

The Greatest Life Ever Lived

A Study in the Incarnate Life of Jesus Christ and An Exposition of the Four Gospels
LESSON XVII : THE RETURN FROM EGYPT TO NAZARETH / JESUS IN THE TEMPLE AT TWELVE

Matthew 2:19-23	Mark	Luke 2:39-52	John	related passages
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Lesson Overview

- The family of Jesus, having fled to Egypt to escape the wrath of Herod the Great, now receives word that it is safe to return.
- Upon returning to Israel, Joseph is led to live in Nazareth to avoid confrontations with Herod's son that now sits on the throne. This ends the infancy narratives concerning our Lord's incarnation.
- At the age of twelve Jesus is left at Jerusalem during the Passover season. Joseph and Mary returns to find Jesus in the temple. This is the only inspired preserved incident of the boyhood of Christ.

The Family of Jesus Returns from Egypt to Nazareth

Mt 2:19 *But when Herod was dead, behold, an angel of the Lord appeareth in a dream to Joseph in Egypt, :* It is quite probable that the family of Jesus was not long in Egypt prior to the death of Herod. It is well attested that Herod died just prior to the Passover in 750 AUC. If Jesus had been born in late fall / winter of the year prior, He could have been visited by the Magi in late winter / early spring of the following year (i.e. the year Herod died), fled into Egypt and Herod died anywhere from within a few weeks to a few months of Jesus' flight into Egypt. Exact chronology is not possible (see lesson 13 on the dating of Christ's birth).

How Herod died has been discussed by bible students. Suggestions include heart disease and dropsy due to malfunctioning of the kidneys, cirrhosis of the liver, cardiac hypertension, advanced case of arteriosclerosis, among others. In describing his symptoms, Josephus speaks of ulcerated entrails, a putrefied and maggoty scrotum, foul breath (oh, oh ... I'm in trouble with that one!!), constant convulsions, etc.

Mentioned in the last lesson was Herod's attempt to mass murder leading Jews to at least have mourning at the *time* of his death if he couldn't have it *for* his death, and his murder of another of his own son's five days prior to his own death. Archelaus, offspring of Herod and Malthace (one of Herod's ten wives) and the son who eventually reigned in his father's stead, provided Herod the Great with a gorgeous funeral. "His corpse was wrapped in purple. Upon his head had been placed a crown of gold, in his hand a scepter. The bier on which his body rested was of solid gold, lined with precious stones. Five hundred slaves bore perfumes. Along the track leading across the desert from Bethlehem to Jericho the solitary ruin of Herodeion, the place of burial, is still visible." [Hendriksen, Matthew] Compare that with the believer's attitude towards death.

Mt 2:20 *saying, Arise, take the young child and His mother, and go into the land of Israel: for they are dead which sought the young child's life. :* an almost identical command as given in Mt 2:13 to go into Egypt. In the former command the angel stated he would tell them when they could return; that promise is now fulfilled.

The wording "they (plural) are dead" instead of "he (Herod, singular) is dead" is hard to understand. Some take this to refer to Herod and his soldiers, but were the soldiers all dead? The most natural meaning is that the angel simply wanted to emphasize that there is no one left who is seeking the life of Jesus. Hendriksen: "Herod was dead. Let Joseph regard all others who might wish to kill the child also dead." A.B. Bruce: "The plural here, as often, expresses a general idea, a class, though only a single person is meant. (Ex 4:19) But the manner of expression may indicate a desire to dissipate completely Joseph's apprehensions. There is nothing, no person to fear: go!" [Nicoll, Gk NT]

Note the absence of where to go in Israel. Joseph obeys one step at a time.

Mt 2:21 *And he arose, and took the young child and His mother, and came into the land of Israel.:* Joseph probably intends upon returning to Bethlehem: they possibly had relatives or at least friends / acquaintances, and it was close to the center of religious activity, Jerusalem. Some as early as Augustine have suggested Joseph's intentions were for Jerusalem itself, for where would be more suitable to raise the Messiah? But as one author put it, God deemed the despised Galilee a better training school for the future Savior of publicans, sinners and Pagans.

Note the prompt obedience, a characteristic of Joseph. But the flight to Egypt was so urgent that the family arose in the night to flee, here they wait until day.

Mt 2:22 *But when he heard that Archelaus did reign in Judea in the room of his father Herod, he was afraid to go thither: notwithstanding, being warned of God in a dream, he turned aside into the parts of Galilee. :* "In order to understand this verse it must be borne in mind that before his death King Herod the Great had made a will which he changed several times. The terms

of the final revision were by the Roman government allowed to be carried out. Thus it had come about that at the father's death Herod Antipas, a son by Malthace, became Tetrarch of Galilee and Perea; Archelaus, another son by the same wife, was made Ethnarch of Judea, Samaria, and Idumea; and Philip, a son by Cleopatra of Jerusalem (not to be confused with the far more widely known Cleopatra of Egypt) became Tetrarch of the northern territories: Iturea, Trachonitis, Gaulanitis, Auranitis, and Batanea. The titles: king, Ethnarch, and Tetrarch, are in this sentence mentioned in the descending order of authority and prestige. When Joseph heard that Archelaus was now ruling over Judea in the place of his father he was afraid to settle there." [Hendriksen, Matthew] Archelaus exercised the authority of an Ethnarch with promise of a royal title if he conducted himself so as to deserve it. Along with the throne, Herod's son seemed to also inherit Herod's disposition for death. At the Passover just after his father's death, a great rebellion broke out due to Herod's execution of two beloved teachers of the law just prior to his own death. Archelaus killed three thousand Jews to quell the rebellion, many of which were just Jews coming to Jerusalem to observe the Passover. Archelaus proved to be so cruel that the Jewish and Samaritan leaders complained to Rome and Archelaus was deposed in the ninth year of his reign (6 AD). From that point on governors were appointed to rule the areas, the most famous of which is of course Pontius Pilate.

Mt 2:23 and he came and dwelt in a city called Nazareth: that it might be fulfilled which was spoken by the prophets, He shall be called a Nazarene.

Lk 2:39 And when they had performed all things according to the law of the Lord, they returned into Galilee, to their own city Nazareth.

Nazareth was a town not spoken of in the OT, associated with the heathen rather than the people of God. Another portrayal of the universal influence Jesus was to have in His life. There has always been questions concerning "He shall be called a Nazarene" because there's no such quote in the OT:

- One explanation is that the quotation does occur in writings which the Jews esteemed highly yet was not inspired and therefore not preserved as part of the scriptures. The particular writing Matthew quoted is therefore lost.
- Others associate the word nazoraios and naziraios (Nazirite, cp Judges 13:7) but this is improbable since Jesus was not a Nazirite.
- Another explanation is that the phrase introducing this is "spoken by the prophets" which could be taken to mean not any specific prophet nor any specific quote but rather that the prophecies in general stated that the Messiah was to be rejected (Ps 22:6,8; 69:11,19; Isa 53:2-4). Vincent in his Word Studies states that "the very name of Nazareth suggested insignificance." "That designation of Him was at first a term of scorn and derision (see Jn 1:46), and Isaiah had prophesied that the Servant of the Lord would be despised by men." [Tasker, Matthew]
- Another explanation (often connected with the previous) is that perhaps Matthew is using the verbal similarities between the Gk word nazoraios and the Heb word nezer, meaning "a branch" in such passages as Isa 11:1 and Jer 23:5. While Tasker says such a thought would seem somewhat irrelevant in the present context, Bruce in his commentary on the gospels says this is the widely accepted interpretation among both Catholic and Protestant scholars [Nicoll, *Gk NT*]. Vincent: "In Hebrew it meant *sprout* or *shoot*. The name is prophetically given to the Messiah (Isa 11:1). In Isaiah 10:33,34, the fate of Assyria is described under the figure of the felling of a cedar-forest. The figure of the tree is continued at the opening of ch. 11 concerning the Jewish state. The cedar throws out no fresh suckers, but the oak is a tree 'in which, after the felling, a stock remaineth' (Isa 6:13; compare Job 14:9). There is a future then for Israel, represented by the oak. 'There shall come forth a shoot from the stock of Jesse, and a twig from his roots shall bear fruit.' As David sprang from the humble family of Jesse, so the Messiah, the second David, shall arise out of great humiliation. The fact that Jesus grew up at Nazareth was sufficient reason for His being despised. He was not a lofty branch on the summit of a stately tree; not a recognized and honored son of the royal house of David, now fallen, but an insignificant *sprout* from the roots of Jesse; a Nazarene, of an upstart sprout-town." [Vincent, *Word Studies*]

I have no definite reference for this other than my own memory: Chuck Swindoll once compared Nazareth to a military-inhabited, red-light district type of town in today's culture. This is why one was amazed to find anything good coming from the area (Jn 1:46). Yet Jesus emerged perfect and sinless, teaching us that **man's problem is not our environment but our spiritual state of separation from the Lord**. Since man is at the core sinful, a perfect environment will not change our true condition (and this will be proven during the millennium). But a perfect Man may come from the worst of environments untouched by sin.

Matthew and Luke coincide here, with Luke picking up where Matthew's narrative stops. As mentioned in the last lesson, Luke leaves out the events of the Magi / Herod's slaughter of the infants / the trip into Egypt. This is not an error, the narratives did not fit into Luke's purpose of writing. While Luke's gospel is universal in appeal and portrays much of Paul's style (who was the apostle to the Gentiles), it must be remembered that Luke's writings is Luke / Acts. Possibly in his "orderly account" (Lk 1:3) Luke emphasized the ministry of Jesus to the Jews while reserving Acts for the outreach to Samaria and the ends of the earth.

Lk 2:40 And the child grew, and waxed strong in spirit, filled with wisdom: and the grace of God was upon Him. : "The Jews marked the stages of a child's development by nine different terms: the new-born babe (Isa 9:6); the suckling (Isa 11:8); the suckling beginning to ask for food (Lam 4:4); the weaned child (Isa 28:9); the child clinging to its mother (Jer 40:7); the child becoming firm and strong (Isa 7:14, of the virgin mother); the youth, literally, he that shakes himself free; the ripened one, or warrior (Isa 31:8)." [Vincent, *Word Studies*]

By all indications, Jesus' development was:

- **normal** as any other child's growth and development (*with the exception of sin!* -- Heb 4:15)
- **physical** which reminds us that our physical being is important to the Lord just as the spiritual
- **intellectual** since He was filled with wisdom. Greek scholars mention the fact that this is in the present tense, implying that this development was a gradual, day by day process.
- **spiritual** which marked every stage in the development of Jesus, daily guiding Him and causing Him to prosper. There was no horseshoe or astrological luck from the stars. An old Dutch proverb: "Everything is dependent on God's blessings."

"The image (filling Himself) appears to be that of a vessel, which, while increasing in size, fills itself, and, by filling itself, enlarges so as to be continually holding more. It is plain that Luke regards the development, and consequently the humanity, of Jesus as a reality. Here we have the normal growth of man from a physical and moral point of view." [Godet, *Luke*]

Lk 2:41 Now His parents went to Jerusalem every year at the feast of the passover. : the Mosaic law required all male Jews of mature age to attend three feasts at Jerusalem: the Passover, Pentecost, and the Feast of Tabernacles (Ex 23:14-17; 34:22,23; Deut 16:16). Due to the difficulties of the dispersion forcing many to live a great distance from Israel it became custom to attend but one of the feasts, typically the Passover. The law did not require the attendance of the women although many Jewish teachers recommended this. That Mary would attend showed the devoutness of the entire family.

Lk 2:42 And when He was twelve years old, they went up to Jerusalem after the custom of the feast. : although there is dispute among Jewish sources as to when a boy became a *bar mitzvah* (a son of the law) and came under obligation to observe the ordinances personally, the general age agreed by many is the boy's thirteenth year. Many would bring their male children to the temple prior to this age in preparation of what was to come. It was during Jesus' twelfth year that Joseph and Mary bring Him with them. Whether or not He had attended previously is open to conjecture, but the sources I used that mentioned this lean toward this being Jesus' first trip to the temple.

Lk 2:43 And when they had fulfilled the days, : the festival lasted seven days, but the third day commenced the so-called *half-holidays* when it was lawful to return home. Opinions are divided on how long the family stayed.

as they returned, the child Jesus tarried behind in Jerusalem; and Joseph and His mother knew not of it. : how this occurred is not sure although several theories have been advanced. A custom to this day is for the women and children to travel in front with the men and the young men behind. Jesus being twelve could have been in either group and therefore Mary probably thought Jesus was with Joseph while Joseph may have thought Jesus was with Mary. As the caravan stopped for the evening and the two groups gathered together, it was then that Jesus' absence was noted.

It should be noted that this was not a case of wilful and deliberate disobedience. Because of Jesus' love for the temple and all that transpired there, "on the day for leaving, He found Himself unintentionally separated from the band of children to which He belonged. When once left behind, where was He to go in this strange city? The home of a child is the house of his father. Very naturally, therefore, Jesus sought His in the temple." [Godet, *Luke*]

Lk 2:44,45 But they, supposing Him to have been in the company, went a day's journey; and they sought Him among their kinsfolk and acquaintance. And when they found Him not, they turned back again to Jerusalem, seeking Him. : they sought = made from a combination of two words, *from the bottom up + to seek*. They searched for Him up and down, implying a thorough search. "*Seeking Him*" implies they continued to search thoroughly as they continued back to Jerusalem. Wuest: "And they conducted an intensive search for Him among their relatives and acquaintances, and not having found Him, they returned to Jerusalem, searching diligently for Him."

Lk 2:46 And it came to pass, that after three days they found Him in the temple, : the three days probably a reference to when He was first separated: one day out, one day in, and one day finding Him.

sitting in the midst of the doctors, both hearing them, and asking them questions. : the temple had great and spacious porches suitable for teaching. Jesus was there among the teachers, both listening to them and asking questions. Being at the time of the Passover there was undoubtedly some very famous Rabbis still to be found in the temple area, providing an opportunity for Jesus that was not available at Nazareth. The asking and answering of questions was a favorite teaching method among the Jews.

Lk 2:47 And all that heard Him were astonished at His understanding and answers. : "understanding" comes from a root word which means *to bring together* and denotes that quality of mind which *combines*, understanding not only the facts but also how they all relate to each other. The sense is that at this young age Jesus not only knew the Bible but how it all fit together, what it meant in relation to the whole. It was this understanding which riveted all eyes upon Him. "Nevertheless, exaggeration must be avoided. Jesus was not yet the teacher. That would come later." [Hendriksen, *Luke*] Note the importance of knowing the entire Word of God and how it all rightly fits together.

Lk 2:48 And when they saw Him, they were amazed: : note the intense emotion: they were astounded, shocked. "A very strong word; the verb meaning, literally, *to strike out or drive away from*; and so *to drive out of one's senses*. Hence in the general sense of great amazement." [Vincent, *Word Studies*]

and His mother said unto Him, Son, why hast Thou thus dealt with us? Behold, Thy father and I have sought Thee sorrowing. : I was shocked at the comments of many on Mary's statement. The general concession is that Mary is here revealing a great lack of faith, with one author stating this was an attempt to justify herself at their apparent parental failure by not knowing where Jesus was for several days. Having small children myself, I personally see nothing unfaithful nor irreverent in Mary's question and fully understand the parental emotions which controlled the situation. These emotions would have overridden any rational thinking, and I know of no one who would not have responded as Mary given the same circumstances. Wuest: "And having seen Him, they were struck with astonishment to the point of a loss of self-control."

"Father" is not incorrect as Joseph was legally while not paternally the father of Jesus. Jesus does use this however to make a point in His response to them.

Lk 2:49 And He said unto them, How is it that ye sought Me? Wist ye not that I must be about My Father's business? : the first saying of Jesus recorded for us. Note Jesus refers to both Joseph and Mary in His answer, speaking to *them* and the word for *you* is plural. The sense is not that they could have left Him in Jerusalem but rather that it should have immediately occurred to them where Jesus would have been.

Must (literally *it is necessary, it behooves*) is often used by Jesus concerning His own appointed work, expressing both the divine appointment and the constraint of duty.

about My Father's business: literally *in the things of My Father*. Could be translated either as above or as *in My Father's house*, which some prefer since it reflects back on Joseph and Mary's search for Him. "Mary's question was not as to what her son had been doing, but as to where he had been. Jesus, in effect, answers, 'Where is a child to be found but in his Father's house?'" [Vincent, *Word Studies*] Either interpretation is correct.

Note there is a proper form of freedom of expression: Jesus here did not sin yet responded to His earthly parents. Within the guidelines of respect, children should be allowed to give their opinions. This must be balanced with the obedience that follows.

Lk 2:50 And they understood not the saying which He spake unto them. : one of the aspects of Jesus' sufferings was that many misunderstood Him. We will see during His earthly ministry that the Jewish leaders blamed His behavior on Satan and that His own family thought He was insane. In fact, Jesus went to the cross with His own half-brothers still in unbelief; it was not until after the resurrection that He saw them come to the saving knowledge of who He was.

Lk 2:51 And He went down with them, and came to Nazareth, and was subject unto them: : when it is considered that He was in His true Father's house and that His earthly parents did not understand Him, it is remarkable to note that He unquestioningly obeys and returns with them. The word denotes habitual continuous subjection. One author states that "not even to the angels fell such an honor as to the parents of Jesus."

but His mother kept all these sayings in her heart. : similar to the word used in a previous narrative (Lk 2:19) but with a minor difference: here it gives the indication that *through all these circumstances*, Mary kept, guarded everything that happened.

Lk 2:52 And Jesus increased in wisdom and stature, and in favour with God and man. : there is close resemblance between this and what is said of both Samuel and John the Baptist. Note in John's case however the absence of the favor of men, referring possibly the manner in which John developed. John lived separated from people, growing up in the uninhabited regions. When he did appear he must have impressed his audience as stern and austere. Jesus however was meek and lowly, earning the favor of all around Him. Which way was correct? A lesson for all of us is that **"each to his own temperament, and the Lord will use each accordingly."** The issue in human personality is not what type of temperament is right or wrong but rather the submissive spirit of the individual. **God can use anyone with a surrendered heart, regardless of personality type.**

Another lesson hidden here is the need for a proper concern of the lost's perspective towards the believers. This is not teaching compromise but a reminder that there is no place for an anti-social attitude among believers.

Theological Implications

Why is this incident alone recorded of the youth of Christ? I agree with those bible teachers who hold this is when Jesus realizes who He was and His true mission on earth (referred to as **the Christ Consciousness**). The Baptist theologian of late 1800's Augustas H. Strong states this: "here, at His twelfth year, He appears first to become fully conscious that He is the Sent of God, the Son of God." [Strong, *Systematic Theology*, p675] Edersheim: "And so far as we can judge, it was then and there that, for the first time, He felt the strong and irresistible impulse - that of Divine necessity of His being - to be 'about His Father's business.' ... It was the first manifestation of His passive and active obedience to the Will of God. Even at this stage, it was the forth-bursting of the inmost meaning of His Life: 'My meat is to do the Will of Him that sent Me, and to finish His work.' And yet this awakening of the Christ-consciousness on His first visit to the Temple, partial, and perhaps even temporary, as it may have been, seems itself like the morning-dawn, which from the pinnacle of the Temple the Priest watched, ere he summoned his waiting brethren beneath to offer the early sacrifice." [Edersheim, *Life of Messiah*]

The importance of this is one's bearing on what theologians call the **kenosis** or the emptying of Christ (taken from Phil 2:7 which literally reads "but emptied Himself having taken a bondman's form" with emptied = *ekenosen*). The question is to what degree did Jesus "empty" Himself when He left heaven to become man. Strong lists five possible theories of which the most satisfactory

is the middle of the five:

- **Jesus gave up all divine attributes** which we see in the gospels to not be true: Jesus knew Nathanael prior to him coming to Jesus; Jesus could raise the dead; etc.
- **Jesus gave up only the relative attributes** (i.e. Jesus gave up the omniscience, omnipotence and omnipresence while retaining the attributes of love, holiness, truth) which for the reasons above is shown to be not true.
- **Jesus gave up the independent use of the divine attributes** being dependent upon the Father's will and the leading of the Holy Spirit.
- **Jesus gave up the use of the divine attributes** which for the reasons above is shown to be not true.
- **Jesus only acted like He did not possess the divine attributes** which would make Jesus a liar when He said He did not know the time of His second coming. I believe Jesus did not really know the timing of His return because the Father chose to not reveal it to Him. Of course Jesus was aware of the time prior to His incarnation and knew again after His glorification, but during His humiliation it was hid from Him. See also Mk 5:31,32; Lk 8:45 when the woman with the issue touched Him and He looked around to see who it was; Mk 11:13 when He went to see if there were any figs on the tree.

The theory I believe to be most consistent with the scriptures is "that the humiliation consisted in the surrender of the independent exercise of the divine attributes.... *The humiliation, as the Scriptures seem to show, consisted:*

(a) in that act of the preexistent Logos by which He gave up His divine glory with the Father, in order to take a servant-form. In this act, He resigned not the possession, nor yet entirely the use, but rather the independent exercise, of the divine attributes....

(b) in the submission of the Logos to the control of the Holy Spirit and the limitations of His Messianic mission ...

(c) in the continuous surrender, on the part of the God-man, so far as His human nature was concerned, of the exercise of those divine powers with which it was endowed by virtue of its union with the divine, and in the voluntary acceptance ... of temptation, suffering, and death." [Strong, Systematic Theology, p703]

The best illustration of the divinity / humanity of Christ that I am aware of is that of a sun being hidden behind the clouds on an overcast day. The power and glory of the sun is still there but is concealed to human eye, although there may be an occasional bursting through of the sun with all its brilliance. I used to believe Christ controlled everything even as a babe. Now I think that Jesus' main concerns when He was an infant was for His mother, a bottle and a diaper (or whatever they used back then). While I previously held that it was liberal to portray Jesus as too "human" I now believe I was unbalanced in my understanding of the incarnation.

The importance of this lies with how we view the humanity of Christ and the joining of His natures, how He could be 100% divine and yet 100% human at the same instance. This is a great mystery which one author states is more difficult to understand than even the trinity. God is great and has been pleased to hide things from us, knowing we could not even comprehend what He has chosen to reveal. Let's leave it at that.

Some practical considerations: **Jesus was as human as we are** (yet without sin) and therefore understands what we go through. That is of great comfort when we sorrow or hurt (Heb 4:15,16). Also note **the absolute dependence of Jesus upon the scriptures and the Holy Spirit** whom the Father had given to Him without measure. If Jesus needed these to live pleasing unto the Father, how much more do we?