

Luke 2:41-52 Every year his parents traveled to Jerusalem for the Passover Festival. ⁴²When he was twelve years old, they went up according to the custom of the Festival. ⁴³When the days had ended, as they were returning, the boy Jesus stayed behind in Jerusalem. His parents did not know it. ⁴⁴Since they thought he was in their group, they went a day's journey. Then they began to look for him among their relatives and friends. ⁴⁵When they did not find him, they returned to Jerusalem, searching for him. ⁴⁶After three days they found him in the temple courts, sitting among the teachers, listening to them and asking them questions. ⁴⁷And all who heard him were amazed at his understanding and his answers. ⁴⁸When his parents saw him, they were astonished. His mother said to him, "Son, why have you treated us this way? See, your father and I have been anxiously looking for you." ⁴⁹He said to them, "Why were you looking for me? Did you not know that I must be taking care of my Father's business?" ⁵⁰They did not understand what he was telling them. ⁵¹He went down with them and came to Nazareth. He was always obedient to them. And his mother treasured up all these things in her heart. ⁵²Jesus grew in wisdom and stature, and in favor with God and with people.

This text for today is the only event from Jesus' life from age roughly 2 to 30 that we have recorded in the Scriptures. We would love to know more but Jesus' youth, but in his wisdom the Holy Spirit did not see fit to record any of it for us. That didn't stop people from making things up, though. There are books claiming to have been written by the Apostles Thomas and Matthew that tell some stories of that time in Jesus' life. The problem is that the one attributed to Thomas came out after he was dead for almost 200 years. The one attributed to Matthew is even worse. It came out over 700 years after he was dead.

You could probably call these stories ancient fan fiction. They involve the young Jesus performing miraculous signs. Sometimes he healed people who were sick or poisoned. One story talks about his friend dying after falling off a cliff. The people blamed Jesus. Jesus raised him from the dead just so he could tell the people that Jesus was innocent. Another talks about working with Joseph. A piece of wood was cut too short so Jesus miraculously made it the right size. There are stories of Jesus striking other kids dead for picking on him.

None of those stories are true or in any way helpful to a believer. You can see why they would exist. They attempt to satisfy our desire to know more. Rather than wasting our time with that, let's look at this one account from Jesus' youth that the Holy Spirit did have recorded for us. We will see that even The Young Jesus Is Our Savior. He obeyed his Father's will and he carried out his Father's business.

This text gives us a glimpse of the fact that God made an excellent choice in Jesus' mother and earthly guardian. Luke tells us, "**Every year his parents traveled to Jerusalem for the Passover Festival.**" Every faithful Jewish man was required to travel to Jerusalem three times a year for the festivals of Passover, Weeks, and Shelters. Women were not required to come but Mary went anyway.

As the crow flies, it is roughly 65 miles from Nazareth to the Temple in Jerusalem. Of course they wouldn't travel straight through because they wanted to avoid going through Samaria. Instead they would cross over to the other side of the Jordan and then cross back when they got to Judea. So that makes the trip closer to 90 to 100 miles. They didn't have cars to drive. They went on foot both ways.

We're blessed in the Midwest that there is a WELS church in almost every city. We have all kinds of WELS churches within a half hour's drive of here. Imagine if three times a year you had to walk to Lansing for church. I wonder how well those services would be attended. But it just shows how dedicated Mary and Joseph were to their Lord. All the other weeks of the year they would have been found in their local synagogue.

At the age of 12 or 13 a Jewish boy became old enough that they were under all the obligations of adult church membership, including making those trips to Jerusalem. Later Jewish tradition would call this your Bar Mitzvah if you are a boy or Bat Mitzvah if you are a girl. Those phrases mean "son of the commandment" and "daughter of the commandment" respectively. You can see parallels to our modern practice of confirmation.

It might seem strange that the Son of God himself would go to the Temple—which was to give the people a picture of their Savior—to celebrate the Passover which pointed ahead to his own suffering and death about 21 years later. Just like the lamb that they sacrificed was spotless, so also Jesus would be without any sin. His blood would rescue the whole world from sin, death, and Hell.

Already at that young age, Jesus was fulfilling God's Law in our place. We call this Jesus' active obedience. In his Sermon on the Mount he would say, "**Do not think that I came to destroy the Law or the Prophets. I did not come to destroy them but to fulfill them.**" No human being could come close to obeying God perfectly throughout their life. Jesus did for us all.

Now let's skip ahead to the end of this text. Luke tells us, "**⁵¹He went down with them and came to Nazareth. He was always obedient to them. And his mother treasured up all these things in her heart.**"

Think about that for a second. Jesus is true God. He took part in the creation of the whole world. He lives and rules over everything in creation for us.

And yet he was obedient to his sinful parents who made mistakes. Judging from this text they did not yet fully grasp what it meant that he was going to be the Savior. But he obeyed them. By doing that he perfectly fulfilled the fourth commandment for us: "Honor your father and mother, that it may go well with you and that you may enjoy long life on the earth."

By show of hands, how many of you have obeyed the fourth commandment perfectly? Notice that my hand did not go up either. Even in those moments that I did the right thing and obey my parents, too often I would do it angrily or grudgingly. Even then I was doing the right thing for the wrong reason. Jesus never did. He was perfectly obedient. He did it all for you and for me.

The last verse of this text is tied with one other passage as the passage that is hardest to comprehend: **"⁵²Jesus grew in wisdom and stature, and in favor with God and with people."** The other one, by the way, is Jesus saying on the cross, **"My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?"** Martin Luther said about that "God is forsaken by God. Who can understand it?"

This verse is so mind-blowing because Jesus is true God. He is perfect. He knows everything. But during this part of his life when he was in his state of humiliation he did not make the full use of his power and glory as God. He isn't shining as bright as the sun like he was on the mountain of Transfiguration. So it was possible for Jesus to grow in wisdom. All I can do is read this text, know for a fact that the Holy Spirit is telling the truth, set aside all the questions, and trust God's power and plan.

How could Jesus grow in favor with God? That's a little easier to understand. Everything that Jesus did was in perfect keeping with his heavenly Father's will. So everything he did was pleasing to God. Over the course of his life, the examples of his perfection just kept building and building. Apparently he had the same affect on the people all around him. They may not have understood that he was the Savior, but they knew there was something special about him. His ministry would reveal the truth.

The Young Jesus Is Our Savior. He obeyed his Father's will and he carried out his Father's business.

Luke tells us, **"⁴³When the days had ended, as they were returning, the boy Jesus stayed behind in Jerusalem. His parents did not know it. ⁴⁴Since they thought he was in their group, they went a day's journey. Then they began to look for him among their relatives and friends."** People today might read that and gasp. They might even question if Joseph and Mary were really good parents after all.

Just as an aside here, this text calls Joseph and Mary Jesus' parents and Mary even refers to Joseph as Jesus' father. We know that God is his only Father and that Joseph was his earthly guardian. As you can imagine, that would be difficult to explain the real situation each and every time they talked to someone else. So they called Joseph his father even though it wasn't true so they wouldn't have to explain Jesus' miraculous birth in every conversation that they would have.

Since you were walking to and from Jerusalem, you would go with any extended family or neighbors you might have. It wasn't out of line for Mary and Joseph to assume that Jesus was in their larger group. Remember that up to this point he had been perfectly obedient to them. They never would have expected that Jesus would do anything wrong. So when their first days' journey came to an end, they went looking for him.

Luke continues, **"⁴⁵When they did not find him, they returned to Jerusalem, searching for him. ⁴⁶After three days they found him."** When my kids were little and we were out somewhere together, my head was always on a swivel. That's especially true when we had our third child because parents have to play zone instead of man-to-man. I had one child in particular who liked to run ahead when he was little. Because children are small, they are easy to lose in a crowd.

I cannot imagine anything worse for a parent than thinking they've lost a child. Panic is the first word that would come to mind. Now imagine how you would feel if the child you lost is the single most important child that ever has or ever will be born. You just lost the Savior of the whole world. It was probably the understatement of the century when Mary said they were anxiously looking for him.

At the same time, did they really have to worry? Could God the Father lose track of his one and only Son? Can you even imagine how many angels were around him every second of his youth? There was no way that God was going to let his plan of salvation be jeopardized. So they probably didn't need to be worried, but I totally do not blame them for being scared out of their minds.

After three long days of worry, they found him in the one place where they really should have checked first, **"They found him in the temple courts, 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.**” He wasn’t off playing with friends somewhere. He wasn’t looking for a new toy. He was in his Father’s house.

The rabbis were impressed with what they saw. Jesus’ depth of knowledge and insight was far beyond the average 12 year old. At the Chapel of the Christ on the Martin Luther College campus there is a painting depicting the boy Jesus in the Temple. It’s one of the many situations in the Bible where I would have loved to have been a fly on the wall. Can you imagine what those conversations must have been like? But in his wisdom the Holy Spirit has not told us more.

Mary said to him, **“Son, why have you treated us this way? See, your father and I have been anxiously looking for you.”** I can only imagine the sense of relief that they felt. Jesus answered her, **“Why were you looking for me? Did you not know that I must be taking care of my Father’s business?”** He wasn’t talking back or being a smart aleck. He was making a statement of fact.

The angel Gabriel told Mary about Jesus, **“He will be great and will be called the Son of the Most High. The Lord God will give him the throne of his father David.”** An angel told Joseph, **“She will give birth to a son, and you are to give him the name Jesus, because he will save his people from their sins.”** So they should have understood who Jesus would be. To be fair, they didn’t know a lot of the details about what his life would be like, so I won’t get too upset with them.

This shows us how Jesus was obeying the first commandment for us, “You shall have no other gods,” as well as the third commandment, “Remember the Sabbath day by keeping it holy.” The third commandment wasn’t just about that day, but about a lifetime dedication to God and his Word. It’s not always easy to get up for church on Sunday when we might not be able to sleep in any other day. At this time of year it’s so cold out and it’s so nice and warm in bed.

Jesus never had trouble with that. He knew what his purpose was. He wanted to be around his Father’s house and to grow in his knowledge. His dedication to his Father even meant that he was willing to go to the cross. He knew what he was going to suffer there but his obedience to his Father and his great love for all of us gave him no other choice. Because Jesus always perfectly obeyed his Father, we get the credit as if we have too.

The Young Jesus Is Our Savior. He obeyed his Father’s will and he carried out his Father’s business. The Apostle Peter wrote, **“To be sure, we were not following cunningly devised fables when we made known to you the powerful appearance of our Lord Jesus Christ, but we were eyewitnesses of his majesty.”** We don’t need made-up stories about the Savior. We have Mary and Joseph’s eyewitness testimony. We have these words inspired by the Holy Spirit. Jesus is the Savior we need.