

My Father’s House



Luke 2:41-52

This passage tells us that the Holy Family made the pilgrimage to Jerusalem for the Passover. Passover was the first day of a weeklong holiday. Passover precedes the Feast of Unleavened bread. The entire eight day festival was often referred to as Passover. This holiday week is the most important of the three annual holidays celebrated by pilgrimage to the Holy City, the other two celebrations being the Feast of Weeks (Spring Harvest) and the Feast of Tabernacles (Fall Harvest). According to God’s law, all males were required to make this journey three times a year to celebrate these holidays as a community in thanksgiving and remembrance of God delivering Israel from slavery in Egypt, and in thanksgiving for harvests by giving of first fruits from each harvest. Pentecost is the Greek name for the Feast of Weeks, celebrating the Spring Harvest.

For these pilgrim feasts it was common for family groups to travel together, perhaps groups starting from one town would depart with friends or neighbors, and join up with other groups of friends or relations as they traveled. These would become large groups of people traveling together as a caravan. This would have afforded protection along the road from thieves and bandits, as well as a time for reconnecting with friends and family. The women and children would group together at the front of the caravan visiting with one another; and when stopping for the night, working to prepare meals together. The men would bring up the end of the caravan. Older children would run together away from the watchful eye of parents, but in the relative safety of the large group. It would not necessarily be hard to believe that Jesus wasn’t missed until the large group traveling home together stopped for the evening meal, and may have taken awhile to search through the group trying to find him. The scriptures tell us that Mary and Joseph had already traveled for one day. That means they likely had to wait until morning to start back to Jerusalem, it would have been too dangerous for the two of them to return during the night. In the morning they would have travelled the same distance as the day before, reaching Jerusalem at the end of the day, maybe a little earlier because of their fear and rush to find their missing son. Jerusalem could be a very dangerous city, and their fear for him was not unfounded. Eventually he was found in the temple courts.

*After three days they found him in the temple courts, sitting among the teachers, **listening to them and asking them questions.***

The Rabbis would school young men in the teachings of Torah. The most respected teachers of the Law would congregate in the temple courts, teaching their students and debating amongst themselves. Only the best students would come to these school gatherings to learn from the most respected teachers. It was a great privilege to be taken into a school of one of these rabbis. Paul makes mention of his inclusion and instruction by the Rabbi Gamaliel, in one such group. Gamaliel was the most learned teachers of the law in their time. It would be astonishing to find a 12 year old Galilean among the group to begin with, but what scripture records is even more amazing:

*“Everyone who heard him was **amazed** at his understanding and his answers”* (v46).

The word “amazed” is translated from the Greek “existēmi”. (Pronounced: ex-is'-tay-mee) It means: “to *put (stand) out* of wits, i.e. *astound*, or *become astounded*, *insane* :- amaze, be or make astonished, be beside self, bewitch, wonder”.¹ You could say that those hearing Jesus conversing with the Rabbis were *beside themselves in amazement* at his understanding and his answers. The amazement of those who heard him, were amazed at not only his answers, but also the underlying understanding of the questions he posed. This 12 year old possessed an understanding not only surpassing his age, but also if not on par with, but surpassing that of the teachers before him.

Luke often uses this word “amaze” to reflect a supernatural encounter. Perhaps here he was pointing out Jesus’ supernatural understanding of the wisdom of God.

- 2:16-20 Shepherds seeing infant Jesus
- 8:49-56 Raising of Jairus’ daughter
- 24:19-24 Road to Emmaus
- Acts 2:5-8 The crowds hearing the apostles speaking at Pentecost

Returning to our passage in Luke 2, verse 47 tells us that both Mary and Joseph were “*astonished*”, the Greek is similar to the word above meaning, amazed, astounded, astonished; but it is not clear to what they were astonished – whether it was finally locating their missing son (the son of God!); or to Jesus being found at the temple surrounded by the teachers, or if they had heard Jesus speaking with the teachers and were astonished by his words. Likely, all three are appropriate conclusions. Clearly they were not even thinking about who Jesus was in terms of his deity, they thought of him as their beloved son lost in Jerusalem and unaccustomed to the ways of city life.

Perhaps we should take into consideration that nothing about Jesus had been recorded for 12 years since his infancy. Likely, there was nothing out of the ordinary about his youth. He probably lived a very normal life of a Judean boy, no different than any of the other boys living in the Galilean countryside. Then twelve years later his

¹ Strong's Talking Greek & Hebrew Dictionary

true identity was unexpectedly brought to the fore-front. Mary and Joseph likely were not expecting such a scene to unfold surrounding their lost son. Most likely they were scared out of their wits by their missing son, not knowing where they would find him. Finally locating him at the Temple expressing eloquently the wisdom of God was not at all what they were anticipating from a missing 12 year old boy who up until this very moment had been very much like any other 12 year old boy.

Jesus response to his parents, *"Why were you searching for me?" he asked. "Didn't you know I had to be in my Father's house?"* But they did not understand what he was saying to them. (v. 49-50) clearly points out that they had not considered anything beyond the fate of a lost 12 year old boy in a large and dangerous city. Jesus, on the other hand knew exactly what he was doing, and it made perfect sense to him to be among the teachers at the Temple. Where else would he possibly be in all Jerusalem? This is the first time we see Mary and Joseph not understanding the purpose behind God coming to dwell among them in the form of their son. Jesus' response is not a rebuke; rather it is more an expression of surprise. The Greek grammar reflects this:

The "me" and the "I" in the next phrase are emphatic. "Why were you searching for me?" "Didn't you know I had to be in my Father's house?"

In Jesus' mind there is was no other place to possibly look. He wouldn't be anywhere other than his Father's house. A secondary interpretation of "my Father's house" could be read as "about my father's business", which also seems appropriate as Jesus appears to know who his father is, and has an idea of what his future may be about: bringing God's love, teaching and light into a dark world. This would be the first time we hear Jesus addressing his relationship to God as his father. It is not the way most Jews would have termed their relationship with God. Jews viewed God more along the lines of "Almighty God" or "Creator of the Universe", not as a father figure. We see Jesus is stepping up into the role of an obedient son to his father's business.

Notice also that Jesus is not rejecting his relationship with his "earthly" parents. In fact the scriptures tell us: *"Then he went down to Nazareth with them and was **obedient to them.**"* (v51) Jesus returned to Nazareth with his parents, living under their authority. Despite being the Son of God, he put himself under the authority of his earthly parents. Could it be that the human aspect of his personality still had the life of an adolescent young Judean man to experience? Being subject to the authority of his parents, his extended family, his community allowed him to experience something of a "normal" life preparing him to be able to sympathize and understand those whom he came to help. Just as Jesus was obedient and faithful to his duties to his family, despite his calling and position as the Son of God, he did not turn his back on his family and his responsibilities to his family. It appears that he had a rather normal childhood and adolescence, maturing as most children do. Not only did he grow physically and mentally, but also with healthy relationships within his family, and with God, a model which all of us ought to strive to imitate. Our final verse attests to this development:

"And Jesus grew in wisdom and stature, and in favor with God and men." (v. 52)