Great Expectations: Jesus (Evening Service)

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[0:00] Right, so this is the last sermon in our Christmas series. So we're looking at Luke's Gospel, we'll be looking at the nativity sort of story, and we're looking at this little story that Deborah just read for us that finishes off the introductory section of Luke's Gospel, the story of Jesus as a preteen.

So you have Luke's Gospel, which is in these various theological chunks, and the first little chunk is the birth of Jesus, and then this really interesting little story, and then it jumps to Jesus as an adult. So as you heard it read, it's so interesting, right? Like, it's so interesting. It's fascinating. It's the only place in the Bible where Jesus isn't a baby or a man, so it's really unique, so I've really enjoyed studying it this week.

So let's dive into it. The first thing we should do, though, is let's do a flyover. Let's just remind ourselves of kind of the story. So, and then we'll come back to the question, the obvious question, which is why does Luke include this story?

This one story of Jesus as a kid. Why just this one story? So the flyover. Okay, so Mary and Joseph are obviously quite pious people.

[1:19] They are good parents. They're doing everything by the book. You know, the first couple of verses of the passage talk about they're doing everything by the Lord, raising their kids in the faith, and earlier in the chapter they presented Jesus at the temple as per the rules, and now they've come to Jerusalem for the Passover, which they did every year, the passage says.

The rules in the Bible way, way back in the day said that for these feasts, for the Passover feast, only the men had to go because it was a really full-on journey to get there.

So they said somebody's got to go. So the man is the only one that actually has to go. But in this case, the whole family went. So again, they presented as these very faithful people. The journey was pretty arduous.

Three days, about 80 miles from Nazareth to Jerusalem to go to the feast. And people would do the trip in a massive group. So they'd sort of gather their extended family, their neighbors and their friends, and they'd form this big caravan of people.

Safety numbers, I guess. It was fairly perilous. Slave traders, bandits and stuff. So Mary, Joseph, Jesus, they go to the feast. No dramas there. No dramas. Now, on the way back, there's a moment where Mary and Joseph realize Jesus is not with them.

[2:32] So panic. And I know this feeling. I've lost my daughter Bea and Ollie a number of times. That's a horrible, horrible thing, right? But interestingly, the passage passes no judgment on Mary and Joseph.

It doesn't present them as these terrible parents. But you might think, well, it was three days. How would they not know? Like, how would they not know? But it was just different back in the days. Kids were the responsibility of every adult in the community. So it was a pretty fluid sort of arrangement. We have some people living in our basement suite from Syria who have two small children, and their kids come up and play for a couple of hours.

And our kids will go down there for a couple of hours. Not with the, you know, just, they'll just head down there. And we'll ring up after about 20 minutes going, are our kids being a problem? And the dad, Isaiah, says, no, we are one family.

It was this, it's this kind of attitude of like, all the adults look after all of the kids. So they might have just assumed Jesus was with another, with the uncle or with the auntie or something.

[3:39] Or they could have assumed that Jesus was with the other person. Because the husbands and wives, they weren't like riding on a camel beside each other, right, down the road.

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In these caravans of people, men right up the front, mum and the kids were at the back. Again, it was like a sort of a safety thing. And Jesus was 12 years old.
So that's the cusp of manhood in the ancient Near East. At 13, you're regarded as an adult. So perhaps Joseph assumed Jesus was with Mary because he's just a kid. Perhaps Mary thought Joseph was with the other men at the front because he's almost a man.
I don't know. We don't know. But a day into the journey, they head back to Jerusalem to find him. After a couple of days, they find him in the temple. He's sitting with the teachers. There's a dialogue. He's having a dialogue with them.
He's asking these questions. He's obviously wanting to learn. And the teaching, the pedagogy was like question-answer back and forth, right? And so apparently some of the things he was answering, they were pretty astounded at him because he was so young.
[4:40] The parents see him and of course go, your father and I have been so worried. What were you trying to do to us? Which you may have heard before. Jesus says, why are you looking for me?

Did you not know that I must be at my father's house? In other words, it took you a couple of days to find me. You should have known I'd be here.
This is the place you should know that this is where I'd be. In the temple. We lost our daughter, Bea, at Ikea about two weeks ago. And so fun fact.
Fun fact. When you lose a child at Ikea, it's called a code 99. So you find an Ikea person and then all of a sudden you'll hear code 99 over the speaker. So you hear code 99 over the speaker. Some kid's gone missing. So anyway, so we have all these Ikea employees racing. Like a terrible place to lose a child, obviously. Racing around trying to find our daughter, Bea.
[5:41] And we found her after about 20 minutes in the stuffed toys section. In the kids area. And I mean, of course, right?

Of course. She's not going to be by the pack's wardrobes. Looking at the... At how awesome they are. The mechanisms are lovely and smooth.
But like, it's not of interest to her. Of course she's going to be where the stuffies are. This is kind of what Jesus is saying. Like, you spent all this time looking for me. You should have known I would be here.
It's part of my mission. So Mary and Joseph don't really get a... They pack up. They head back to Nazareth. And then the next 18 years of Jesus' life is summarized in verse 51.
And he went down with them and came to Nazareth and was submissive to them. And the passage finishes with Mary saying she treasured these things up. She stored these things away. She held on to them. Think about them.
[6:39] And Jesus grew in wisdom and stature and favor with God and man. So that's the overview. Now if you read it sort of not very closely, you'd sort of go, okay, good parents, really disobedient child who backchats and is a smart aleck.

So that's a fairly shallow reading, obviously. But let's get back to the question, though. Well, why is this story, of all of the stories that we don't know about, why this one is the only one included? Well, I think a couple of reasons. I think there's a couple of big points to jump out of this passage. Let's get into that. I think the first thing is this. Jesus is confusing and Jesus is disturbing. Jesus is confusing and disturbing.
And here's what I mean. There's a contrast made in the passage between verses 48 and 49. I don't know if you spotted it. I think it's the main point of the passage. Mary says, your father and I were looking for you.
Jesus basically rebukes them and then starts talking about my father's house. Your father and I. Jesus starts talking about my father's house. I'm supposed to be here learning, gaining wisdom in my father's house.
[7:51] What's he saying? Jesus recognizes at this point that he's the son of God. And he's chosen this occasion, this bizarre occasion, this brink of manhood, to tell his parents in a pretty unforgettable way that he knows who his real father is.

And that he's got a mission. And he must be obedient to that mission. And somehow this temple learning thing was part of training for that.
So it looks like rebellion, but it's obedience. And Jesus' parents are hurt. They don't get it. It's such a family-based culture. His words must have been very confusing to them.

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What says they pass it? They don't understand what he's talking about. But Jesus tries to tell them that God's purposes are so great that they take precedent over even close family ties.
Some of you know this. I know this. I've been a Christian 30 years. 30 years. And for most of that time, my family, parents and siblings, have basically, I think, have alluded to the fact that they think I'm just lost to a cult.
[9:06] And most recently I've tried to go, I'm in the Anglican church. Like, Anglican. Like, I don't think it's a cult. Being a Christian, because I've been a Christian, I've made unusual career choices in their mind.

You know, I had this really sweet corporate sort of gig to Sheba. And I left it and I worked for a non-profit and then another non-profit and another non-profit. And each time I just earned less money.
Each time I changed jobs. It's just, you know, it's just a stupid idea, isn't it, really? Except if you think it's the will of the Father. Except if you think this is what God is calling you to do.
And that's just been, for my family, quite confusing. And at times, when I've chosen God's will over what they think is normal or typical, it's hurtful.
Some of you might have a similar story. You know, like, you know, you get saved as a teenager, you become a Christian as a teenager at a camp. It's exposing us to that reality.
[10:17] Like, it happened to Jesus. It's probably going to happen to you. So I think that's the first point. It's just exposing us to that reality. And we should not be surprised by this. Secondly, I think it makes it important.

It helps us to try and understand the humanity of Jesus. Did you notice in the text how Jesus was asking questions to the scribes?
He wasn't lecturing them. Jesus was, it seems like the plainest reading was that Jesus was learning in this situation. And in verse 52, it says, Jesus grew in wisdom.
Now, if Jesus is truly God, fully human, fully God, shouldn't he know everything? Shouldn't he know all this stuff? That's a good question, right?
I think part of the answer to that question is in Philippians 2. Paul says this. He goes, I think, I think, one of the things that Christ emptied himself of was omniscience and all-knowingness.
[11:34] So, an example, like an example of this is in Matthew 24, verse 36. Jesus is talking about his return. So, he's, you know, earth, on earth, right?

He's talking about his return. And here's what he says. Because, you know, people are sort of wanting to know when Jesus will return. When will God come back? Jesus says this. This is Jesus. Of that day and hour, no one knows.
Not even the angels, nor the Son, but the Father only. Jesus doesn't know. So, Jesus wasn't all-knowing here. Somehow, the omniscience of God in Christ was restrained.
This is important because it helps us see that the Son of God didn't just take on part of the humanity, part of our humanity at Christmas, but all of it.
Jesus is not God in a human body. He's not pretending to be human. It's kind of like a bit of a wink, wink, nudge, nudge, kind of like. You know, like. No, he became fully human. Human mind. All the while being fully God.
[12:38] Human mind, human will, human emotions, but all the while being fully God. It's a total mystery. Can't explain it. Can't explain it to you. I'm just telling you what the Bible teaches us. I think that's one of the points of the passage.

And why is this important to understand? It's important for a couple of reasons. It's important to know that Jesus was fully human as well as fully divine because Jesus took on a human body to save our bodies.
And he took on a human mind to save our minds. And without becoming human in his emotions, how can he rescue our hearts? And without becoming human in his will, how could he save our wandering, sort of broken wills that we have?
Gregory of Nazianzus, which is exactly how you pronounce it, church father, lived a long time ago. He was talking about the incarnation. And he said this. He said, that which he has not assumed, so he's talking about what Jesus became, that which he has not assumed, he has not healed.
Jesus was human, fully human. So he could save us fully, all of us, all parts of us. Secondly, another reason why I think it's important that we understand that Jesus was fully human, which comes across in the passage really well, is that, well, we have this line in the liturgy that we say, for

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we do not have a high priest who is unable to sympathize with our weaknesses, but one who in every way has been tempted, yet without sin.
[14:05] See, only a human, not angels, only a human can sympathize with us, with our weaknesses, with our temptations. So Jesus experienced our pain as a man, not a pretend man, not a fake man, not a faux man, a real man.

So he can sympathize, he can pray for us, he can understand what we're going through, he knows what it's like. I think one more reason why it's really important to understand that Jesus was fully human, which really comes out in the passage.
He didn't know everything. He was learning stuff. It's the whole cross, forgiveness, redemption thing. It doesn't work unless Jesus was fully human, as well as being fully divine.
He had to be fully human for it to work. Jesus died on a cross, sinless. He took our punishment. This is just Christianity 101. But the whole thing only works because he was a perfect human. Perfectly keeping the law that we can't do as humans. We exchange our sin for his perfect human record.
[15:13] He had to be human for the whole thing to work. And I'm going to finish here. I made two points, basically. Following God, trying to do his will, following the Father.

People will misunderstand you. Parents, relatives. And you might even hurt people. But secondly, but what a saviour, though.
What a Jesus. What a saviour we follow. Fully God, fully human. Amen.

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