

In our previous classes we've covered the background and circumstances of Jesus Christ's birth. In the last class we talked about Herod the Great and **the wise men from the east**, from the Parthian Empire, and how Herod murdered the infant boys of Bethlehem and the surrounding towns to try to kill the newborn King of the Jews, and how Joseph and Mary were warned and fled to Egypt to escape the slaughter. Then after Herod's death an angel told Joseph they could safely return, so they settled up in Galilee, in the **village of Nazareth**, where Jesus would grow up. Here's an illustration approximating how Nazareth would've looked at that time, a village of perhaps several hundred people set in something of a bowl surrounded by hills.

So that brings us to where we'll continue the story with a short statement by Luke about Jesus' childhood in **Luke 2:40—**
40 And the Child grew and became strong in spirit, filled with wisdom; and the grace of God was upon Him.

So let's unpack this verse and see what it tells us.

And the Child grew [He grew up there in Nazareth, or Shootville or Branchtown, as the prophesied Branch from Jesse, father of David] **and became strong in spirit** [meaning the Spirit of God was working in Him since He had God's Spirit in Him from the womb], **filled with wisdom** [with understanding and insight which comes from God's Spirit at work within Him, so He was a very wise and understanding child, well beyond His years]; **and the grace** [the favor, the goodwill, the goodness, the blessing] **of God was upon Him.**

So Jesus grows up there as a good Jewish boy, being brought up by righteous and God-fearing parents in what was no doubt a heavily religious environment. Remember as we talked about several classes ago, the region of Galilee had been resettled in the previous century or two by religious Jews who knew from prophecy that the Messiah would appear in Galilee, and they wanted to be there when that happened. Most of the towns of that area that are mentioned in the Gospels, like Nazareth, Capernaum, Bethsaida, Chorazin and others had been founded or resettled in that time by religious Jews.

And now we come to the only event of Christ's childhood that's recorded for us in Scripture, which is the incident at the temple when He's 12 years old. This might be a good time to mention that there are various documents and stories that have circulated about Jesus performing miracles as a child. But there's no evidence of that, and in fact the Gospels refute that idea. Let's turn to **John 2:11** and notice something here that refutes that idea. This is at the conclusion of the story of Jesus turning water to wine at the wedding feast in Cana, and notice what it says:

John 2:11—This *beginning* of signs Jesus did in Cana of Galilee, and manifested His glory; and His disciples believed in Him.

So John says that this miracle of turning water into wine was *the beginning* of the signs—and this word translated “signs” means “miracles” and is often translated that way—that Jesus did. He didn't *begin* doing miracles as a child. He *began* doing miracles when He turned water to wine at Cana, which we'll cover in a few classes from now.

Now we come to the only event from Christ's childhood that's recorded in the Bible for us, here in **Luke 2:41.**

41 His parents went to Jerusalem every year at the Feast of the Passover.

Of course, this is in obedience to the command that we read on the Holy Days found in

Deuteronomy 16:16—

16 “Three times a year all your males shall appear before the LORD your God in the place which He chooses: at the Feast of Unleavened Bread, at the Feast of Weeks, and at the Feast of Tabernacles; and they shall not appear before the LORD empty-handed.

As we see throughout the Gospels and later in the book of Acts, Jesus and the apostles continued to follow this command and go to Jerusalem these three times a year. You’ll sometimes see these referred to as **the “pilgrimage feasts”** since the people were to make a pilgrimage to Jerusalem for these holy Feasts as God commanded. And notice that Joseph and Mary did this every year, showing again that they were obedient, God-fearing people.

Continuing back in **Luke 2:42—**

42 And when He was twelve years old, they went up to Jerusalem according to the custom of the feast.

I’ve talked a little previously about the educational system in Galilee at that time, and it might be helpful to review that at this point because it ties in with Jesus being 12 years old as we read here. By way of review, Jewish boys and girls would go to school from about age 5 or 6 to age 12. This was called **bet sefer** or **“house of writing or house of the book.”** Their schooling focused on the Bible. They would learn large portions of Scripture. They would learn things like history too, but it would be the history of Israel and the biblical heroes and kings and other characters. They would learn things like geography, but it would be the geography of the Holy Land. So it wasn’t *all* Bible, but their education was certainly centered around the Bible.

In this schooling, the boys were expected to *memorize the entire Torah*, the five books of Moses—Genesis, Exodus, Leviticus, Numbers and Deuteronomy—by age 12. This may sound impossible to us, but it’s still done today in Israel and in other Jewish communities. Of course, not all Jewish boys were capable of doing this, but the small minority who were able to memorize the entire Torah then moved on to the next level of learning, which was called **bet midrash**, or **“house of explanation.”** There they would go on to study the rest of the Hebrew Bible with the goal of memorizing the entire Tanakh, or what we would call the Old Testament. Again, most of them would not be able to do that, so at some point, either at age 12 or beyond, they would end this formal study and learn their family trade—such as farmer, potter, builder, metal worker, leather worker or whatever.

What’s relevant to our story today is that at age 12, at this transition from *bet sefer* to *bet midrash*, a Jewish boy was expected to have learned the entire Torah, and he would then participate in what was called his “first Passover.” This doesn’t mean that was literally his first Passover, since every child participate in the family Passover. What this meant was that this would be *his first Passover to be considered a part of the adult community* and he would participate in taking the lamb to the Temple to be sacrificed.

This was probably the precedent for the bar mitzvah that is done today when a Jewish boy turns 13. As far as we can tell, the elaborate bar mitzvah ceremonies celebrated today originated sometime in the middle ages and doesn’t go back to Jesus’s time, but it seems to be an outgrowth or later development of what was done and Jesus’s time.

My point in mentioning all this is to help us understand the context of these events. Jesus is not your average 12-year-old like those today. He is a 12-year-old who has already spent half His lifetime diligently studying Scripture and has in all likelihood already memorized the entire five

books of Moses. He is now considered an adult ready now to go on and study and memorize the rest of the Old Testament, which I'm sure He did. Why do I say that? Because as we'll see later, He is regularly called a rabbi. And to be a rabbi in that day one had to have memorized the entirety of the books of the Old Testament, if not more. So back to the story—

42 And when He was twelve years old, they went up to Jerusalem according to the custom of the feast.

43 When they had finished the days, as they returned, the Boy Jesus lingered behind in Jerusalem. And Joseph and His mother did not know it;

44 but supposing Him to have been in the company, they went a day's journey, and sought Him among their relatives and acquaintances.

So this tells us that after the Passover feast was over, which lasted more than a week because it included the Feast of Unleavened Bread, Jesus's family started the long trip back to Nazareth. You can look at your map on the back and see that there was a road that went from Jerusalem to Jericho about 15 miles away, and from there the main route ran northward along the Jordan River up to Galilee. It would've been quite crowded, with probably at least several tens of thousands of people, including many of Joseph's and Mary's friends and relatives, leaving Jerusalem to travel back to Galilee.

When you traveled to the Feast then, you traveled as family and extended family of uncles and aunts and cousins. By this time Joseph and Mary likely had at least several other small children to take care of, so Jesus was probably the least of their worries. No doubt both Joseph and Mary thought Jesus was with other relatives or friends among these large groups of people walking back to Galilee, so it wasn't until they stopped for the night, probably somewhere around Jericho, that they realized He was not with either one of them. Continuing in verse 45—

45 So when they did not find Him, they returned to Jerusalem, seeking Him.

So now Joseph and Mary turned around and traveled for a day back up the road to Jerusalem to try to find Him.

46 Now so it was that after three days [probably one day out of Jerusalem, another day back, and they found him the day after they returned to Jerusalem] they found Him in the temple, sitting in the midst of the teachers, both listening to them and asking them questions.

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

Here to there's a lot of information packed into these few verses. So let's dig into them a little deeper.

First of all, the Temple was a common place for teaching. Later we'll see Jesus himself teaching in the Temple. And later we find mentioned in the book of Acts that apostles like Peter and John were teaching in the Temple. So as near as we can tell, there were nearly always people there at the temple teaching, and audiences there wanting to learn more about God's Word. According to some sources, specific parts of the temple complex were set aside just for this.

Notice that Luke says Jesus was—

“sitting in the midst of the teachers, both *listening to them and asking them questions.*

47 And all who heard Him were astonished at His *understanding and answers.*

So Jesus is listening and asking questions of the teachers. This might have been rabbis who were there teaching and discussing God's Word, and one source suggests that it might've even been the Sanhedrin, which met in public in the Passover season to discuss and answer questions about the law. We just don't know for sure, other than that the teachers, whoever, they were, would've been considered experts in God's Word. And those “who heard him were *astonished at His*

understanding and answers,” or His responses. So Jesus is asking them questions, and they are also asking Him questions, because they are amazed at His answers. So what’s going on here?

Maybe you’ve noticed in reading the Gospels that on a number of occasions someone will ask Jesus a question and He will respond with a question, or vice versa. To us, if we did that today and asked someone a question and they responded back with a question, we’d assume they’re dodging the question. But that was not the case then. Asking questions and answering questions with questions was a common way that rabbis taught in that time.

And there was a good reason for that. Let’s say that I ask you a question and you give me the answer. I may accept your answer or I may not, depending on whether I believe it. But if I ask you a question and you answer with a question that makes me *find my own answer*, then I’ll accept the answer because I had to come up with the answer myself. So by answering a question with a question, the teachers of that day helped the person *come to his own answer* to the question, so it was truly *his* answer and not just the *teacher’s* answer. This method of teaching has been used by Jewish rabbis and teachers for centuries and is still used today.

Let me illustrate with a story that I heard from an American teacher who leads study groups to Israel. He told about a group he was leading that stopped in the Israeli city of Safat, in Galilee not very far north of Capernaum. One of the members of his group was a lady who taught art, and there in Safat she stopped in a photo store run by an elderly Jewish rabbi. She was blown away by the impressionistic photos hanging on the walls in his store so she asked him, “*Which of your photos is your favorite?*” So she started the conversation by innocently asking him a question, not being aware that this is how rabbis commonly taught.

So she asks, “Which one of these photos is your favorite?” and the elderly rabbi responded by saying, “*Are you married?*” Now, she thought that was odd, but she answered anyway—“Yes, I am. *Why?*” She didn’t realize it, but by asking a question in response to his question, she was continuing the discussion. Otherwise he might have dropped it.

So then the rabbi responded by asking, “*Do you have any children?*” Again, she thought that was odd, but she answered anyway—“Yes, I have two daughters and a son. *Why?*” She again answered his question with a question, not realizing what was going on.

So the rabbi responded by saying, “*Which one is your favorite?*” The rabbi answered her original question about his photos, which was “which one is your favorite?” *What was his answer to her question?* His answer was that he couldn’t pick one single favorite, because his photos were like children—each was his favorite in different ways. So by answering her question with several other questions, he led her to an answer that she would fully understand and appreciate.

And this is one of the ways the rabbis and teachers of Jesus’ day taught to help people come to the right answer to a question. They *asked questions* to help the person come to his or her own answer. Jesus Himself used this method. Let’s look at a few examples starting in

Matthew 12:9—

9 Now when He had departed from there, He went into their synagogue.

10 And behold, there was a man who had a withered hand. And they asked Him, saying, “Is it lawful to heal on the Sabbath?”—that they might accuse Him.

So they asked a question, but their motivation was to trap Jesus and make Him look bad. They wanted Him to answer yes or no because there are some there who think it's okay to heal on the Sabbath and some who don't, so whichever way He answers He'll alienate some people. But Jesus outsmarts them.

11 Then He said to them, “What man is there among you who has one sheep, and if it falls into a pit on the Sabbath, will not lay hold of it and lift it out?”

12 “Of how much more value then is a man than a sheep? Therefore it is lawful to do good on the Sabbath.”

So He asks them two questions in return. Of course they would lift a sheep out of a pit, even on the Sabbath day. So He caught them in their own trap. And then He asks, “How much more valuable is a man than a sheep?” Man is made in the image of God, so obviously man is more valuable than a sheep. So if you can help a sheep on the Sabbath day, surely you can help a human being on the Sabbath day. So with two questions He has *check* and *mate* and they're caught in their own trap that they tried to set for Him.

13 Then He said to the man, “Stretch out your hand.” And he stretched it out, and it was restored as whole as the other.

They didn't like that, because it says they then plotted to destroy Him. They tried to discredit Him, and He turned around and used their question for a teaching moment for all those there witnessing this in the synagogue. And He showed that their motivation wasn't a sincere desire to understand God's instruction, it was to try to discredit Him and His teaching.

Let's look at another example in **Matthew 21:23—**

23 Now when He came into the temple, the chief priests and the elders of the people confronted Him as He was teaching [so here He is teaching in the temple, like we talked about earlier], and said, “By what authority are You doing these things? And who gave You this authority?”

24 But Jesus answered and said to them, “I also will ask you one thing, which if you tell Me, I likewise will tell you by what authority I do these things:

25 “The baptism of John—where was it from? From heaven or from men?”

Notice that Jesus here does answer their question. They asked him, “Who gave you the authority to teach this way and do these things?” And He answers their question by saying that *John the Baptist* did because John is a prophet and a priest and the forerunner of the Messiah—but He phrases His answer as a question.

And they reasoned among themselves, saying, “If we say, ‘From heaven,’ He will say to us, ‘Why then did you not believe him?’

26 “But if we say, ‘From men,’ we fear the multitude, for all count John as a prophet.”

So they wrestle with Jesus' question because they can't answer it. If they say John's baptism was from heaven, meaning from God, they're condemning themselves because they didn't believe John. And if they say it was from men, then they're in trouble with the people because they recognized John as a prophet. So either way they answer, they're in trouble.

27 So they answered Jesus and said, “We do not know.” And He said to them, “Neither will I tell you by what authority I do these things.

So here Jesus answers their question with a question that puts them on the spot and they refuse to answer. So Jesus says, “Okay, you won't answer My question, so I won't answer your question.”

We'll see this teaching method of answering questions by asking other questions a number of times in the Gospels as we go through them. But this is the background—this was a common teaching method in Jesus's day, and it's still used down to this day by Jewish teachers.

So back to Luke 2:47 when Jesus is 12 years old at the temple—

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

So those there at the temple that day knew there was something special about this 12-year-old kid. He was only 12 years old, but this was not your ordinary boy. He was astonishing the people there with His questions and answers. He was holding His own against, if not bettering, men who had spent 30, 40, 50 or 60 years studying God’s Word. This was an amazing sight.

48 So when they saw Him, they were amazed; and His mother said to Him, “Son, why have You done this to us? Look, Your father and I have sought You anxiously.”

49 And He said to them, “Why did you seek Me? Did you not know that I must be about My Father’s business?”

Again, there are a lot of interesting things here. Mary is understandably worried, but this isn’t a situation where Jesus has been rebellious or irresponsible toward them. As He says here, He was “about His Father’s business.” And notice how He subtly corrects Mary’s statement. She says, “Your father and I have sought you anxiously,” referring to Joseph and herself. But Jesus responds, “did you not know that I must be about My *real* Father’s business?”—referring to God the Father. He gently reminds her of who His real Father is. Notice also how He phrases this—even though just 12 years old, He said “I *must* be about My Father’s business.” Even at that young age He was thoroughly convicted of what He must be doing and His direction in life.

50 But they did not understand the statement which He spoke to them.

They didn’t really grasp what *He* had already come to grasp—that He was the *unique, one and only Son of God*. At some point Jesus had come to realize that. How and when did He come to know and realize that? We just don’t know, because Scripture doesn’t tell us. But it’s obvious that He grasps and understands His uniqueness here at 12 years old.

I know I’ve had conversations with some of you about the question of what did He know and when did He know it? Did He know who He was from birth? I doubt it because the physical brain simply cannot process things like that for at least several years. Obviously He had God’s Spirit from birth and that gave Him additional insight and understanding of spiritual things, but that doesn’t mean that a 7- or 8-year-old has the capacity to grasp all of these things. I think it must have been a learning process, that as He studied and memorized God’s Word, and that as He walked over the land where as the God of the Old Testament He had interacted with people like Abraham, Isaac and Jacob and the prophets centuries earlier, it increasingly dawned on Him who and what He really was.

I say that because it is clear that Jesus *learned* throughout His lifetime. The fact that He *learned* tells us that He didn’t know everything from the beginning. Let’s look at a couple of Scriptures that show us that He learned. One is **Hebrews 5:8—**

8 though He was a Son, yet He learned obedience by the things which He suffered.

9 And having been perfected, He became the author of eternal salvation to all who obey Him,

This clearly tells us that Jesus *learned* through the things He experienced in this physical life, including suffering, and that He *was perfected* through this learning process. So obviously He was not perfect and did not know everything from the beginning if He learned and was perfected through His experiences as a physical human being. Does this mean that He sinned or was imperfect? Of course not. You might say that He was perfect, but that He became even *more* perfect by the things He experienced.

Another verse we should look at is **John 8:28—**
28 Then Jesus said to them, “When you lift up the Son of Man, then you will know that I am He, and that I do nothing of Myself; but as My Father taught Me, I speak these things.
 Notice here that He says the Father *taught* Him. If He was taught, then He obviously did not know everything from the beginning. He had to *learn* as He grew and matured. How was He taught? I think the same way that *we* are taught—through study of God’s Word and through our experiences in this life.

How does God teach us new spiritual concepts? Through God’s Holy Spirit at work within us. As we study God’s Word, from time to time things will jump out at us that we never noticed before. Or may be in prayer a sudden realization will come to us that we hadn’t thought of before. Or maybe in a sermon or sermonette or Bible study we’ll suddenly see something that we never saw before. This is the way God’s Spirit works to help us learn and grow in spiritual understanding. And I think it’s probably the same basic way it worked for Jesus Christ—except in a vastly deeper and accelerated way because of who and what He was. I think He learned over time just as each of us learns over time. I look forward to the time when I can ask Him and find out for sure.

So, concluding today’s study in **Luke 2:51-52**, we read—
51 Then He went down with them and came to Nazareth, and was subject to them, but His mother kept all these things in her heart.

As we’ve seen before, Mary “kept these things in her heart.” She must have wondered about what kind of Child this was, now growing into a young man. This again shows that Mary is the most likely source of the information for Luke’s Gospel, since she kept them to herself and didn’t talk to others when these things happened.

And here too we see something about the character and nature of Jesus Christ. In verse 49 we saw that Jesus understood that He was the Son of God. But that didn’t make Him proud or elevated in His opinion of Himself, and it didn’t make Him look down on His human parents Joseph and Mary. Instead, as we see here, He was *subject to them*. As God’s Son He was a perfect *human* son to His human parents just as we would expect Him to be.

52 And Jesus increased in wisdom and stature, and in favor with God and men.
 And here we see that growth process of growing in wisdom and maturity, both physical and spiritual, growing in favor with both God and other human beings. It’s interesting that this word “favor” here is the same word translated “grace” elsewhere in the New Testament. So you could say that He was increasing in grace with God and men—grace being the favor, the goodwill, the goodness, the blessing God the Father directed toward Him and that He directed outward toward others.

So we’ll stop there and pick it up next time with the beginning of the ministry of John the Immerser, commonly known as John the Baptist. I might mention too that next Sabbath in the sermon I plan to speak on something that will supplement our regular Bible classes. I’ve mentioned before the concept of *remez*, which is hinting at or referring back to Old Testament passages. There are a number of puzzling passages in the Gospels that suddenly make sense when we understand the concept and practice of *remez*. So we’ll plan to cover that next week in the sermon. Any questions? Class is dismissed.