

Son of the Law

Luke 2:39-52

We do not know when. But sometime or other, Joseph decided to make Bethlehem his home. For one thing, it was his ancestral home. Also, Mary's secret would be easier to keep with new neighbors.

Mary, Joseph and Jesus lived there in David's hometown for a year or two. Then rich, regal visitors arrived from across the eastern deserts.

They brought gifts with them. But they also brought danger. Herod was drunk with power and determined to destroy the newborn king. So, warned by an angel, Joseph led his little family down the trade route south through Gaza to Egypt.

After Herod died, Joseph still wanted to settle down in Bethlehem. But Herod's son Archelaus was not much better than his father. So they took their toddler son and returned to Nazareth instead.

When they had performed everything according to the Law of the Lord, they returned to Galilee, to their own city of Nazareth. The Child continued to grow and become strong, increasing in wisdom; and the grace of God was upon Him. Verses 39-40

A decade passed before we catch another glimpse of God's Son: a twelve year old boy celebrating Passover in Jerusalem.

Now His parents went to Jerusalem every year at the Feast of the Passover. And when He became twelve, they went up there according to the custom of the Feast; Verses 41-42

In a foot caravan with family and friends, Mary, Joseph and Jesus journeyed south. They splashed through the green waters of the Jordan near Jericho. Then they climbed the twisted mountain road up to Jerusalem.

Just like all the other pilgrims, they came to offer sacrifices and celebrate the Passover. But this time, they had also another purpose.

As a twelve-year-old boy, it was time for Jesus' bar mitzvah.

Supposing

It was a both a sacred ceremony and a rite of passage. And it still is today. At twelve, every Jewish boy is declared a bar mitzvah: a son of the Law. That meant he is no longer considered a child. In the eyes of the Creator, he is a man.

So Jesus celebrated the seven day Passover Feast for the first time as an adult. There were sacrifices and prayers and the annual meal of mutton, bitter herbs and unleavened bread. Then it was time to go home.

...and as they were returning, after spending the full number of days, Verse 43

Every road that sloped down from Jerusalem was packed with travelers that morning. And the road to Jericho was especially crowded. All of Galilee had come to the feast.

Now they were headed home. They walked the chalky mountain road that snaked down off the ridge. Women walked together, chatting about children and the chores that waited for them at home.

The men walked together, too. They shared stories about the feast, worrying and wondering about the Romans who ruled Palestine.

Children walked where they chose. And that presented a problem for Mary and Joseph.

As Mary walked through the spring sunlight toward Jericho, she assumed Jesus was with Joseph. And Joseph supposed the boy was with his mother.

...the boy Jesus stayed behind in Jerusalem. But His parents were unaware of it, but supposed Him to be in the caravan, and went a day's journey; Verses 43-44

Jews whose love for the Lord was especially deep and whose piety was profound were reluctant to leave the glory of God's house. So they made a habit of stopping by the broad temple courtyards the morning following the feast. They wanted to smell the smoke from sacrifices and hear the buzz of murmured prayers one last time before going back to their work-a-day worlds.

Jesus was no longer considered a child in God's eyes. And He was first among those who hated to leave that scale model of Heaven, the one place on earth where God's presence dwelled.

Meanwhile, Mary and Joseph walked all day down to Jericho to camp for the night. And as they walked, they made the same mistake many people make today.

They supposed Jesus was with them. No, they had not seen Him among the caravan of family and friends. And no one told them He was traveling along with them. They simply assumed Jesus was with them. But He was not.

Then and now, it is always a mistake to suppose Christ is with us. For instance, it is foolish for a church congregation to assume the Savior is automatically meeting with them on Sunday morning.

If we do not lift up our Lord's blessed Name, rely on His Word, and trust in His shed blood, our Savior's Spirit is not with us. And assuming He is, is entertaining a myth.

Worse yet, many people suppose Christ is in their lives. As they travel through their days, making plans and molding priorities into concrete decisions, they simply assume the Savior is going along for the ride.

No, they have never asked Jesus to come into their hearts and lives. Neither have they turned away from their selfishness and sensuality and trusted in the Savior's blood to cleanse them from their sins.

Nevertheless, they go to church. They pray all the prayers and sing all the songs. They listen when the Bible is read and God's Word is explained. And it never occurs to them that they might be wrong.

We dare not face the monstrous darkness of death with flimsy and foolish suppositions. God wants us to know for sure we are saved.

John was a very old man when he wrote his first epistle. And he did so, he said, for an eternally important reason.

These things I have written to you who believe in the name of the Son of God, so that you may know that you have eternal life. 1 John 5:13

We dare not risk a hope-so or think-so faith. We must know for sure Christ is in our hearts and our sins have been forever washed away by His blood. And if we are not sure, we must make sure.

We must do so today, too. Before it is too late.

Seeking

When Mary and Joseph finally realized they were wrong, that Jesus was not really with them at all, they were filled with sorrow and worry. What if something had happened to Him?

...but supposed Him to be in the caravan, and went a day's journey; and they began looking for Him among their relatives and acquaintances. Verse 44

The sun sunk slowly behind the high ridge. Only then did the carpenter and his wife finally realize the boy Jesus was not with them.

The long caravan of travelers was pouring into Jericho. So they searched among the other boys from Nazareth. But Jesus was not with them. They also asked friends and relatives, but He had not been with them all day. Neighbors had not seen the boy, either.

That was a good first step for Mary and Joseph. It is the same thing many people do when they realize that Jesus is not in their hearts.

Some "think-so" saints do the same thing Mary did. Realizing they are neither forgiven nor changed by Christ's presence in their lives, they seek out friends and family members. They talk to godly grandparents and faithful friends: people they are sure really do know the Savior.

Christianity cannot be caught like a cold. So we might get some good advice and godly counsel. But that is all, though.

The best Christian friends can do for us is tell us what someone once told them. Salvation is found only in Jesus Christ. So if we want it, we must go directly to Him.

When desert stars swarmed over the Jordan Valley, Mary and Joseph finally laid down to rest. But they did not get much sleep. They were too worried about Jesus.

The next morning they set out in the dew of a gray, chilly dawn. And all that day, they walked back up the mountain road to Jerusalem, their hearts in their throats.

In a green twilight, they finally crested the Mount of Olives. And Jerusalem was spread out before them, the temple shadowed and still in the gathering darkness.

They found a place to sleep and spent another fitful night, wondering and worrying. The next morning, they got up before the sun once again.

Mary and Joseph may not have known precisely where Jesus was. But they did know where He would not be.

They knew Him well enough to know He would not be where people were rough and rowdy, or snide and sinful. He would not be among those who tried to take advantage of people, either.

Mary smiled at Joseph as they walked beneath the limestone blocks of the eastern gate. There was only one place Jesus was sure to go.

When they did not find Him, they returned to Jerusalem looking for Him. Then, after three days they found Him in the temple, sitting in the midst of the teachers, both listening to them and asking them questions. Verses 45-46

As a special Passover treat, the bearded rabbis, doctors of the Law of Moses, would sit on benches in the shaded pillars of the temple portico. There, people were free ask them questions and listen as they taught the rich truths of God's Word.

That is where Mary and Joseph found young Jesus. When they finally found Him, they took the boy aside and scolded Him.

When they saw Him, they were astonished; and His mother said to Him, "Son, why have You treated us this way? Behold, Your father and I have been anxiously looking for You." Verse 48

It was Mary who spoke. Did He not realize they had been out of their minds with worry? Why, she wondered, had her son treated them with such disrespect and disobedience. In all His life, He had never done so before.

There was no defiance in the boy's eyes. Neither was there any shame. He looked at them with a calm, level gaze. He knew there was a great deal the carpenter and his wife did not understand.

And He said to them, "Why is it that you were looking for Me? Did you not know that I had to be in My Father's house?" Verse 49

There were gentle but firm reproofs in our Redeemer's reply. He started by responding to something Mary said without thinking.

Behold, Your father and I have been anxiously looking for You. Verse 48

In a sense, Mary was right. Joseph was Jesus' father in a legal sense, just it is with any adopted child,

There was no rebellion in Jesus' words. Just the simple truth. Joseph was not really His father at all. God was and is and ever shall be Jesus' Father.

No, the boy was not with them as they traveled home. He was a son of the law now. And His spiritual life was in His own hands.

It was not a matter of preference or desire, but of necessity. He had to be with His Father and about His Father's business.

And that was not all. He had not ran away and abandoned his mother and her husband. They left Him behind.

That is always the case when saints are startled to realize that somewhere, somehow they no longer have the intimate, empowering relationship with Christ they once had. They no longer walk with Him and share their sorrows and successes with Jesus as they once did.

When that happens, we must face the truth. Christ has not left us. We have left Him. We have simply gone about our daily lives, assuming the Savior is willingly going our way.

Jesus was an adult in God's eyes now. And it was not up to Him to stay with His parents. In the same way, it is not up to Him to stay with us.

My sheep hear My voice, and I know them, and they follow Me; John 10:27

If we are members of the Good Shepherd's flock, He does not follow us. We follow Him.

But sometimes sheep do not follow their shepherd. They stray and wander off. That happens with spiritual sheep when we start setting our own plans and seeking our own pleasures.

But then a crisis looms in our lives. We are ambushed by pain or problems, sickness or sorrow, troubles or trials. And in anguish, we cry out to God, "Why did You let this happen to me?"

The answer is sometimes hard to swallow. But God was not the author of our trouble in any sense. We simply wandered off on our own.

Jesus does not follow along with us when we stray away from Him, smiling and pretending everything is fine.

He has given us His Spirit to guide us and help us follow in His steps. But when we ignore the Holy Spirit and go our own way, we lose the comfort and counsel of a close communion with Christ.

There is but one solution. We must go back and find Jesus. We must confess our wicked, wandering ways. And we must start following close to Him once again. That is the only way lost sheep can become found sheep.

Submitting

A throng of people crowded around. Seated on the flat, paving stones, a twelve-year-old boy sat before a semi-circle of seated rabbis.

There was wonder in the old men's eyes. They peppered the boy with questions. And each time, His answers stunned them.

And all who heard Him were amazed at His understanding and His answers. Verse 47

The word understanding refers a wisdom concerning the relationships of different ideas. It is knowing how diverse themes fit together. Jesus did not merely know the facts of the Law. He knew what the law meant and how it related to God's plans and promises.

The old rabbis shook their heads. They had never heard anyone with such deep, spiritual understanding. None of their students were so wise. In fact, even they did not have such wisdom..

Those scribes of the Scriptures were amazed and astounded at Jesus' understanding. But they would not be the last. Years later, other teachers of the Law would echo the wonder they felt that day.

The Jews then were astonished, saying, "How has this man become learned, having never been educated?" John 7:15

Mary was a good and godly woman. She loved God and both believed and trusted His Word with all her heart. But her understanding was nowhere near that of her Son. And neither was Joseph's

But they did not understand the statement which He had made to them. And He went down with them and came to Nazareth, and He continued in subjection to them; Verses 50-51

Our Savior was superior to Mary and Joseph in every possible way. For one thing, He was vastly more intelligent than they were. So when they made plans or gave orders, young Jesus always had a better idea.

Our Savior's self control and inner strength was measurelessly beyond that of both His mother and His stepfather, too. And while they often made mistakes, He never did.

Nevertheless, He did not insist on His own way. Instead, He willingly submitted to their authority over Him. He lived the truth which His Spirit would one day whisper in Paul's ear.

Every person is to be in subjection to the governing authorities. For there is no authority except from God, and those which exist are established by God. Therefore whoever resists authority has opposed the ordinance of God; and they who have opposed will receive condemnation upon themselves. Romans 13:1-2

Jesus is our model. If we genuinely love and serve Him, we are to imitate our Lord in every possible way.

And since He willingly submitted to people who were infinitely inferior to Him, we must do the same. After all, God is the one who establishes every authority.

Our Heavenly Father is the One who places princes on thrones, teachers in classrooms, and parents in homes. And He expects His children to willingly and humbly obey them.

We must never be misled. If we are in rebellion to those who are over us, we are foolish to think we are serving Jesus Christ. Rebellion is always out of step with a relationship with the Redeemer

Jesus was a son of the Law and an adult in God's eyes. Nevertheless, He willingly followed Mary and Joseph back to Nazareth.

Much more important than that, Jesus was the Son of God. And He knew it. Yet, He quietly worked in Joseph's carpenter shop for eighteen long years.

We do not know why. But that was His Father's perfect will for Him. So our Savior submitted to it without a word of protest.

Jesus shined His heavenly Father's light by quietly living in obscurity and humbly obeying Mary and Joseph. And if we belong to Jesus, that is what we must do

We must lovingly submit to those who are over us, just as we do to our heavenly Father.