

The Christmas Season, which seems to begin earlier every year is finally over. It officially ended on January 6 – The Feast of the Epiphany – or the manifestation of Christ to the Gentiles. That is when we celebrate that the Wise Men showed up – but, we won't go there. We are now in the Epiphany Season, which is the season of transition – from the joyous celebration of Christmas to the somber season of Lent – as we prepare to celebrate the last week of our Savior's life.

One of the interesting things that we find as we read the Scriptures, is that we are told very little about the childhood of our Savior. We have a lot of information on the events surrounding his birth. And we have a lot of information about his three year ministry, and of course, the last week of his earthly life – resulting in his death, burial and then, his glorious resurrection.

The only glimpse that we have into the childhood of our Savior is that which we read in our Gospel lesson from this morning – so I ask you turn with me to Luke 2. As I said, we know a lot about the beginning of our Savior's earthly life – and it's end. But what we have in Luke 2 is the only event about his youth that is recorded for us in the Scriptures.

As we look at our passage we see first of all that the earthly parents of Jesus were devout Jews. We are told this in Luke 2:41,42 (READ).

It was their custom to go to Jerusalem each year at the time of the Passover, because this is what the law required. As we read in Exodus 23:14-17: *“Three times you shall keep a feast to Me in the year: You shall keep the Feast of Unleavened Bread (you shall eat unleavened bread seven days, as I commanded you, at the time appointed in the month of Abib, for in it you came out of Egypt; none shall appear before Me empty); and the Feast of Harvest, the firstfruits of your labors which you have sown in the field; and the Feast of Ingathering at the end of the year, when you have gathered in the fruit of your labors from the field. Three times in the year all your males shall appear before the Lord GOD.”*

This instruction was repeated to the Jews just prior to their entering into the Promised Land – Deuteronomy 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.”*

So we see first of all that the parents of Jesus were faithful in following the law of God and this was not the first time. They did present him to be circumcised on the 8<sup>th</sup> day, as the law required. Now, we are familiar with the story – Jesus stays behind in the Temple. You might think – how could they let that happen? He's twelve years old.

While we don't know exactly how this happened, there are a few plausible explanations for this. It is possible that there was a large contingent of pilgrims from Nazareth and his parents thought he might be with his friends. Or, as one custom tells us – the women and the children went ahead, with the men following behind – and the one thought he was with the other parent.

In any event, after a days journey they realize that he isn't there, so they head back to Jerusalem – and after three days they find him – where else – in the Temple. Why they didn't look their first, we don't know – but we read: Luke 2:46-47: *“Now so it was that after three days they found Him in the temple, sitting in the midst of the*

*teachers, both listening to them and asking them questions. And all who heard Him were astonished at His understanding and answers.”*

So the picture before us is that you have this 12 year old kid, sitting in the midst of the most learned Jewish scholars in Jerusalem – the teachers of the law – and Jesus was both listening and asking them questions.

Historians tell us that the Temple courts were often used for teaching and a common method of learning was the asking of questions followed by discussion.

The thing that we do not see is the scholars looking down on Jesus and either saying: ‘who are you to tell us what the interpretation of God’s law is’ or ‘why don’t you just sit there and listen, and be quiet as a child should?’

A couple of things come into play here. At 12 years old, Jesus was only one year away of being made a “son of the commandment” where he would then be considered an adult member of the Jewish religious community. So perhaps, the scholars thought this would be an ideal time to begin his training for adulthood.

The second thing, and more important is seen in the response to his parents – Luke 2:48-50: *“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.” And He said to them, “Why did you seek Me? Did you not know that I must be about My Father’s business?” But they did not understand the statement which He spoke to them.”*

At 12 years of age Jesus knew who he was. He knew that God was his father. We do not know the extent to which he understood all that would follow when he started his ministry, but for now we know that he understood who he was and, as he said: *Did you not know that I must be about My Father’s business?*

As we compare Scripture with Scripture we know that the primary reason that Jesus came was to die for the sins of those who would believe him. He would be the one final and perfect sacrifice for sins of the world.

But we also know that he came to reveal the Father. As we saw a couple of weeks ago *“and the Word became flesh and dwelt among us.”* And part of his revealing the Father was to give the correct interpretation of God’s Word. What do I mean by this?

Remember at this time, the Scribes and the Pharisees – some of those same Jewish scholars that Jesus is engaging in the Temple had completely distorted the law of God. The true meaning of God’s law that He revealed to His people – and preserved for them – had been buried under the teachings of the Scribes and Pharisees.

In the Sermon on the Mount, we often read the phrase: *“You have heard that is was to those of old ... But I say to you ...”* In other words, Jesus was comparing his teaching with that of the Scribes and Pharisees.

They had reduced God’s law to a long list of do’s and don’ts – and it was entirely based on outward obedience. To the Scribes and Pharisees it did not matter what was in one’s heart, it was only a matter of outward obedience to the law. That is precisely why Jesus said in Matthew 5:20: *“For I say to you, that unless your righteousness exceeds the righteousness of the scribes and Pharisees, you will by no means enter the kingdom of heaven.”*

And then he went on to explain what he meant. I give you two examples. Matthew 5:21-23: “*You have heard that it was said to those of old, ‘You shall not murder, and whoever murders will be in danger of the judgment.’ But I say to you that whoever is angry with his brother without a cause shall be in danger of the judgment. And whoever says to his brother, ‘RacaRaca!’ shall be in danger of the council. But whoever says, ‘You fool!’ shall be in danger of hell fire.*” And Matthew 5:27-28: “*You have heard that it was said to those of old, ‘You shall not commit adultery.’ But I say to you that whoever looks at a woman to lust for her has already committed adultery with her in his heart.*”

You can read also Matthew 23 where Jesus pronounces woes on the Scribes and Pharisees. He calls them hypocrites, blind guides, sons of hell, white-washed tombs, with some of his concluding words in Matthew 23:33: “*Serpents, brood of vipers! How can you escape the condemnation of hell?*” I do not think that our Savior was politically correct.

Again, it is what is in the heart that counts, and that is one of the reasons that Jesus came. Remember, as Jeremiah 17:9 teaches: “*The heart is deceitful above all things, And desperately wicked; Who can know it?*”

Jesus started telling the teachers of the law the truth as it comes from the heart when he was only 12 years old. And in all probability, that is why they were amazed at his true understanding of God’s Word. We know that at least one of the Pharisees – Nicodemus – had his heart changed. But that is what it takes – a heart changed by the Spirit of God.

So, while the story of Jesus in the Temple might seem simple – it teaches us much. Let us not only know God’s Word and strive to keep it outwardly, but remember that it is what is in the heart that counts.