

Jesus as a Young Boy

The time between the birth of Jesus and the beginning of His early ministry is sometimes called “the silent years.” There is only one break in this silence, the story of the boy Jesus at the temple, which we heard in our Gospel Reading today. Though this story is included in the second chapter of Luke, it really fits better with what follows in chapter 3. Already as a 12-year-old, Jesus is introduced as the Servant of the heavenly Father. The Child who was presented in the temple now takes a seat among the teachers of the Word of God, much to the amazement of the onlookers.

Luke tells us that Mary and Joseph regularly went up to Jerusalem for the annual feast of the Passover. This feast celebrated the redemption of the people of Israel from Egypt and was observed in the spring of the year. It was the most important of the Jewish festivals, and the law required all males to attend.

At the conclusion of the Passover feast, Mary and Joseph started back to Nazareth, thinking that Jesus was among the group of pilgrims who were travelling together. But at nightfall the boy was nowhere to be found. A frantic search began for the missing son, one which ended three days later when Jesus was discovered in the temple courts. These courts surrounded the temple sanctuary and were used as a place for instruction and study of God’s Word.

Jesus was making quite an impression on the crowd that had gathered. Here was no ordinary boy; His questions and answers showed superior knowledge and understanding. Mary and Joseph were also astonished - and a bit perturbed - when they found Him. This is evident from the words spoken by Mary: “*Son, why have you done this to us? Look! Your father and I have been anxiously searching for you,*” (Luke 2:48).

Any parent who has suffered the trauma of a missing child can well imagine what Mary and Joseph experienced. How guilty Mary must have felt for failing to keep closer watch over the whereabouts of this son entrusted to her care by the Lord.

The words that Jesus speaks to His mother here are the first recorded in any of the gospels. Mary had addressed a question to Him. He responds with a double question: “*Why have you been looking for Me? Did you not know that I had to be about My Father’s business?*” (v. 49).

There is in these questions a gentle rebuke for Mary. She was tempted at times to think of Jesus as an ordinary child, one over whom she had complete control.

Mary had to learn, as also later at the wedding at Cana, that Jesus was directed by a greater will, the will of the heavenly Father, in a way no other child was directed. This was something that Mary and Joseph did not understand. For them it was a learning experience. And for all who witnessed this 12-year-old in the temple, it was a dramatic introduction to the Servant of God.

What Jesus did was not an act of rebellion over against His parents. His complete obedience to them continued to be demonstrated on their return to Nazareth. For Mary this incident added to the treasure stored in her heart. Already she was learning what those words of Simeon meant, “a sword will pierce your own soul too.”

Luke closes out this story by telling us that Jesus grew wiser and taller and increased in the approval of God and of people.

One assumes that Jesus spent the next 18 or so years of His life in and around Nazareth working as a carpenter (see Mark 6:3, where the question is asked, “Isn’t this the carpenter?”). The next time we will next hear of Jesus is when He is baptised by John in the Jordan River at about 30 years of age (3:23).