

Increase in Wisdom and Favour

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Preacher: Jonathan Smith

[0 : 00] Please take a seat. It's great to be with you here this morning. If you're new or visiting, my name's Jono Smith, one of the pastors here at Holy Trinity. If you're with us on Friday, you'll remember that we're going through a series through the book of Luke, looking at the early part of Luke, the birth narrative, and a little way after that.

And on Friday, I gave you a one-point sermon. A lot of people were happy about that. And the one point of the sermon was that Jesus' name means God saves.

And that tells us everything about why Jesus came to this earth, to save, to be the saviour, the Messiah, not just of the Jews, but we also saw through the words of Simeon that he came to save people of all nations.

And that's reflected in the congregation here today, which is fantastic. I've got another one-pointer for you this morning. It's for free. I'll get over it pretty soon.

I'm going on holidays tomorrow, so I'll be back with my 50-minute sermons back in the new year. Is that a groan? I've got a really interesting passage this morning, guys.

[1 : 08] It's really the only passage that looks at Jesus in his infancy, or really in his young adult life, age of 12 in that culture, right on the cusp of manhood.

For us, it's more like 30 or 40. But for him, 12 years old. So it's going to be interesting to see. It's also interesting to see a lot of scholars that I read during this week who are kind of educated beyond their intelligence and don't believe that Jesus is the Son of God.

Those kind of scholars tend to argue that this passage is not really an authentic part of Luke's Gospel. It's not really written by Luke. It's written by the early church to kind of fill in the gaps between Jesus' birth and his adult life.

We don't agree with those guys, and there's a few good reasons why. But I thought I'd have some fun and just read you a story or an account from the second century, which is actually a fabricated story about Jesus' early life.

and see if you can pick the difference between this from the infancy Gospel of Thomas and the reading we have this morning. This is the boy Jesus who should be on Ritalin.

[2 : 26] Okay. When this boy Jesus was five years old, he was playing at the foot of a brook, and he gathered together into pools the water that flowed by and made it at once clean and commanded it by his word alone.

But the son of Annas, the scribe, was standing there with Joseph, and he took a branch of a willow and with it dispersed the water which Jesus had gathered together. When Jesus saw what he had done, he was enraged and said to him, you insolent, godless dunderhead, what harm did the pools and the water do to you?

See now that you also shall wither like a tree and shall bear neither leaves nor root nor fruit. And immediately that lad withered up completely, and Jesus departed and went into Joseph's house. But the parents of him that was withered took him away, bewailing his youth, and brought him to Joseph and reproached him. What a child you have who does such things. After this again, he went through a village and a lad ran and knocked against his shoulder.

Jesus was exasperated and said to him, you shall go no further on your way. And the child immediately fell down and died. But some who saw what was taking place said, from where does this child spring since every word is an accomplished deed?

[3 : 44] That's a legendary story about Jesus as a young man and the difference between that story and the gospel accounts is pretty obvious.

That is a story probably written by some well-meaning Christians trying to reinforce the fact that Jesus was the son of God. But we see in the gospels actually Jesus is a lot more subtle than that.

He doesn't go around performing tricks and he also isn't that hot-headed. Jesus is pretty edgy, but he doesn't go around killing people because they knocked into him, although he could.

But that's what a legendary story looks like. Luke's gospel, indeed all the gospels we see are very much historical accounts. Luke is, as we've seen, a historian par excellence and he gets the details right from the eyewitnesses, not from legends that came about a couple of centuries later.

Listen to what Dr. John Piper says. He says, After such stories, as we've just heard, the account in Luke 2 seems a bit drab. And that is precisely what speaks in favour of its authenticity.

[4 : 55] It does not appear to be motivated by a desire to overplay Jesus' uniqueness. The claim to uniqueness is much more subtle and that accords with the way Jesus acted most of the time.

In addition, the Greek language of that made-up story is almost certainly a translation... Sorry, the Greek language of the actual Luke chapter 2 is actually a translation of the Semitic language of Palestine, which means that it was not created like the legends in Greek-speaking areas far removed from the land of eyewitnesses.

On the contrary, it is Jewish in content and language, therefore probably originated in Palestine and the most likely source for the story is actually Mary.

So you notice that Luke, throughout the birth narrative, refers or says things like Mary stored up these things in her heart or in other words, Mary committed these things to memory and then when Luke was writing his gospel asking eyewitnesses about what they'd seen, Mary was most probably one of those that he spoke to.

So we can see that this is a true account. If you ever find someone saying anything to the contrary, it's really important to actually read these so-called gospels that they're talking about. There's a lot of bestsellers written about the lost gospels and whatever but if you actually look into them, it's pretty easy to tell the truth from the myth and so we're going to look at Luke chapter 2 this morning which is a historical account of a young man named Jesus and his encounter with the temple teachers and also with his parents.

[6 : 32] There's one major point, see if you can look for it, it's the highlight of this passage and probably of this whole entire section of Luke. So let's go.

We'll go Luke chapter 2. Make sure you have your Bibles open. We'll go through it together starting at verse 41. Luke says, Now every year his parents went to Jerusalem for the festival of the Passover and when he was 12 years old they went up as usual for the festival.

So we saw last week, we've seen week by week that Mary and Joseph are both very pious, very keen to obey the law of Moses. They are Jewish people who want to honour God with their lives and so they circumcise Jesus at day 8.

They take him to dedicate him at the temple at day 40 and then now 12 years later they're going to Jerusalem for the first day of a 7 day feast known as the Feast of Unleavened Bread and I think what Luke wants to show us in this, he keeps referring to their pious commitment to God, I think he wants to show us and Theophilus who he's writing to that although Jesus was rejected and killed by the Jews it wasn't because he was anti-Semitic, it wasn't because he was against the law of Moses, actually him and his family honoured the law of Moses and that's not the reason he was killed.

He also, obviously the main point he wants to make in telling us this is to show us the situation of what happens in the temple that Jesus is no ordinary boy.

[8 : 10] Now there would have been a lot of 12 year olds going to the temple, as I said this was when they're about to enter manhood, this is where they had their bar mitzvah which means they become a son of the commandment, they become responsible for keeping the commandments of God and so that's why Jesus is there with other 12 year old boys but Luke wants to point out something very important that Jesus is no ordinary kid.

We're going to see why in just a minute, let's keep going. Verse 43, when the festival was ended and they started to return, the boy Jesus stayed behind in Jerusalem but his parents did not know it. Assuming that he was in the group of travellers, they went a day's journey, then they started to look for him among their relatives and friends. Now, this sounds a little bit horrific when we first read it, doesn't it?

I mean, do we need to get the DHS in on this situation? Jesus' parents have just kind of abandoned him. They've gone a day before they even noticed that he wasn't there.

But I think actually it's not as bad as it sounds. Luke never kind of intimates that they're bad parents or that they've done anything wrong in misplacing him. He doesn't intimate either that Jesus is being disobedient.

[9 : 25] I think we need to look into their culture and see, once again, a 12-year-old boy is not just a little kid playing on his game. Boy, he's actually about to be a man, so he's got certain responsibilities.

Also, the fact that they're travelling in a caravan of people, all together, a bunch of them. If you've ever grown up in a small town or lived in a small town, you'll know that you know people really well, you can trust people more in that situation.

They assume he's with good friends of theirs. I think it also points probably, rather than pointing to the fact that Jesus was disobedient or the kind of kid in the legend who's going to go around killing people, it's actually that he is really trustworthy, that he is an obedient child and so they can trust him to obey them and to be with them.

Now, the reason that he's not has little to do with his disobedience or with the parents' lack of concern, but actually he's missing because God means for him to be missing.

He's missing because he must be missing, as he says later on. God has set up a situation so that we can learn who he really is even at this tender age.

[10 : 37] Let's take a look at what happens. Verse 45, When they did not find him, they returned to Jerusalem to search for him. After three days they found him in the temple sitting among the teachers listening to them, asking them questions.

And all who heard him were amazed at his understanding and his answers. So it's three days later. It's not clear whether they were searching for three days or whether Luke means that they went a day, then they came back a day and they were searching for a day.

It doesn't really matter. They've gone to a lot of trouble. You can imagine it's not just a matter of turning the car around and heading back up the freeway. They have to walk in the Middle East. It's hot, it's hard, and they've got to go back to Jerusalem to find this kid who's got loose. And so it's been a lot of trouble, say in the next verse, that they have experienced great anxiety and so they eventually find him in the temple and they're amazed to see him listening and asking questions.

And I guess in a way, if you think about it, this should amaze us as well. We understand Jesus to be the Son of God, that Jesus is God in human flesh.

[11 : 49] We just said in the Creed, he's fully God and fully man. And so we've got an interesting theological riddle to solve here. If you think about it, Jesus, God in human flesh, is sitting in a temple learning about God from his temple teachers.

How does that work? It says in verse 52 as well that he grew in, not just in stature but in understanding, in wisdom.

So he's learning things about God. He is God. I think probably the answer to the riddle is found several places in the Bible but particularly in Philippians too, you know that great hymn of the early church that Jesus emptied himself and became man.

I think one of the things he emptied himself of as the son of God was his omniscience. God knows all things but I think when Jesus came he emptied himself of that.

He voluntarily left that behind in order to live a human life. So we see later on, about 20 odd years later, he says about his return that even he doesn't know when he's coming back.

[13 : 07] He doesn't know, nobody does, only the father in heaven knows. So another example of Jesus not knowing, something that self-emptying of his omniscience. And so he sits there and he listens and he learns more and more about who he is.

Let's keep going, verse 48, when his parents saw him, they were astonished. And his mother said to him, child, why have you treated us like this? Look, your father and I have been searching for you in great anxiety.

Any of the parents in the room relate to this? Remember being in this situation? Carowanas, nodding vigorously. I can remember this look from my parents quite often.

Remember this dad? My dad's here today. I used to have a bit of a habit of running away or getting lost and the look on your parents face when they finally find you is kind of 50% anger and 50% relief and it's a very strange thing to see and you're just hoping that they'll fall on the side of relief rather than anger and so you get a very human response here from Mary and Joseph they've been experiencing great anxiety they've had to endure the walk and then the search for him and now they've finally found him safe and well and yet they're still quite indignant with him but his response is the most important thing for us to see this morning.

Let's look at verse 49. He said to them why were you searching for me? Now only God could get away with giving that response. He's got some privileges here I think because if I had said to my dad why were you searching for me that 50-50 response would go to 100% anger pretty quickly. [15:02] Why were you searching for me? Did you not know and this is it this is the major point did you not know that I must be in my father's house? They did not understand what he was saying to them.

This is the major point. Jesus as a 12 year old adolescent is fully aware that he is the son of God. This little boy to our reckoning knows that he is the son of God. There's a contrast there. You see Mary says look your father and I have been searching for you and Jesus says no I was in my father's house. We could translate it I'm about my father's business. I must be. He knows the distinction between Joseph his father and his true father in heaven. He knows. He understands.

So as he sits in the temple learning about his father he knows that he is the son of God. And then Luke completes the picture by saying as he often does they did not understand what he was saying to them and that's code for there's more here than meets the eye.

[16:21] It's not just a story about a runaway kid and the parents who find him. It's actually about Jesus the son of God. It's interesting too that he says I must be in my father's house.

He's obligated. It's almost as if it's not his decision. It's God's decision. There's a couple of reasons or a couple of meanings. First of all because God is sovereign he dictates the situation.

You see this often. God puts Jesus in situations so as to show that he is who he says he is God's son. Think of the wind and the wave, the calming of the wind and the waves.

These situations crop up constantly throughout Luke's gospel and throughout the gospels where God designs a situation so that Jesus can reveal himself to be the son of God, to be the Messiah. So the reason he had to be there was because God made him and the reason for that was to show Joseph and Mary, to show the teachers who would later reject him, to show Theophilus in the book and to show us here today that this is no ordinary 12 year old.

[17:35] This is no ordinary 12 year old and he knows it. He knows it. Now this is tough because I'm not telling you anything new here this morning, am I?

I think most people are not here this morning going, wow, Jesus is the son of God. I've never heard that before. I didn't just say that in the creed five minutes ago, 20 minutes ago. I'm not teaching you anything new.

But listen, I reckon particularly at Christmas, it's really, really important for us to remember who Jesus is. We can underestimate Jesus when we see a plastic baby in a manger.

We can be tempted at Christmas to think about the baby Jesus, meek and mild, gently he sleeps and so on. Even as a 12 year old, we can be tempted to think that, well, he was just a little kid.

No, no, no. Jesus is the son of God. The most incredible thing about this passage is that Jesus is submitting and learning from teachers in the temple, submitting to parents, being obedient to parents, both of whom he created.

[18:50] Get your mind around that. He's submitting to authority structures which he has given and to people whom he's created. Listen to Colossians.

Remember this. This 12 year old boy, he is the image of the invisible God, the firstborn over all creation. For by him all things were created, things in heaven and on earth, visible and invisible, whether thrones or powers or rulers or authorities, temple teachers, parents.

All things were created by him and for him. He is before all things and in him all things hold together. And he is the head of the body, the church.

He is the beginning and the firstborn from the dead so that in everything he might have the supremacy. For God was pleased to have all his fullness dwell in him and through him to reconcile to himself all things, whether things on earth or things in heaven by making peace through the blood shed on his cross.

That's this kid. Don't underestimate the boy Jesus. Never underestimate Jesus.

[20:11] I had someone come to me this week who's struggling with understanding who Jesus is and currently understands him to be a good guy and a moral guy and a good teacher. She asked me, how can you reconcile the boy Jesus, even the man Jesus, with the Jesus who is coming to judge the nations with the iron scepter, the Jesus of revelation who's coming perhaps before the end of the service to judge all people, to damn some and to save others.

That doesn't make sense. I think this is a really good link for us to answer that question. That the baby Jesus in the manger and the coming king who judged the nations are met together in this 12-year-old boy.

He is a kid. He does do things that kids do. But he's also the living son of God, the firstborn over all creation.

All things were created by him and for him. That's the boy Jesus. That's the Jesus who we worship. I can't label this point enough.

I just think at Christmas time we're in such great danger to reduce Jesus down. But we need to see him. We need to see him in the manger. We need to see him as a kid.

[21 : 39] We need to see him as the man, as the same God who's coming to judge the nations. It's the same God whom we're worshipping this morning. If he wasn't, then we wouldn't be worshipping him.

So can I encourage you? Wayne just said that every day is Christmas Day. Can I encourage you every day to think about Christmas in these terms?

To know who it is who came and was born of a woman. To know who it is, the majestic son of God who emptied himself and humbled himself to live as a man, to die, to be raised again for our salvation.

It's the glorious son of God. God, all things were created by him and for him. Let's pray to him now. Father, thank you so much for this really interesting insight into Jesus as an adolescent on the cusp of manhood, as a 12-year-old boy.

Father, please, Lord, save us from the error of underestimating Jesus, reducing him down to being a baby. Lord, please help us to appreciate every breath, to appreciate every sunrise, to know that all things are maintained by him.

[23 : 07] Please help us to submit every part of our lives, knowing that we were made for him.

Please help us to anticipate a day coming very soon, perhaps, when he'll come to judge all peoples.

Lord, please help us to have the right kind of fear, a fear of reverence and of love for the man Jesus Christ who died on the cross for us.

I pray it all because Jesus is supreme, because Jesus is king. In his name we pray.

Amen. I pray the Lord. Amen. I pray that I pray. Amen. I pray that things are forever. Amen.