

Lesson 9

Second Sunday after Christmas

The Holy Gospel: Luke 2:40–52

Out of all the incidents that Mary must have told Luke when he interviewed her, the Holy Spirit inspired Luke to write this story as representative of the childhood of Jesus. Jesus was 12 years old—about to take His place in the Jewish community as a *Bar Mitzvah*, a “son of duty,” and take on the responsibilities of an adult male Jew. Joseph and Mary were faithful in their religious duties, and participated in all the required rites and ceremonies, including the Passover festival in Jerusalem.

When the seven-day festival was completed, Mary and Joseph joined the company of pilgrims for the return to Galilee. Jesus stayed behind in Jerusalem.

121. How could these parents travel a whole day without concern that Jesus was not at their side?

Retracing their steps, they looked for Jesus along the way and at the place where they had camped in the hills outside Jerusalem. Finally they found Him in the temple, sitting among the rabbis, caught up in their teaching and discussion. Luke does not explain where Jesus spent the nights while alone in Jerusalem. Perhaps one of the rabbis befriended Him and brought Him back with him to the temple during the days.

122. What impression did Jesus make on the teachers and the people who gathered around them?

We might expect parents in that circumstance to be firm in disciplining such a thoughtless son, and Mary did express her concern and disappointment. But the Greek softens her complaint by having her call Jesus *teknon*, “child,” instead of *huios*, “son.”

123. What evidently was awakened in Mary and Joseph by the circumstances they found that softened her rebuke?

Responding to His mother’s complaint, Jesus only expressed surprise that they had not known where He would be. The Greek is *en tois tou patros mou*, “in the things of My Father.” It specifies neither the “My Father’s business” of the KJV nor the “in My Father’s house” of the ESV, but “house” is an appropriate translation, for the temple surely was the place where the Father’s “things” were to be found. Remarkable here to note is that Jesus uses the singular “my” instead of the plural “our” when referring to His Father. This denotes the unique relationship between Jesus and God, between God the Son and God the Father.

124. Why did His parents not understand what He was saying to them? How did His mother react to incidents such as this?

Returning to Nazareth, Jesus “was submissive to them.” With His *Bar Mitzvah*, Jesus’ formal instruction at the synagogue school ended. Joseph’s training Him in the skills of carpentry accelerated. Jesus grew into the adult community of Nazareth.

125. What adverbs might we use today to label the four aspects of His growth that Luke described?

The Old Testament Lesson: 1 Kings 3:4–15

Verse 3 of this chapter says, “Solomon loved the LORD, walking in the statutes of David his father, only he sacrificed and made offerings at the high places.” “High places” were mountaintops or hilltops where the Canaanites worshiped Asherah and Baal, their fertility deities. Their worship practices often included sexual immorality along with the sacrifices and feasting. On entering Canaan, Israel was ordered to destroy the pagan high places. They were to offer their sacrifices only at the tabernacle

That worship of Yahweh at the altars of high places had become accepted is shown by Solomon’s frequently going to Gibeon, the “great high place.” More significant is the fact that after the Philistines destroyed Shiloh and stole the ark of the covenant, the tabernacle itself and its bronze altar were set up at Gibeon. Then the ark was recovered. David brought it to Jerusalem, but the tabernacle was left at the high place in Gibeon. It’s where the Israelites went to worship Yahweh. That’s where Solomon went and where Yahweh appeared to him (see 2 Chronicles 1:2–6).

126. What does it say that the Lord was willing to appear to Solomon at Gibeon? Why was the Lord pleased with Solomon’s response and request?

127. Why has “as wise as Solomon” become a proverbial phrase? (See 1 Kings 4:29–34.)

128. What does it say that after this encounter, Solomon returned to Jerusalem to offer sacrifices before the ark of the covenant and to celebrate there with a royal feast?

129. How does this Old Testament Lesson tie in with today’s Holy Gospel?

The Epistle for the Day: Ephesians 1:3–14

Ephesus was “the jewel of Asia,” the Roman province on the west coast of what we call Turkey today. It enjoyed a large inland harbor, connected to the Aegean Sea by a channel several miles long. It was a bustling metropolis of 200,000, a center of commerce, a seat of government, prosperous and worldly. Its civic pride centered in the temple of the goddess Diana, a building 342 feet long and 164 feet wide, surrounded by 100 stately marble columns 55 feet tall, with walls and roof also of gleaming white marble. It was one of the seven wonders of the ancient world. To this proud pagan city Paul devoted three years of his apostolic ministry, with such effect that Acts says, “all the residents of Asia heard the Word of the Lord, both Jews and Greeks” (19:10).

The central theme of the epistle is this: In the fullness of time, all things in heaven and earth are to be united in Christ (v. 10). As Paul assured the Ephesians—and, by extension, assures us—of a place in this divine plan, he unfolded the mystery of predestination. Many scholars think this whole pericope is one long, flowing sentence in Greek that gushed out of the inspired apostle as he dictated his greetings at the beginning of his letter. It is a trinitarian doxology, each section of which is ended with “to the praise of His glory.”

Fill in key words or phrases to appreciate the wonder of it more fully: “Blessed be the ___ of our ___, who has blessed us in ___ with every ___, even as He ___ us in Him before the ___, that we should be ___ before Him. In love He ___ us for ___ through ___, according to the purpose of ___, to the praise of His ___, with which He has blessed us in ___. In Him we have ___ through His ___, the ___ of our ___, according to the ___, which He ___ upon us, in all ___ making known to us the ___, according to His ___, which He set forth in ___ as a plan for the ___, to ___ all things in Him, things in ___ and things on ___. In Him we have obtained an ___, having been ___ according to the purpose of Him who ___ according to the ___, so that we who ___ might be to the praise of His ___. In Him ___, when you heard ___, the ___, and ___ in Him, were sealed with the ___, who is the ___ of our ___ until ___, to the praise of His ___.”

130. The phrase “in Christ” or its equivalent occurs 12 times. Why is God’s choosing so pointedly qualified in this way? (See John 14:6.) What do the phrases “adoption through Jesus Christ,” “according to the purpose of His will,” and “to the praise of His glorious grace” say about our being chosen?

131. “We have redemption through His blood.” The *apolutrōsis* was the ransom payment to emancipate a slave. What does this say about God’s plan by which He has made us His sons and daughters in Christ?

132. When will God’s eternal plan and purpose be fully put into effect?

133. How is it that we were included in this mysterious purpose of God?

134. What does it mean to you in your Christian life that God chose you in Christ from eternity to be His son or daughter?