The Holy Gospel according to Luke 2:41-52

**The Boy Jesus in the Temple – 26th December by Dr Maxwell Reid**

**The Gospel according to Luke, chapter 2, beginning at verse 41**

**41**Now his parents went to Jerusalem every year at the Feast of the Passover. **42**And when he was twelve years old, they went up according to custom. **43**And when the feast was ended, as they were returning, the boy Jesus stayed behind in Jerusalem. His parents did not know it, **44**but supposing him to be in the group they went a 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 parentssaw 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 favour with God and man.

This is the gospel of Christ, **Praise to Christ the word**

Please be seated

The story of the birth narrative is mentioned by Matthew and Luke, this is the only account of Jesus as a child. It bridges the gap between the infant Jesus’ dedication with his Mum and Dad in the temple, and years later, the beginning of his adult ministry. As he grew, he had become filled with wisdom at this early age. Luke picked up the story just prior to the time when Jesus reaches the age of accountability which is thirteen according to Jewish law. In Luke’s opinion Jesus’ greatness could already be seen in his childhood and he portrayed Jesus as the unknown 12-year-old boy from Nazareth who demonstrated such prodigious wisdom that he amazed his teachers and astonished his parents.

There are modern day theologians who speculate on Luke’s intended audience for this passage, some showing clear links between Luke’s narrative and the tales of divinized Emperor Caesar Augustus. Remember, he was the one who called the Census so he could raise taxes, which necessitated Joseph and Mary travelling to Bethlehem 12 years earlier.

It would appear that Luke intended to show that Jesus was superior, not just to all previous Jewish Prophets, like for example, Moses, but also superior to the greatest of Roman Emperors. This was actually dangerous ground for Luke, as the Romans of the time had a notorious custom of getting rid of troublemakers. You’re likely to end up rowing a galley in the Roman navy or fed to the Lions in the Coliseum. But perhaps the intended audience for Luke was likely not aimed at the Jews, who are intimately familiar with Jewish tradition anyway, but instead, the 1st century gentile Christians living far away from Jerusalem long after the temple had been destroyed, living in a world dominated by Roman Pagan culture. Now, most people outside Israel at that time were entrenched in the Roman paganism whether they liked it or not, and despite the disparity in numbers, what Luke was saying to them, is that Jesus is not just for the Jews, because he brings salvation to all peoples and all nations.

The second theological issue here is the problematic interaction between Jesus and his mother. Yes, well this will probably sound familiar to anyone who has brought up a child. A common discourse between a mother and a12 year old in our house was “aw Mum! Why can’t I? Because it’s in the Mother’s Manual. Well, I’d like to see this Manual! You can’t, it’s for Mothers only”

As parents we can all imagine the distress he caused by going AWOL for three days. They must have been sick with worry. In this modern day with all our technology, including cars, cell phones, search parties, sophisticated police forces with their search and rescue equipment, we can still understand that a child could go missing. We can also understand how Jesus’ absence would go unnoticed for a whole day’s travel from Jerusalem, as it was common practice to travel in a large group to and from the Passover celebrations, and they probably assumed he was with their extended family or friends. Most of us have experienced management in some form whether it be a farm, business, part of a large organisation, or even managing the complexities of a household, where we usually discover that is very unwise to assume anything. It can be professional suicide in a management meeting to offer “I assumed” to cover a mistake one has made. However, they had assumed, and when the families regrouped at the end of the first day of travel, his absence was noticed, and panic would certainly have set in. It was a hard day’s travel back to Jerusalem the next day. But once in the city, which was large for those days, they then had to decide where in Jerusalem they would look for him. We can imagine how they felt. Not only had they lost their only son, but they had lost the Messiah whom God had trusted into their care.

In the meantime, how was Jesus feeling? He knew he was just fine. He was not worried a bit. From his perspective, what was there to worry about! How typical! One might argue that Jesus was disrespectful to his mother because he concerned himself with the things that matter to him at that moment to the extent that fundamental family relations were treated as secondary matters.

This gospel reading summarises Jesus’ first 12 years as faithful development where he has become strong in both wisdom and divine favour. With this journey to Jerusalem for the Passover, and then his respectful engagement with teachers of the Gospel, Luke reaffirmed Jesus’ obedience with tradition. Then at the conclusion of Luke’s text, we are told that he returned home with his parents and remains an obedient child, while growing in strength, stature, and favour.

However, he was restless, and while he respected his parents, it is also clear that in his mind, the sense of his future vocation outweighed his family obligations. While Mary speaks of his earthly father, Jesus describes his home as in the temple. He honoured his teachers, and yet presumed himself to teach, long before given any right normal to do so. Jesus was already the Messiah, and he continued to grow more deeply into that role.

But, let’s come back to the parents, particularly Mary, who are described as astonished and anxious and confused. Theirs was no ordinary worry, but that heightened one of parents with frightening thoughts of losing a child. As parents we can understand how Mary and Joseph felt. In a similar situation, we naturally would fear the worst.
Even though eventually he was found to be safe he was oblivious to their distress, to the point of being quite put out by it. What was there to worry about from his perspective? Jesus was where he wanted to be, doing what he wanted to do, and what he was beginning to understand he was called to do.

Well, the issue I see here is that, while we all try in our own lives to follow what God has called us to do, Jesus was showing us that this calling can come at a very early age. In this case, we have a child who had grown up very quickly, with his parents having to come to terms with the fact that he has his own vocation. Although at the time they don’t understand his reasoning, Mary ponders and waits for an understanding that still escapes her. As the Gospel said “she treasures these feelings in her heart. She has after all treasured him since his birth and like any responsible parent, will continue to do so, but nevertheless, no one, not even Mary fully understood who Jesus was, or what his mission in life would involve. Amongst her jumbled feelings of loss, fear, worry, anger relief and joy, she also saw her son growing up rather quickly and breaking free of his normal life to discover his true identity and vocation.

We know that this choice became incredibly challenging and painful for Jesus and his close disciples. In greater or smaller degrees, we too have choices about how we follow God’s wishes for us. Now this transformation may not be instantaneous, in fact, it may be slow, but even so, the change in all of us can still become every bit as dramatic as the promise it fulfils. As we look back retrospectively on our lives we can wonder. Did we allow ourselves to become aware of God’s plan for us, and if so, did we follow it?

**Amen**