group means caravan.

Typically, the woman and children traveled in front of the caravan and the men walked behind.

Luke tells us in **verse 44** that they traveled one whole day before realizing Jesus wasn't among them. In other words, when they stopped to make camp, Joseph thought Mary had Jesus and Mary thought Joseph had Jesus — and they realized that night neither one of them had Jesus.

We can picture them racing around the caravan hollering for him — verse 44 tells us that none of his relatives or friends have seen him — and they finally realize: they left him back in Jerusalem.

Have you ever left your child somewhere? You got home from school or church and realized you're one kid short.

This isn't just any kid; I can't help but wonder what their conversation was like:

"Honey, do you know where the Messiah is?"

"No, I thought he was with you!"

With me? No, I don't have him. We have lost the Savior of the world!"

Several years ago, I read an online news article about a mother forgetting to take her six-year-old son home after his birthday party. She had a big birthday party for him and his friends at Chuck E. Cheese and she lost him. I can understand that — if you've ever been to Chuck E. Cheese, you can lose a herd of buffalo in there!

In all the chaos of a million pilgrims and a large caravan, this is understandable — but it is no less terrifying to them.

Verse 46 says:

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

Luke 2:46-47

According to Jewish custom during Passover, leading teachers, even members of the Sanhedrin, Israel's Supreme Court, would come out into the temple area and sit with people, answering their questions and giving them direction.

Luke says, here they are, and Jesus is **sitting** among them giving His own insights and asking His own perceptive questions.

We're told that they were **amazed at his understanding and answers** — the word *amazed* literally means to remove oneself; to go out of one's mind.

Charles R. Swindoll, *Insights on Luke* (Zondervan, 2012), p. 80

We would put it, "Their minds were blown completely away" They were stunned by this 12-year-old kid who had a grasp of the Scriptures unlike anything they had seen before.

And here comes Mary and Joseph. After traveling one day out, then one day back to Jerusalem, on the third day they finally find Jesus here in the temple, surrounded

by these leading men who are sitting here with Jesus.

Never mind any of that. I love this — Mary is a typical mother — look at ***the middle part of verse 48:***

*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 2:48b

She just wades right into the middle of these men; there's no, "Excuse me, your honor; pardon me." No, it was more like, "Young man, your **father** and I have been terrified over your disappearance. What were you thinking? Why would you do this to us?"

Mary assigns to Jesus sinful actions — sinful behavior of disrespect and unkindness toward them. But that wasn't true at all.

Now stop for a moment.

Jesus is fully God and fully human; He's growing in His awareness of His deity, by virtue of the Holy Spirit, who has been guiding Him and protecting Him from sin and watching his steps all along the way.

But Jesus is still 12 years old. It's possible to be naïve and unaware of what you're putting your parents through; it's possible to be immature before becoming mature; of doing dangerous things and making mistakes, without sinning.

Jesus is like a kid who got left behind at the State Fair and that was just fine with him — He gets to do what He really wants to do.

And for Jesus, it isn't more rides and cotton candy — He has evidently received significant revelation from God's Spirit during this Passover celebration.

And now, Jesus speaks His first recorded words in Scripture.

Verse 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?”*

Luke 2:49

This isn't a rebuke or some smart-aleck response. He's still 12. In His youthfulness, He's actually confused why they are confused.

The original construction of his question — "Did you not know" — implies his expectation that they knew.

Alan J. Thompson, *Exegetical Guide to the Greek New Testament: Luke* (B&H Academic, 2016), p. 56

We are not given any of the details of what happened during these three days when Jesus was essentially by himself in Jerusalem. But what we do know from His response here is that in the City of David, His royal forefather — God the Father — through God the Holy Spirit gave Jesus the revelation that He was God the Son; both human and divine;

born as Mary's son, but eternally pre-existent as God the Son.

Jesus' human nature and His human mind and heart have now been informed that He has divine nature, equal to God His Father.

And we know that because Jesus says something staggering here — notice Mary says in **verse 48, Son — your father and I have been searching for you.** And Jesus says in **verse 49, I must be in my Father's House.**

Jesus now knows. He knows who He is and what His mission is all about — the business of His Father.

In the 39 volumes of the Old Testament, God is only referred to as Father 14 times, normally as a reference to the entire nation of Israel. God was referred to as Abraham's Father, but Abraham never spoke this way.

But from this moment on, Jesus will nearly always address God as His Father — using this expression more than 60 times!

Adapted from Hughes, p. 104

Now this is where the religions of the world have stumbled regarding the deity of Christ.

When you hear the terms father and son, you think of a biological relationship. A father having — begetting — children.

I am a father of four children:

- which means I begat them; I had them;

- which also means I existed before they did;
- I was here first — I was around before they were, and I reminded them of that periodically.

So, if God is the Father and Jesus is the Son that means God the Father had to exist before God the Son.

But then you read a verse like Colossians 1:17 that says Jesus was before all things — He existed prior to all things; prior to creation.

But if Jesus came into existence when He was born 2,000 years ago, then He didn't exist prior to creation.

Well, a big part of the problem is that we don't understand this concept of Father and Son.

Now, follow me; in the New Testament, there are a number of times where "son" identified a person's nature.

- Barnabas was called the son of encouragement because he was such an encourager (**Acts 4:36**);
- James and John were called the sons of thunder because of their bombastic personalities (**Mark 3:17**);
- Jesus described some unbelievers as "sons of hell" (**Matthew 23:15**);
- The apostle Paul called unbelievers "sons of disobedience" (**Eph. 2:2**);

- Luke will call believers sons of light (**Luke 20:36**).

• Adapted from John MacArthur, Luke: Volume 1 (Moody Press, 2009), p. 195

The term son does not always refer to origin or chronology but to essence and nature.

So as the Son of God, Jesus is equal to — of the same eternal essence and divine nature of — God the Father.

And let me tell you, the Jewish leaders understood this concept. Later on, when they demanded that Pilate crucify Jesus and Pilate wanted to know why, they responded by saying in **John 19:7**:

"We have a law, and according to that law he ought to die because he has made himself the Son of God."

John 19:7b

They knew that Jesus was claiming full equality with God.

The Jewish leaders got it.

Paul told the Philippian church that Jesus didn't grasp — He didn't hang onto — His equality with God but set it aside and became a man (Philippians 2).

Now there are two passages that unbelievers like to use in this regard.

One of them is **John 3:16**:

For God so loved the world, that he gave his only Son, that whoever believes in

him should not perish but have eternal life.

John 3:16

Your translation may read this passage, "he gave his only begotten Son." If Jesus was begotten, it sounds like God the Father existed before God the Son. That God the Father biologically produced Jesus.

You might turn to **John 3:16** and write in the margin of your Bibles the meaning of that Greek term begotten — monogenes — it means one of a kind; unique; the only One like Him. So, God the Father sent His one-of-a-kind Son into the world.

Another verse most often used by religions and cults to deny that Jesus is eternally pre-existent and equally divine is **Colossians 1:15**.

Colossians 1:15 says that Jesus is:

The *firstborn* of all creation.

First-born is not referring to biology or chronology but to priority. The original word here for firstborn (prototokos) refers to supremacy or first place.

In the Old Testament, Israel wasn't the first nation on the planet, yet God calls them His firstborn (Exodus 4:22); King David is called the firstborn son even though he was the lastborn son to Jesse (Psalm 89:27).

What this meant was that Israel would have a preeminent place among the nations of the world and David would be preeminent over his brothers.

So, you might write in the margin of your Bible at **Colossians 1:15** the word preeminent.

Jesus wasn't the first created creature — in fact, all you have to do is read the next verse in Colossians 1 which says:

He is ... the firstborn of all creation. For by him all things were created, in heaven and on earth ... all things were created through him and for him.

Colossians 1:15-16

This means Jesus is over all of creation with the divine right to rule over all because He actually spoke it all into existence.

Now back here in Luke chapter 2, we don't know how much God the Spirit revealed to the young heart and mind of Jesus as to all of who He was — but He now knew that He was eternally God the Son, born through Mary in order to die for our sins.

Verse 51 says:

And he went down with them and came to Nazareth and was submissive to them.

Luke 2:51a

What I would expect to read here is, "And he went down with them and came to Nazareth and they were submissive to Him!

No, for the next 18 years, Jesus will submit to them as an obedient son; kind, honest, pure — growing more and more in His understanding of His nature and His work and His life's mission.

This is the uniqueness of Biblical Christianity to the rest of the world's religions.

He is more than a compassionate, enlightened man; a non-violent leader; a revered prophet and teacher.

Theophilus, I want you to have certainty concerning the identity of Jesus. Who is Jesus? That's the question of the ages.

Have you answered that question? Who is He to you?

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