

First Sunday after Christmas

MY FATHER'S HOUSE AND BUSINESS

Luke 2:41-52

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Analysis by Norb Kabelitz

41Now every year his parents went to Jerusalem for the festival of the Passover. 42And when he was twelve years old, they went up as usual for the festival. 43When the festival was ended and they started to return, the boy Jesus stayed behind in Jerusalem, but his parents did not know it. 44Assuming that he was in the group of travelers, they went a day's journey. Then they started to look for him among their relatives and friends. 45When they did not find him, they returned to Jerusalem to search for him. 46After three days they found him in the temple, sitting among the teachers, listening to them and asking them questions. 47And all who heard him were amazed at his understanding and his answers. 48When his parents saw him they were astonished; and his mother said to him, "Child, why have you treated us like this? Look, your father and I have been searching for you with great anxiety." 49He said to them, "Why were you searching for me? Did you not know that I must be in my Father's house?" 50But they did not understand what he said to them. 51Then he went down with them and came to Nazareth, and was obedient to them. His mother treasured all these things in her heart. 52And Jesus increased in wisdom and in years, (or in stature), and in divine and human favor."

Prologue: According to Luke 1:1-4, the author of the Luke's Gospel had access to other writings by "eye-witnesses," to write his orderly account for friend Theophilus. Should we be

surprised then that in the infancy narrative of the Gospel of Thomas, we find a duplicate of this reading in spite of the biblical notation attached to 2:41-52: "Only Luke provides a story of Jesus' boyhood." We find the same story in *The Apocryphal New Testament with other Narratives and Fragments Newly Translated by Montague Rhodes James*, sometime provost of King's College, Cambridge (Oxford at the Clarendon Press, Great Britain, 1924 and corrected in 1953). We also cite the Gospel of Thomas, Greek Text A, offered by Tischendorf, page 54: "The stories of Thomas the Israelite, the Philosopher, concerning the works of the Childhood of the Lord," numbered from I. To XIX. Among these extra-biblical materials are accounts of the child Jesus doing miraculous feats. The story of Jesus at 12 years old is number XIX and versed as follows:

1And when he was twelve years old his parents went according to the custom unto Jerusalem to the feast of the passover with their company: and after the passover they returned to go unto their house. And as they returned the child Jesus went back to Jerusalem; but his parents supposed that he was in their company. 2And when they had gone a day's journey, they sought him among their kinsfolk, and when they found him not, they were troubled, and returned again to the city seeking him. And after the third day they found him in the temple sitting in the midst of the doctors and hearing and asking them questions. And all men paid heed to him and marveled how that being a young child he put to silence the elders and teachers of the people, expounding the heads of the law and the parables (see what Jesus said about speaking in parables!) of the prophets. 3And his mother Mary came near and said to him: Child, wherefore hast thou so done unto us? Behold we have sought thee sorrowing. And Jesus said unto them: Why seek me? Know ye not that I must be in my Father's house? 4But the scribes and Pharisees said: Art thou the mother of this child? And she

said: I am. And they said unto her: Blessed art thou among women, because God hath blessed the fruit of thy womb. For such glory and such excellence and wisdom we have neither seen nor heard at any time. 5And Jesus arose and followed his mother and was subject unto his parents: but his mother kept in mind all that came to pass. And Jesus increased in wisdom and stature and grace. Unto him be glory for ever and ever. Amen.

Another thought: If Jesus was born in the spring (the time at which lambs are birthed), maybe the festival referred to was also his birthday.

DIAGNOSIS: The House and Business of Joseph and Mary

Step 1: Initial Diagnosis (External Problem) : Parental Responsibility

As true Israelites, responsible parents were to bring up their children in the faith through the customs of home, temple, and synagogue: circumcision, dedication, and presentation. Also, it may have been Jesus at 12 rather than the rabbinical 13 that he had become a “son of the law” (bar mitzvah), and now came with his parents to Jerusalem to bond his relationship to God by observing the Passover. (Indeed, maybe it was his birthday too, becoming 12 years old, at Passover-time!) Now Jesus could go to the Temple with Joseph, father with son, and observe both the commandments and the ritual of the Passover. Whatever the case may be, it was the business of the house of Mary and Joseph to teach the rituals and laws of Israel in their son, which they observed every year. As St. Paul later would write, “God sent his Son, born of a woman, born under the law” (Galatians 4:4).

Step 2: Advanced Diagnosis (Internal Problem) : “Jesus Lost”? or

“Lost Parents”?

The suggestion is made in the apocryphal account that Jesus started with kinfolk on the return journey but then “Jesus went back to Jerusalem.” That the parents “did not know” suggests that Jesus was “lost to them” not only among kinfolk, but because he was claiming another parent, which they “did not understand” (v. 50; see Danker, *Jesus and the New Age*, regarding “Jesus is the boy or servant of the Lord in a sense that transcends Israel’s mission.”) Should we blame the parents of Jesus for not understanding this? The “internal problem” is more than Jesus being missed and parents who experience painful anxiety . (Also, finding Jesus “after three days of searching” suggests a “code” that will repeat itself in the passion and Easter story of “not knowing and not understanding.”) As the exchange in the Temple implies, might it not be that not “knowing” (v. 49) and “not understanding,” makes them “lost to Jesus” whose birth had proclaimed a higher parental link? Couldn’t it also be said that their “not knowing” of this child’s higher allegiance suggests unbelief? Are we too lost when we do not know, or understand, and therefore do not or cannot believe? (See Luke 18:34 and check out “do not understand” in a Concordance.)

Step 3: Final Diagnosis (Eternal Problem) : “Lost in Translation” and in Fact

While Joseph and Mary experience parental responsibility for “their son,” and painful anxiety because he has been missed, Jesus (unknown to them) is involved in a growing relationship with a divine Father. We find him “home for Christmas” in his Father’s house and involved in his Father’s business interests. If we are not also there and in the know, then we too are lost. We are lost to the Son who is in the Father’s house and about his Father’s business, as he expounds “the heads of the law and the parables of the prophets” (see Apocrypha above). What we

don't know can hurt us. We cannot find the way to the Father except through Jesus who is more than "Mary's son," but also God's son. We are lost not only to the Son but also the Father (see John 6:36-45).

PROGNOSIS: The House and Business of the "Christmas" Father

Step 4: Initial Prognosis (Eternal Solution) : *"My Father's House and Business" Is Salvation*

Jesus as a 12 year old, born under the law, is born in order to "redeem those under the law that we might receive adoption as children" (Gal. 4:4, 5). Jesus is found as he "searches the Scriptures with questions and answers," engaging the "elders and teachers of the people." It is Passover-time. Might we suggest that there was give-and-take about the festival with questions and answers? Jesus will later say, "You search the Scriptures because you think that in them you have eternal life and it is they that testify on my behalf" (John 5:39). While Jesus is only 12 in this give-and-take of scriptures, we are pushed to see the Passover as forerunner of the Father's new "business" in his Son, who as the "Lamb of God" takes away the sin of the world! In this new Passover Jesus shares himself in the bread and wine of communion to be our victory; he sets us free from the power of legalism, judgment on sin (of not knowing and unbelief), and death as the "wages of sin."

Step 5: Advanced Prognosis (Internal Solution) : *Finding or Being Found by Jesus Himself*

We find Jesus "on the third day"-or are we found? Check out the use of "on the third day" in the Gospels and creeds! Is that why we read from Galatians on Easter (the third day), "Formerly, ... you did not know God ... now, however, that you have come to know God, or rather be known by God" (Galatians 4:8-9)? It is Jesus as Savior and teacher of God's salvation who will expound, open

our eyes, and give us his Holy Spirit-whose job it is to testify to Jesus and enlighten the understanding of the Church (“and their eyes were opened,” Luke 24:31). We hear also echos of Philip and the Ethiopian’s questions: “Do you understand what you are reading?” He replied, “How can I unless someone guides me?” (Acts 8:30-31). “Everything written about me in the law of Moses and the prophets and the psalms must be fulfilled” (Luke 24:44). While Joseph and Mary had not arrived at that stage of understanding (yet), isn’t that why St. Paul encourages us to “Let the word of Christ dwell in you richly; teach and admonish one another in all wisdom, and with gratitude in your hearts sing psalms, and spiritual songs to God” (Colossians 3:16)? So that we might understand and believe? Or is it what St. Augustine said? “Understanding is the reward of faith. Therefore seek not to understand that you may believe, but believe that you may understand.” Is that why Luther said: “I believe that I cannot by my own reason or strength believe”? Lord I believe! Help my unbelief!

Step 6: Final Prognosis (External Solution) : Churchly (Divine) Family Response-ability

Able to respond! Response-ability. How does that happen?” “She kept all these things and pondered them in her heart” (King James, Luke 2:19; in the NRSV, “treasured”). I like the “pondering,” brooding over, like a hen broods over her eggs and finally warms them into a chick’s overture in the breaking of the shell that had so long hidden the “understanding.” The Spirit, like the mother hen, broods over her chicks. While Jesus returned “obedient” to his parents, might we also be “obedient” to him and our “divine parent” and dwell in his connection to the Father and the Father’s business? It would be easier to tell people what to do, with biblical exhortations, “honor your parents,” “focus on the ‘Holy Family.’” But we have been called to tell what God is doing with us and for us in Jesus. What does

it mean that “He increased in wisdom and stature, and in divine and human favor”? As Fred Danker says, “Stature is of God’s making and favor is gifted to those who humble themselves before God,” and who in turn are exalted as children of God “with wisdom which knows and loves God and does His will.” The Father’s business is “soteriology” (salvation through Jesus Christ).

A challenge: Why is it that our witness seems to lose human (and maybe divine) favor in today’s world? Is it because of culture wars, Biblical interpretation re homosexuality, controversy, feminism, pro and con abortion issues, same sex commitments and worship wars? What might we need to enjoy “divine and human favor?” Why are we “losing” and “declining?” Have we lost it? Are we anxious like Jesus’ parents because of uninformed, prejudicial, “don’t understand,” and/or legalistic attachments (under the Law) to Scripture quotations rather than “family response-ability” to the Father of our Lord who would have none be “lost?” What will you do and be as “son and daughter of the Father in his house and business?