



# BIBLICAL RESOURCES

1Samuel 1:20-22, 24-28; Psalm 84 (83); 1 John 3:1-2; Luke 2:41-52

## Why were you searching for me? Did you not know that I must be in my Father's house?

Luke 2:41 Now every year the parents of Jesus went to Jerusalem for the festival of the Passover. 42 And when he was twelve years old, they went up as usual for the festival. 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. 44 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. 45 When they did not find him, they returned to Jerusalem to search for him. 46 After three days they found him in the temple, sitting among the teachers, listening to them and asking them questions. 47 And all who heard him were amazed at his understanding and his answers. 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." 49 He said to them, "Why were you searching for me? Did you not know that I must be in my Father's house?" 50 But they did not understand what he said to them. 51 Then he went down with them and came to Nazareth, and was obedient to them. His mother treasured all these things in her heart.

Luke 2:52 And Jesus increased in wisdom and in years, and in divine and human favour.

### INITIAL OBSERVATIONS

Jesus in the Temple is a story unique to Luke's gospel. Luke may well be using a source here (for example, there seems to be know awareness of the virginal conception in the story). Rather than an innocent reminiscence, the story bears the marks of post-East composition.

This deceptively simple tale serves several purposes of the evangelist. (i) It reminds us of the Jewishness of Jesus and

his family. (ii) It fulfils one of the conventions of ancient biography: childhood prodigies. (iii) It begins the portrait of Jesus as a prophet and as a reader of Scripture. (iv) It portrays Jesus as a human being, experiencing the ordinary development from childhood onwards. (v) It shows Jesus himself taking "ownership" of all the things said of him in thus far in the Infancy Narrative of Luke.

All five elements are significant for Luke. He is very likely writing against what we may call proto-Macionism, that is the desire to uproot Jesus from his Jewish roots, and behind that a desire to dismiss Judaism as somehow surpassed and superseded. He may also be countering the beginnings of Apollinarianism, evident in other non-canonical accounts of Jesus' childhood. Typically, these such emphasis the divinity of the child Jesus that he hardly seems human. There is a considerable contrast, for example, with the *Infancy Gospel of Thomas* (you can find in [www.gnosis.org](http://www.gnosis.org)).

### OLD TESTAMENT BACKGROUND

Three times in the year you shall hold a festival for me. You shall observe the festival of unleavened bread; as I commanded you, you shall eat unleavened bread for seven days at the appointed time in the month of Abib, for in it you came out of Egypt. No one shall appear before me empty-handed. You shall observe the festival of harvest, of the first fruits of your labor, of what you sow in the field. You shall observe the festival of ingathering at the end of the year, when you gather in from the field the fruit of your labor. Three times in the year all your males shall appear before the Lord GOD. (Exodus 23:14-17)

Cf. also Deuteronomy 16.1-8, 16 and Luke 22:7-13.

### Thought for the day

Today we have a chance to reflect on the *mystery* of our own families! It really is a bit of mystery, how we mostly come out okay from this most intense and formative of experiences. We receive so much that we really want to ponder and to treasure. We can also be burdened by attitudes and traits that we might well wish we were without. Yet, through it all, we are grateful. Family is our "first love" and never really loses its importance for us.

### Prayer

Bless all our families. We thank you for the very gift of life itself we have through our parents and for all the other many gifts we receive from our families. We have received so much: help us to continue to give. Help us too to know what to overlook and forget, to pay attention to what can be healed and forgiven, and through it all to continue to love.

Now the boy Samuel continued to grow both in stature and in favour with the LORD and with the people. (1Samuel 2:26)

### KIND OF WRITING

Typically, biography of the period included these elements: pre-public career of a great person, family background, miraculous conception, omens and other predictions of future greatness, childhood prodigies. These are found in Greek, Roman and Jewish documents of the period: e.g., Cyrus (Herodotus I, 114f.), Alexander the Great (Plutarch, Life of Alexander 5), Moses (Ant. 2.230; Philo, Life of Moses 1.21). All these elements are registered in Luke 1-2.

One example may suffice. Josephus, the Jewish priest and historian, untrammelled by false modesty, says of himself:

"When I was a child, about fourteen years of age, I was commended by all for the love I had of learning; on which account the high priests and principal men of the city frequently came to me

together, to know my opinion about the accurate understanding of points of the law”.

*Josephus, Life 9*

Two observations may help us grasp more clearly the purpose of the story. Firstly, it does show a concentric pattern as follows:

- A The family goes to Jerusalem (41-42)
- B Jesus remains, unobserved (43)
- C The parents' search (44-46a)
- D *Jesus among the teachers* (46-47)
- C\* The parents' reproach (48)
- B\* Jesus replies, misunderstood (49-50)
- A\* The family returns to Nazareth (51a)

In such a layout, the focus falls on Jesus as source of wisdom, a characterisation which will continue through the Gospel as Jesus interprets the Scriptures on his own authority (Luke 4:1-13; 4:16-21; 7:26-27; 10:25-28; 20:17-18; 20:37-38; 20:41-44; 24:25-27, 32; 24:44-47).

Secondly, the climax in terms of plot must fall on B\*, when Jesus makes his apparently enigmatic response. The complication in v. 43 leads to this climax in the form of dialogue and thus the emphasis really falls on the *future career* of the child prodigy.

#### NEW TESTAMENT FOREGROUND

Therefore he had to become like his brothers and sisters in every respect, so that he might be a merciful and faithful high priest in the service of God, to make a sacrifice of atonement for the sins of the people. (Hebrews 2:17)

For we do not have a high priest who is unable to sympathise with our weaknesses, but we have one who in every respect has been tested as we are, yet without sin.” (Hebrews 4:15)

#### ST PAUL

But when the fullness of time had come, God sent his Son, born of a woman, born under the law, in order to redeem those who were under the law, so that we might receive adoption as children. And because you are children, God has sent the Spirit of his Son into our hearts, crying, “Abba! Father!” So you are no longer a slave but a child, and if a child then also an heir, through God. (Galatians 4:4-7)

#### BRIEF COMMENTARY

**Verse 41** The scene is set with characters, time and place. As often in the introduction, we are told *what they usually*

*did*. This tells us that they are an observant, pious family.

**Verse 42** In Israelite tradition, one passed from childhood to adulthood at the age of thirteen (teenagers had not yet been invented). Accordingly, Jesus is still a child. The association with *Bar Mitzvah* is erroneous. The “as usual” is a hint of things to come: Jesus is shown regularly praying and going to the synagogue “as was his custom.”

**Verse 43** The details arouse our interest: how did this happen, when will the parents notice, what will they do? Above all, what will be the outcome?

**Verse 44** A reaction which adds suspense by slowing down the telling.

**Verse 45** The suspense is sustained. In this Gospel, Jerusalem functions at the *location* of salvation. Towards the end of the Gospel, there will be another return to Jerusalem: That same hour they got up and returned to Jerusalem. (Luke 24:33)

**Verse 46** In popular stories, the number three is important but here it must have an echo for the reader familiar with the Jesus story.

**Verse 47** Cf. the reaction of one expert in the Infancy Gospel of Thomas: *Now when Zacchaeus the teacher heard such and so many allegories of the first letter spoken by the young child, he was perplexed at his answer and his instruction being so great, and said to them that were there: Woe is me, wretch that I am, I am confounded: I have brought shame to myself by drawing to me this young child. Take him away, therefore I beseech thee, my brother Joseph: I cannot endure the severity of his look, I cannot once make clear my (or his) word. This young child is not earthly born: this is one that can tame even fire: be like this is one begotten before the making of the world. ...I have deceived myself, thrice wretched man that I am: I strove to get me a disciple and I am found to have a master.*

**Verse 48** This is the emotional climax of the story. To express the anxiety of the parents, the narrative at last breaks into dialogue.

**Verse 49** There are two possible transactions here. The Greek does not contain the word “house.” Instead, it runs literally, *I must be “in the things” of my father*. So we can translate by Temple, my father’s house, although the usage is unusual. It may also be rendered “my father’s business” as in the Douai-Rheims translation.

The “must” is part of the “divine im-

perative” found elsewhere in the narrative: 4:43; 9:22; 11:42; 17:25; 22:37.

**Verse 51** A double conclusion, showing Jesus to be fully human and taking up again the pondering of Mary.

**Verse 52** An inclusion: *The child grew and became strong, filled with wisdom; and the favour of God was upon him.* (Luke 2:40). Cf. *The child grew and became strong in spirit, and he was in the wilderness until the day he appeared publicly to Israel.* (Luke 1:80)

#### POINTERS FOR PRAYER

1. Luke’s skill as a storyteller comes through in the details of the story in a way that many people can identify with: the loss of a child, the frantic search, the seemingly offhand speech of the teenager. Let the drama of the story speak to you. Where do you find good news in it?

2. In Luke’s Gospel this story serves to give a glimpse of the future greatness of Jesus, the teacher of his people. Sometimes we can look back over our own life, or the lives of others, and with hindsight can see in childhood or teenage years a glimpse of gifts and talents that were later to blossom. Where have you seen this?

3. “Did you not know that I must be about my Father’s business?” This seemingly insensitive reply by Jesus to Mary serves to highlight that in his life the mission given him by God would take precedence over family ties, painful though this would be. Perhaps you have known situations in your own life, or in the life of another, where there was pain for family members as you followed your own destiny? Where in the midst of the pain was the good news?

#### PRAYER

As your sons and daughters, O loving God, we come before you in thanksgiving, called and united by your eternal Word.

Teach us to ponder the mystery of Nazareth, that we may always find in you the source of our strength and the unity of our families.

We ask this through Jesus Christ, your Word made flesh, who lives and reigns with you in the unity of the Holy Spirit, in the splendour of eternal light, God for ever and ever. Amen.