

BaptistWay Bible Series for December 27: Committed to God's purpose

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We know Jesus lived at home until he turned 30 years of age. He served with his earthly father, Joseph, as a carpenter. He left home and began his ministry, which lasted a little over three years. This timeline is based on the Gospel of John, which records Jesus traveling to Jerusalem for three Passover Feasts. Since Passover was an annual celebration, thus Jesus' ministry was three years in duration.

While the details of Jesus' ministry compose the bulk of the material found in the Gospels, any information concerning his childhood is scant to say the least. Aside from the birth accounts in Matthew 2:1-23 and Luke 2:1-20, Luke 2:40-52 provides the only glimpse of our Lord's formative years. The absence of such details caused some to produce wild, fanciful myths about Jesus. These "false gospels" were rightly labeled false and never were considered as divinely inspired accounts. We should give thanks for those early believers who followed the leadership of God's Spirit and arrived at our New Testament accounts—Matthew, Mark, Luke and John.

What we need to know in order to understand the life and work of Jesus is found in our New Testament books. And while we may desire to know more about Jesus and his childhood, we can learn much from the one passage that portrays a trip he made with his family to Jerusalem.

What the Bible says ...

Luke 2:22 tells us Mary and Joseph brought Jesus to Jerusalem when he was about 6 weeks old. The reference to "days of purification" in 2:22

refers to about 40 days. After the blessing of Simeon and Anna (Luke 2:21-38), spoken as they beheld the 6-week-old Son of God, the narrative moves forward twelve years.

Jesus, no doubt, traveled to Jerusalem on many occasions during his early years. The focus of Luke 2:41-51 is on the journey the family made to celebrate the Feast of the Passover. This particular journey for the 12-year-old Jesus was significant because it was a “coming of age” trip. Jewish boys began preparing to take their places in the religious community at age 13.

After the week-long celebration, the family, traveling by caravan, began the journey back to Nazareth, unaware Jesus had stayed behind. The timeline is very precise at this point: “Thinking he was in their company, they traveled on for a day. Then they began looking for him among their relatives and friends. When they did not find him, they went back to Jerusalem to look for him. After three days they found him in the temple courts, sitting among the teachers, listening to them and asking them questions” (Luke 2:44-46).

Jesus’ response to Mary (Luke 2:49), while it may seem a little out of character for children when addressing their parents, simply lets her know he understands his purpose and mission. The narrative ends with Jesus obeying his parents, returning to Nazareth and continuing “to grow in wisdom and in stature, and in favor with God and men” (Luke 2:52).

What the Bible means to me today ...

Though this is the only glimpse we have into the childhood days of Jesus, we can learn much about how we should help one another grow in our faith. In this passage, I see three important aspects involved in helping children and students to grow.

First, the family is involved. There is no substitute for parents and their influence upon their children. Mary and Joseph were involved in Jesus’ life. They loved him. They provided experiences and opportunities for him to

grow and develop. And they did not send him to these important events on his own. They went with him. How many times have we been reminded we can give children money, prizes and gifts, but the lasting memories have more to do with time spent together, rather than the giving of things.

Second, the church is involved. While the church cannot be expected to raise our children, the church must reach and teach. However misguided we view the religious community of biblical times, the temple, the scribes and the priests all were there to help people grow in their love and devotion to God. Churches do well to use their resources in providing experiences and ministries that help families. It is the church that goes the second mile and helps parents get involved with their children that truly makes a positive impact on such families. Just knowing where your children are is one thing. Knowing what they are doing and being a part of their lives is another thing entirely.

Third, Jesus is involved. Though Jesus made it perfectly clear he was seeing to his Father's business, the boy Messiah did not balk or show disrespect to his earthly family. He returned to Nazareth and lived under their authority, learning a trade, and no doubt traveling to Jerusalem with them on many other occasions. Families can do their best and churches can provide authentic opportunities for all, but growth will not happen if we do not receive and respond as we ought.

May Luke 2:52 describe our own boys and girls in the days to come—growing in wisdom and stature, and in favor with God and men.