

The boy in the temple already hints at the man on the cross

⁴¹Now his parents went to Jerusalem every year at the Feast of the Passover. ⁴²And when he was twelve years old, they went up according to custom. ⁴³And when the feast was ended, as they were returning, the boy Jesus stayed behind in Jerusalem. His parents did not know it, ⁴⁴but 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, ⁴⁵and when they did not find him, they returned to Jerusalem, searching for him. ⁴⁶After three days they found him in the temple, sitting among the teachers, listening to them and asking them questions. ⁴⁷And all who heard him were amazed at his understanding and his answers. ⁴⁸And when his parents saw 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". ⁴⁹And he said to them, "Why were you looking for me? Did you not know that I must be in my Father's house?" ⁵⁰And they did not understand the saying that he spoke to them. ⁵¹And 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. ⁵²And Jesus increased in wisdom and in stature and in favour with God and man. (Luke 2:41-52 ESV)

In two and a bit weeks – depending on the year – the Christian church covers the first 30 years of Jesus' life. With Advent we have the waiting in anticipation time – like pregnancy. With Christmas we have the birth and the hopes and dreams of what this new life will become. Two or so weeks later – next Sunday for us – we will be at the Jordan for the *man* Jesus' baptism and from then on until his death and resurrection and then ascension the focus is all on what he's being doing in his public ministry. After Pentecost the church then turns its focus to us and who we are and how we live because of Jesus – and again the sermons and bible studies will be about Jesus as an adult – whether we are adults or children. Today is rare both because there really is only one text in Scripture to consider but also because there is really only one Sunday – which doesn't occur every year – in which to consider Jesus as a child.

The answer is enigmatic and gives film makers lots of scope for the surreal or the supernatural for we are dealing with a person that one third of this planet's population – us included – claims is truly human and truly God. The question – what is Jesus like? – is valid. The answers, however, are limited to Scripture because we are only asking the question in the first place because Jesus has died on a cross and risen from the dead and has brought to people his life, forgiveness, and a new relationship with God.

We don't know Luke's source for this story but I don't think it's too wild a guess to say that Mary has something to say – she who pondered and treasured all these accounts in her heart – would have corrected Luke if he'd got it wrong.

But what do we have?

A parents' worst nightmare. The loss of a child. Ok, he's not a toddler and can, no doubt, take some care of himself but there's a day's journey involved – and searching – and maybe parents blaming each other – and all up its 3 days before he's found. And we can imagine the relief – the hugging and the desire to throttle at the same time.

We have a mother who seems pretty up tight. Like I said, losing a child is horrible. Who knows what additional torments Mary and Joseph went through because they knew this boy was special. Ok, all parents say that about their kids but in their case, they knew it to be so. This child is destined to have a greater kingdom than King David; he will be called the Son of God; shepherds told of angelic joy at his birth; those Gentile astrologers found him and worshipped him. So when Mary says she's in 'great distress', she's not saying she's annoyed

– she’s saying that she’s tortured, tormented like in hell – perhaps she also remembered Simeon’s words about a sword piercing her heart because of Jesus. Was this it?

We have a boy in the temple who is generating astonishment by his listening and his questions. What I find intriguing and with no way to make a definitive conclusion – it’s more like another precursor to a greater story – is that Jesus is *sitting* among the teachers. Obviously people sat in Jesus’ day. One has to be careful about not making too much of it but we can note that in the biblical world – God sits, kings sit, judges sit, and teachers sit – and I wonder whether there is all rolled up in one 12 year old lad all of the above.

And then we have what Jesus says to his parents – we sense incredulity that finding him was difficult. “*Why were you looking for me? Did you not know that I must be in my Father’s house?*” The only response we have to his words is their lack of understanding – they didn’t put two and two together. Of course when people did do that when Jesus was in the temple as an adult, the people then wanted to stone him (John 8)! Jesus addresses God without any formula acquired from the rabbis or the synagogue or temple – he says ‘my Father’. There is a relationship, a bond, a ‘something’ that marks Jesus as close to God.

And then we have what Jesus does. He is obedient to his parents and returns with them to Nazareth and all those stories that we’d like to know are subsumed in the description ‘*And Jesus increased in wisdom and in stature and in favour with God and man.*’ The lad grows up and the key component is a parent’s dream – the child is obedient! To whom? Ah, this is interesting – to God and then to his parents. With the light of an empty tomb we can see just a little – but also not fully understand – that and how the Lord of lords was submissive to his earthly parents because that is God’s will for him at that time. Later, he will cause his mother and family concern with his preaching and actions – in fact they will even attempt to get him and bring him home to safety when things look dangerous for him (Mark 3). But for now Jesus fulfils the 4th commandment as an expression of keeping the 1st – as it always should be.

What we have in Jerusalem at this Passover are pieces of a jigsaw – momentarily interesting in themselves – as any lost child is newsworthy – but which becomes significantly prophetic because we know the outcome. We have no access to the psychology of the scene, to the hormones, to what parenting a Son of God must be like, to what being the Son of God is like – but what we have is God’s plan taking shape in the person of Jesus – and this points us to something greater – that in Jesus we have God understanding humanity from birth to adulthood and pointing out that we do not understand God. Left to ourselves, our own views of God will lead us astray – into the bushes ultimately in fear or dancing around a golden construction we’ve made to our satisfaction.

This scene is not a club to make our children behave any more than it is a teenager’s rationale for getting some freedom away from parents. This scene can’t be used by us for behavioural modification as such – children, don’t get lost; parents, know which of you has the kids – though it should encourage us to bring our children regularly to the house of the Lord – but it can stand under the shadow of what is to come and it doesn’t jar or ring false. Jesus doesn’t fit neatly into a box. He never did – ask the Pharisees, the Sadducees, Pilate, Judas, even Peter needed help to make his confession. C S Lewis summed up the point well with his famous three options about Jesus – mad, bad, or he is who he says he is – the one who calls God ‘Father’ – even from a cross – who rescues us and gives us life which we can live with him no matter how old we become.