

The Boy Jesus

SCOTT HOEZEE

People who end up getting married often do not meet until they are well into their 20s or 30s. Inevitably then, a big part of dating and getting to know each other involves answering questions along the lines of: Tell me about when you were little. What were your growing-up years like? When you love someone, you are interested in him or her, and so you want to know more and more about the person, including what happened during all those years before you met. Well, sometimes as Christians, we feel that way about Jesus. In the Bible, we do not really get to know Jesus until he is nearly 30 years old, and so sometimes we wish we knew more about his boyhood years. The Bible only gives us one tiny, little glimpse into that time in Jesus' life; and today on *Groundwork*, we will dig into the very end of Luke 2 to ponder that lone story of the boy, Jesus.

DAVE BAST

From Words of Hope and ReFrame Media, this is *Groundwork*, where we dig into scripture to lay the foundation for our lives. I am Dave Bast.

SCOTT HOEZEE

And I am Scott Hoezee, and today, Dave, we are wrapping up our series, which has stayed right within Luke 1 and 2; and this series has been moved along by the four songs that you can find in Luke 1 and 2; songs by Mary, Zachariah, the angels, and Simeon. We have run out of songs now, but we have not run out of Luke 2. These are sprawling, long chapters. Luke 2 is the famous one that begins with the birth in Bethlehem, but then it continues on to the shepherds and Jesus' presentation in the Temple; but now, there is this little tacked on coda of a story that is going to talk about the only story we have in the whole Bible from the time between Jesus' presentation in the Temple at day 40 of his life, and his showing up at the Jordan to be baptized by John the Baptist. The only story we have.

DAVE BAST

Right. It is a reminder that the Gospels are not biographies. You know, a good biography is going to start with the birth of the individual; maybe even before that, something about family antecedents, and then take us right on through all that happened in the formative years. We would love to know about that with respect to Jesus, but it is just not there. As has famously been said, the Gospels are really about the Passion story with an extended introduction.

SCOTT HOEZEE

A long introduction, yes.

DAVE BAST

So, yes, just skipping over those so-called silent years – the first 30 years of Jesus' life – and a few little birth stories, as we pointed out in this series, and then this one incident from the end of Luke 2; but that has not stopped the Church, as you know, or people on the fringes of the Church, from trying to fill in the blank spots on the canvas of Jesus' life.

SCOTT HOEZEE

Yes, that is right. The Bible contains just this one story that we will be reading in the next segment from the end of Luke 2; but the early Church felt that hankering to want to know more; and so there were other

accounts written. There were more gospels that were circulating in the first couple of centuries other than just Matthew, Mark, Luke and John. One of which was something called the *Infancy Gospel of Thomas*. There is also a Gospel of Thomas, but this is a different, shorter book called the *Infancy Gospel of Thomas*, and someone put this together to try to satisfy people's curiosity about: What was Jesus like when he was growing up? What was he like as a little kid or as a teenager? So, this particular gospel – this supposed gospel – contains a number of rather fanciful stories of the divine boy, Jesus.

DAVE BAST

Yes, and a number – not only fanciful, but some of them are downright sinister. So, you have stories about Jesus doing playful things like one famous one is: He made some birds out of clay and then gave them life and they fluttered off; but others of them are: Some kid he did not like, he zaps him or puts somebody to death or something like that.

SCOTT HOEZEE

These are not stories that fit in with the Gospels at all, and the early Church recognized that. The early Church was aware of these stories, but rejected them, for good reason.

DAVE BAST

You know, one of the things that people sometimes will say today is: Oh, look; there were many gospels floating around the ancient world, and the Church censored them, and we just have their official story of what it was. Even some scholars will take this line. The truth is, it is pretty clear and pretty plain to see which of the Gospels were inspired by the Holy Spirit and which were the products of imagination, or even maybe other kinds of world views. There was a whole school of thought in the early centuries called *Gnosticism*, and they went in for these kinds of ridiculous, miraculous kinds of spiritual things. I do not think as Christians we need to be shaken by the fact that we have the authentic Gospels in our Bible; in our New Testament.

SCOTT HOEZEE

Well, it is an Article of Faith. We cannot prove it, that is true; so our critics and cynics who say you cannot prove this stuff; well, that it true. That is why we call it faith; but really, we have reasons for faith because the Holy Spirit lives in us; but that is one thing we sometimes forget. I think almost everybody in the Church – most Christian people – know and believe that the Holy Spirit inspired the writers to get the right words down, but what we sometimes forget is that the Holy Spirit would not have gone through all that trouble and then just sort of left the Church to choose on its own what books were authentic and not. We have to believe that when the early Church was making decisions on what was, as they say, *canonical* – what lived up to the measure of faith, and therefore would be included in the scripture of the Church – we have to believe the Holy Spirit helped them get it right.

DAVE BAST

Exactly.

SCOTT HOEZEE

The same Spirit who inspired the words inspired and moved the Church to make the right calls; and in terms of these infancy stories and these boyhood stories, the early Church recognized this is not the Gospel. The Gospel writers were very up front; nobody more so than John at the end of his Gospel saying: All of us have made selections of the stories of Jesus; and why have we done it? So you would believe. So you would come to faith. And apparently the early Church knew you do not need these silly stories about clay pigeons becoming real birds to come to faith. They just do not measure up.

DAVE BAST

If you want to know what Jesus was doing during those early years, and his teen years, for that matter, Luke tells us; he just does not fill in the details; but there are two verses here toward the end of Luke Chapter 2, verse 40:

And the child grew and became strong. he was filled with wisdom and the grace of God was on him. And then verse 52, the very last verse in Chapter 2:

As Jesus grew up, he increased in wisdom and favor with God and people. That is what he was doing; he was growing up.

SCOTT HOEZEE

He was growing up.

DAVE BAST

He was growing up; he was learning; he was increasing in wisdom and in favor, and we can get how that happened; and in fact, in just a moment as we move forward through this story, we are going to see that the one story that Luke does include that is canonical is very much a story about growing in wisdom. We will look at that next.

Segment 2

SCOTT HOEZEE

I am Scott Hoezee, along with Dave Bast, and you are listening to *Groundwork*, where today we are digging into the final story in Luke Chapter 2. It kind of rounds out Luke's very extended pre-birth and birth narrative of Jesus. Let's just go right to the story and read this from Luke 2 starting at verse 41:

Every year, Jesus' parents went to Jerusalem for the festival of the Passover. ⁴²When Jesus was twelve years old, they went up to the festival according to the custom. ⁴³After the festival was over, while his parents were returning home, the boy, Jesus stayed behind in Jerusalem, but they were unaware of it. ⁴⁴Thinking he was in their company, they traveled on for a day, then they began looking for him among their relatives and friends. ⁴⁵And when they did not find him, they went back to Jerusalem to look for him. ⁴⁶After three days, they found him in the Temple courts, sitting among the teachers, listening to them and asking them questions. ⁴⁷Everyone who heard him was amazed at his understanding and his answers. ⁴⁸When his parents saw him, they were astonished. His mother said to him, "Son, why have you treated us like this? Your father and I have been anxiously searching for you." ⁴⁹"Why were you searching for me," he asked. "Did you not know I had to be in my Father's house?" ⁵⁰But, they did not understand what he was saying to them. So, there is the story; not very long, but...

DAVE BAST

Jesus in the Temple.

SCOTT HOEZEE

Jesus among the doctors.

DAVE BAST

Christ among the doctors, yes; right.

SCOTT HOEZEE

It is a short story, but Luke packs it full of drama.

DAVE BAST

Boy, what parent cannot identify with Joseph and Mary in this story? Every time I read it I think of the day when we took our kids to Great America – this big amusement park north of Chicago. Our daughter, Jane, was maybe 6 or 7 years old – something like that – and wandered away and we misplaced her for a couple of hours in that great crowd. Oh, my goodness! Panic!

SCOTT HOEZEE

If you have lost track of your kid, like you just said, Dave, or I lost track of my daughter for all of five minutes in the mall once, and panic rises in your throat. It is like a floodtide coming up from your feet, and it gets all the way into your throat, and you can hardly breathe. You are panic stricken. This went on for Mary

and Joseph for three days. I cannot imagine and I do not ever want to know how it feels for that to go on for that long. Of course, there are people who lose children for far longer, and sometimes they are never found, and there is no greater, I think, suffering for parents than to lose and never find back. This went on for three days, but before we get to that maybe we should just notice – we said in the earlier segment, Dave, that this is the only story that made the cut. There were lots of boyhood stories that floated in the early Church in the early centuries, which were all rejected as inauthentic by the Church except this one. Luke put this one in, and it does breathe of a different Spirit because it is saturated with the tradition of the Church; once again, where do we start? Passover.

DAVE BAST

Yes; maybe it is good to point out a little bit of the background here. Joseph and Mary, as we noted in last week's program, were extremely devout. They were pious Jews. For them, worship at the Temple meant the three great festivals of the year when they would travel; and it was no small feat to do that. They lived in Galilee; it was about 80 or 90 miles from Jerusalem. They made the journey on foot.

SCOTT HOEZEE

Yes; a long walk.

DAVE BAST

A longer walk, even, than normal because they would normally detour. The pilgrims would detour to the east bank of the Jordan to avoid going through Samaria, which was sort of enemy territory. So, they are four or five days on the road to get to Jerusalem, and then as they come, they are coming from the east, they are going up the Jericho road, climbing into the hills where Jerusalem sits, and they would have been singing the pilgrims' songs...

SCOTT HOEZEE

Yes, songs of assent.

DAVE BAST

Yes, in the Bible; in the Psalms. What a great event that must have been, and this was probably Jesus' first Passover because he is just old enough now to be *bar mitzvah*, a Son of the Covenant.

SCOTT HOEZEE

Yes, 12; so, he went along and they did all the normal things and then they went home. So, Jesus is 12. He is coming of age now, and he is at an age where – you know, you are a kid; you probably would rather hang around with your friends and cousins than with Mom and Dad – and so, when everything was finished with the Passover, they headed home, and there was a pack of kids running around and all the parents out in front; and Mary and Joseph just assumed that Jesus was with the pack of other kids, and he was not.

It reminds me, actually, a little bit of a Garrison Keillor story from *Prairie Home Companion* on the radio, where he talks about Mildred and Melvin from Lake Wobegon, and they are going to travel from Minnesota to Mount Rushmore. They stop to get gas and Mildred goes to the restroom; Melvin pumps the gas into the car, pays for the gas, he gets into the car and he is five miles down the road before he realizes Mildred...

DAVE BAST

Mildred is not there.

SCOTT HOEZEE

Mildred is not in the car. Garrison Keillor's question was: Who knows how these things happen?

DAVE BAST

Yes, right.

SCOTT HOEZEE

Well, who knows how it happens that they could travel the whole day just assuming Jesus was there, and he wasn't.

DAVE BAST

So, they did not find out until it came time to camp for the night, which meant that even if they started out right away and walked through the night,

SCOTT HOEZEE

Which is dangerous...

DAVE BAST

Hard to do, after walking all day – there are probably two days taken up before they even begin the search in Jerusalem, and then it takes them all of a day, maybe a little more, to finally discover him; and when they come upon him, he has this rather incredible reaction. Their reaction we get; it would be the way you or I would react. What is the matter with you? And he says to them: What is the big deal? Didn't you know what I must be about? I must be about my Father's business, he says.

SCOTT HOEZEE

Yes, and it was such a – the way Luke reports it, anyway – it was such a confident answer; an answer that was just incredulous as to why they would be upset. In purely human terms, it is the kind of answer from your child that would drive you a little nuts as a parent. You are sitting there in panic; you are practically in tears, and the kid says: What is the big deal? From a purely human perspective, that had to be a little bit of a maddening answer to Mary; but, it also was a remarkable answer, because there he was and he had been there and he had been well taken care; well fed, apparently; but talking theology with the scholars and theologians of his day, and that, he said, was what they should have expected him to do. I have always thought: Didn't you know I should be in my Father's house doing my Father's business? They probably thought: Your father's house is Joseph's and the business is sweeping out the carpentry shop.

DAVE BAST

Yes, right; exactly. Isn't your father's business carpentry? Why weren't you thinking about that? But, no; this is Father with a capital F, and Jesus, as a 12-year-old, has a remarkably precocious sense of his spiritual life, his calling as a servant of God – as *the* Servant of God, really – and you really would love to know – if only we could have been a little bug on the wall in the Temple – or at least in the courtyards, wherever he was sitting – to know what those conversations involved. What were they about, really?

SCOTT HOEZEE

We will think about that in a minute, but it is interesting, the Church has – from time immemorial, really – we have struggled with figuring out how to put together the two natures of Christ, as we call it – divine and human. The early – Chalcedon and some of the earliest Church councils and creeds established, Jesus had to be one hundred percent divine and one hundred percent human – they did not mix; He was not a third something; He was one hundred percent both – and the Church all along has struggled with how to put that together; but you know who was on the front lines of that for the very first time? Mary and Joseph. They knew all of the promises. Mary could remember the Archangel Gabriel's words. They could remember the shepherds. They could remember what Elizabeth said. They could remember what Simeon said in the Temple. They knew all of the divine things of Jesus, but he was such a human boy, too; so, they were on the front lines of figuring out how to put this together; from a human perspective, they had lost their kid, and it was maddening and terrifying; but from a divine perspective, Jesus said: This is where I belong, in the Temple.

DAVE BAST

You know, I think it is really important to make this point, and we can connect it to what we were saying in the first segment about the phony – the bogus stories about Jesus' childhood. Any idea of Jesus that sees him

as only pretending to be human – that he is like Superman – underneath the costume of his humanity is the man of steel, the divine – that is out of bounds because we know that whatever else he was, he was an authentic, thoroughly, completely human person, and we see that as he is sitting under the teaching of the Word. Think of what a thrill it must have been for him; as a boy, he has maybe at best had a village rabbi in Nazareth, and now he has the top theological faculty of all Israel gathering in the Temple, and he can wrestle with scripture under their tutelage, and ask them questions, and listen. So, let's talk about those questions in just a moment when we come back.

Segment 3

SCOTT HOEZEE

You are listening to *Groundwork*, where we are digging into scripture to lay the foundation for our lives. I am Scott Hoezee.

DAVE BAST

And I am Dave Bast. We just raised the question, Scott: What was Jesus talking about with those teachers, the scribes and the doctors of the Law, in the Temple?

SCOTT HOEZEE

Luke does not record a single word of the conversation, but it certainly is tantalizing to wonder.

DAVE BAST

And you know, it is pretty astonishing, too, as we picture that scene: A 12-year-old kid who has literally just presumably made his bar mitzvah; he has just become a Son of the Covenant; a B'nai B'rith – and he is now almost going toe-to-toe on equal footing, it sounds like. It makes me think of a line of John Dunn, actually: The Word but lately could not speak; and lo, it suddenly speaks wonders. Here just a few years before he could not even talk, and now he is engaged with these teachers.

SCOTT HOEZEE

And although we are told – Luke said the teachers were astonished at his answers, I think it is very interesting, and maybe even instructive for us to note the posture of Jesus here, because really, the main way that Luke depicts what Jesus had been doing – Luke tells us he had been listening to them and asking them good questions. Listening and asking. In other words, the boy, Jesus, was not trying to assert himself or be uppity or be superior to these people. He was very humble – just listening...

DAVE BAST

Yes; and ask first, right.

SCOTT HOEZEE

Yes, you listen first, slow to speak... you listen...

DAVE BAST

And then answering, yes.

SCOTT HOEZEE

And then asking good questions. Not to do a moralism here and try to reduce this whole story down to some little morality tale, but there is something to that; especially in this day and age where people fire off their opinions so readily and shouting matches pass for conversation, sometimes even in the church we are quick to speak and to broadcast our opinions, but slow to listen, and even slower to ask genuine questions, here is Jesus, the Son of God in the flesh, being willing to listen and to ask good questions; and I think there is just that posture – the way Jesus behaved is probably instructive for all of us.

DAVE BAST

Well, and again, I think it is important – the key thing to see here is the real humanity of Christ. He is not a grown-up in a little boy's body, just playing make believe at being 12 years old. We have talked in this program quite a bit about the fanciful traditions and the phony stories...

SCOTT HOEZEE

Magic stories...

DAVE BAST

There is also a tradition that what he was talking about, he was lecturing them, and some of the early sources even say he lectured them on not only theology, but astronomy and physics and philosophy and all the rest.

SCOTT HOEZEE

Nuclear medicine, who knows.

DAVE BAST

But there is nothing here in the authentic story that Luke tells; rather, it is a give and take, a conversation, and sure, he was precocious; he was sort of like LeBron James or something on the basketball court – amazing as a teenager...

SCOTT HOEZEE

Or the teenager, Bobby Fischer, winning all the chess matches.

DAVE BAST

But, you think too, he must have really been asking genuine questions. It was not as though we should imagine that Jesus already knew all the answers; in that you opened up the whole question of how much did he know as a human, as truly human? Now, there we are speculating, and that ultimately proves fruitless, but I do not think we should believe that Jesus somehow already knew it all and that his questions were fake.

SCOTT HOEZEE

One of the big questions of the incarnation of Jesus, the Son of God becoming flesh, involves all of these things. Jesus did give up – you know, the great hymn from Philippians 2, that he gave up equality with God for the time being in order to become genuinely human; so, he gave up some things that you would normally associate with divinity; and maybe that meant he could genuinely learn; he could genuinely be startled; he did not have to fake it when he was in school when he was learning math and so forth; so, how it all interacted, again, we are into a realm of profound mystery there; but we have to believe that Jesus was not being false when he asked questions, and when he appeared to learn, I think we have to say as a human being, he did learn, and how that all intersected with the divine nature, I do not have a clue; but one thing that is interesting here is that he did ask questions, and it will not be the last time that Jesus will ask good questions that will shake people up, because that is what a good question does. It makes you move beyond the pat answers, beyond the little memorized catechisms or creeds, important though they can be; Jesus wanted to always, always push people to something deeper, and to make sure that he would never leave things at the level of: Well, we have never done it that way before. We have always done it this way. We have always thought this. We have always thought that you cannot talk to Samaritans. We have always thought you cannot go near poor people. We have always thought you could not let them into the Temple. Jesus' later career will show that he, again and again through his words and actions said: Really, are you sure? And I think it started right here.

DAVE BAST

The other thing I think we can be pretty clear on is that it has to do with the Father's business – he himself provides that little clue – and you ask: Well then, what is the Father's business that he must be about? And the answer is: Salvation. So clearly, at the heart of all of this, what is going on here is a wrestling with God's

purpose for the world; his Covenant; his promises; his light for the nations; and all of this is on Jesus' mind and heart, even as a 12-year-old. He is going to get an early start on fulfilling that family business.

SCOTT HOEZEE

And as the capper to Luke 2 here, in the whole story of Jesus' birth, Luke is saying to us: The Father's business in salvation is always going to be surprising, so be willing and ready to be surprised.

Well, thanks for joining our *Groundwork* conversation. I am Scott Hoezee, along with Dave Bast, and we would like to know how we can help you continue digging deeper into scripture. So, visit groundworkonline.com and tell us topics or passages you would like to hear about next on *Groundwork*.

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