

May 15, 2022

THE SELF-DISCLOSURE OF THE SON OF GOD

Luke 2:41-52

(7 of 13 in a series through Luke 1-7)

At this point in Luke's gospel, a question may already be rising up in your minds. That question is, "But what did Jesus say about himself?" In other words, so far Luke has piled testimony after testimony showing us that Jesus isn't simply an ordinary man. He's the God-man. He's the Messiah. He's God the Son. We've heard it from seemingly everyone. In the opening scene of the gospel, the angel Gabriel announced that just as the prophets foretold that Elijah would come before the arrival of the Lord, so John will be born of Zechariah and Elizabeth before the arrival of Jesus, thus confirming that he is the Lord himself. Then that same angel, Gabriel, told Mary that though she was a virgin, she would conceive by the power of the Holy Spirit a child who will be called "the Son of the Most High" (1:32). Next, as Elizabeth encounters Mary—who is now pregnant—she rightly calls her, "The mother of my Lord" (1:43). Then, when John is born, his father Zechariah declares that Jesus is the promised son of David who would come and redeem God's people (1:67-70). At Jesus' birth, an angel shows us to announce to some shepherds, "Unto you is born this day in the city of David a Savior, who is Christ the Lord" (2:11). And, finally, when Jesus was presented at the temple, a man named Simeon—whom the Lord promised would live until he saw God's promised savior come to his people—saw Jesus, took him in his arms, and declared that now his eyes had seen God's salvation, noting that Jesus would come to save Jews and Gentiles who would believe in him (2:29-32), and a prophetess named Anna came at that very moment, saw what was being said and thanked God with him for providing Jesus. As I mentioned two weeks ago, Luke is piling up the testimony so that the reader might know for certain that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of the living God.

In fact, I think that's what these two opening chapters in Luke's gospel are about. They're known as the infancy narratives because in these two chapters Luke mainly focuses on Jesus as an infant—covering his conception, birth, circumcision, and presentation at the temple in a way that no other gospel writer does. But it's clear that Luke has an aim greater than simply showing us that some amazing events took place before, during, and after Jesus' birth. His aim is to show us for certain who Jesus is. And he uses all kinds of individuals to bear witness that Jesus is the Christ, piling them up one after another. And, yet, as I've mentioned, you may be wondering—even after all of that testimony—but what does Jesus say? That is, did Jesus see himself as the Savior, the Son of God, the Messiah, and the one who would reign over heaven and earth as God's forever king? I think that's what our text this morning is about because for the first time in these first two chapters, Jesus himself speaks, and he tells us who he is.

Now, if the gospel of Luke were a movie, after the testimony of Simeon at the temple when Jesus was only a few days old, the screen would turn black, and white lettering would pop up, reading, "Twelve years later."¹ The reason that Luke needs this gap of time is obvious. If indeed

his aim is to provide Jesus' own testimony about who he is, then he can't do that when Jesus is only a few days old because although Jesus is the God-man, he developed as a human the same way that all humans do. Therefore, Jesus wasn't speaking in full sentences when he was a month old or anything. And so Luke fast-forwards the narrative to a time in Jesus' life when he could speak and hold a mature understanding of who he is, as he gives us a glimpse into Jesus' life when he was twelve-years-old. But the age of twelve isn't a coincidence, either. In Jewish tradition, when a boy reached age twelve, he was considered to have arrived at an "age of discernment," where he was understood to be able to discern in a mature way in his decision-making. Then, at age thirteen, he would be held responsible for keeping the law of God in a way that he wasn't before, since he'd entered this stage of manhood.² Therefore, Luke picks this pivotal year in Jesus' life when he is seen as having matured to a point of discernment and was ready to begin his life as a man. And he takes one moment during this year to reveal Jesus' confession that he knows who he is.

Now, my guess is that Luke has gathered much of this material from sitting down and talking to Mary herself. After all, there are some details he has that only Mary would know that the other gospel writers don't include. And I'd bet that this section came from her testimony as well. You can imagine Luke sitting down with Mary after gathering testimony after testimony about who Jesus is and finally asking, "But when was the first time it became clear to you that Jesus knew he wasn't simply another boy?" And she would begin, "Well, it was this time when Joseph and I took the family to Jerusalem for the Passover Feast. Jesus was twelve-years-old, and . . ." And that's where our story begins as we look this morning at Luke 2:41-52.

Luke tells us that Mary and Joseph went up to Jerusalem at the Feast of Passover every year, and so the year when Jesus was twelve was no exception. However, this trip stood out—not because of what happened when they got there, but for what happened when they left. After they left, the family headed back to Jerusalem in a caravan of people. And with a group like this, the children could be anywhere in the group. Therefore, either parent might assume the child was walking alongside the other (or even another family member or close friend in the caravan). And that's exactly what Joseph and Mary did with regard to Jesus. They assumed he was with someone else in the group and made it a full day's journey before realizing that Jesus wasn't with them. Therefore, after confirming he wasn't with them, they headed back to Jerusalem.

Thankfully, Luke tells us that after three days they found him in the temple. By three days, he probably is counting in terms of the one day's travel away from Jerusalem as day one, the travel day back as day two, and the arrival in Jerusalem as the third day. In other words, they found him on the day that they got to Jerusalem, though he'd been gone from them for three days.

¹ Darrell Bock, *Luke 1:1-9:50*, Baker Exegetical Commentary on the New Testament (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1994, 259.

² David Garland, *Luke*, Zondervan Exegetical Commentary on the New Testament (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2011), 143.

Now, here is the point at which the story gets real interesting. They find him in the temple, but it's not as if he's simply sitting in the temple, passively observing what's going on. Rather, Luke tells us, "They found him in the temple, sitting among the teachers, listening to them and asking them questions. And all who heard him were amazed at his understanding and his answers" (vv. 46-47). Obviously Jesus was engaged in dialogue with those teaching at the temple, demonstrating a strong grasp of the Scriptures. Luke notes that even his parents "were astonished" (v. 48).

But Mary's astonishment is soon replaced by the concern and distress she's felt over the three days as she says to Jesus, "Son, why have you treated us so? Behold, your father and I have been searching for you in great distress" (v. 48). And, surprisingly, Jesus answers, "Why were you looking for me? Did you not know that I must be in my Father's house?" (v. 49).

The answer from Joseph and Mary (had they audibly answered) would have been, "No, we did not know that." After all, Luke adds that "They did not understand the saying that he spoke to them" (v. 50). However, Luke also notes, "And his mother treasured up all these things in her heart" (v. 51). In other words, though she didn't grasp the significance of what Jesus was saying at the time, Mary kept thinking about it until eventually she realized what Jesus meant—probably not until well after the resurrection.

But since we have the advantage of being even further down the road of redemptive history than Mary was and have the rest of the Bible to learn from as well, we are in a better place to understand what Jesus was saying about himself in his answer and what we can see about him from Luke's further commentary. And what we see from this text is that Jesus is the unique and obedient Son of God who became fully human. Let's take those elements one at a time. First, Jesus is uniquely the Son of God.

Jesus is uniquely the Son of God

I say *uniquely* the Son of God because I've mentioned that the phrase "son of God" is given throughout the Old Testament to individuals like Adam, Israel, and the Davidic kings, and we'll look at this title more in a few weeks when we get to Jesus' baptism and temptation. But Jesus is claiming something here more than that he belongs to Israel or even that he is the Messiah (though he is not less than that). You see, this language of referring to the temple as "my Father's house" wasn't common language that people used at the time when referencing the temple. In fact, no one had spoken like this. "In the long biblical record, not even Moses who had built the tabernacle, not David who had longed to build the temple, nor Solomon who had actually built it, no prophet, no king, . . . not the most exalted of them had ever referred to the tabernacle or temple as 'my Father's house.' [Jesus] was conscious of a relationship with God that none had conceived of, let alone expressed, before."³ Jesus understood that he was the

³ David Gooding, quoted by Dale Ralph Davis, *Luke 1-13* (Ross-shire: Christian Focus, 2021), 59.

Son of God in a unique way. He's disclosing to his parents in that moment that he knows he has a unique relationship to God as his Son—a relationship that no one else had.

And this would be something that Jesus continued to say about himself in his adult years, once noting to some unbelieving Jews, "My Father is working until now, and I am working" (John 5:17). And when he said that, they rightly heard it was a big claim. In fact, John adds, "This was why the Jews were seeking all the more to kill him, because not only was he breaking the Sabbath, but he was even calling God his own Father, making himself equal with God" (John 5:18). Jesus' claim that he has this unique relationship with God as his Son is so grand that if he were not himself God the Son, it would be sinful to say.

And perhaps even more strongly, Jesus would go on to say in Matthew 11:27, "All things have been handed over to me by my Father, and no one knows the Son except the Father, and no one knows the Father except the Son and anyone to whom the Son chooses to reveal him." When we say that Jesus is the unique Son of God, what we mean is that he is the only one who truly and fully knows the Father. Moreover, no one gets to know God as our Father unless the Son chooses to reveal the Father to us. Jesus alone is the one who reveals God so that anyone might know him. This is what Jesus is saying even as a twelve-year-old boy. He is uniquely God's Son, and God is his Father in a way that he is no one else's. Jesus is the *eternal* Son of God, and he is God the Son.

Now, what's crucial for us to recognize here is that as believers, we're not making grand claims about who Jesus is because we just want these things to be true about him. We're acknowledging that in an unmistakable way, he claimed these things about himself. Even at twelve, he'd already gained an understanding of who he was (and is)—the unique Son of God. But Luke gives us more in this text concerning Jesus' identity as well. We also see that Jesus is the obedient Son.

Jesus is the obedient Son

We see Jesus' obedience to his Father in two ways in this text. First, we see it in his statement about being in the temple. Jesus says to his mother, "Did you not know that I must be in my Father's house?" (v. 49). Note the "must" in that statement. Jesus is saying that it is a necessity for him to be in the temple at that moment because that is what obedience to his Father demands. Now, it wasn't what his mother had anticipated or wanted. That's why she informs Jesus that from her perspective he'd treated them poorly, since they'd been searching for him in great distress. But she begins to recognize in that moment that Jesus will obey God, his Father, even if it brings pain to Mary. After all, remember Simeon's words that "a sword will pierce through your own soul also" (v. 35), meaning that Jesus' obedience will be painful for Mary to witness, even as she was getting the first taste of it now. The height of this pain would be felt when Jesus went to the cross, which Paul speaks of in terms of Jesus' obedience, writing that Jesus was "obedient to the point of death, even death on a cross" (Phil 2:8). Jesus laying down his life was an act of obedience to his Father for our salvation.

But the necessity of obeying his Father by being in the temple isn't the only place we see a note concerning Jesus' obedience in this text. We also see it in verse 51. Luke writes, "And he went down with them and came to Nazareth and was submissive to them." It's as if Luke knows that you could read the earlier exchange with Mary and think that Jesus could have been a rebellious child, so he wants to make clear that he wasn't. Yes, he obeys God his Father in everything his Father requires him to do, even if that causes pain for his parents—like needing to be in the temple or going to the cross. But he submits to his parents in everything they tell him to do as long as it doesn't violate his Father's commands. He is obedient.

Jesus' obedience is something that we can often overlook. We rightly celebrate his penalty-bearing death and justifying resurrection as his work to save us. But it's equally as crucial that he is the sinless, obedient Son of God. It's not just that we need Jesus to die on the cross so that our sins are paid for, nor simply rise from the dead so that death is not the last word for us; we need Jesus to be perfectly obedient in his earthly life. And the reason why is because God requires perfect obedience, and none of us can obey perfectly. We sinfully corrupt, even from birth. But Jesus obeys perfectly, and when we place our faith in him, God credits his perfect obedience to us so that we'll stand before God clothed in the perfect righteousness of Christ. Again, remember what we saw two weeks ago—as we're united with Christ by faith, what is true of him becomes true of us. Therefore, this note of Jesus' obedience is a note to remind us that he did everything necessary for our salvation. He is the obedient Son. And, finally, we are reminded that Jesus was (and is) fully human.

Jesus was (and is) fully human

We might think that the church struggled to recognize that Jesus was fully God. And indeed there were some false teachers who denied this reality in the early days of the church. Arius, for example, was a heretic who denied that the Son was fully God, claiming that he was simply a created being instead of the eternal, uncreated Son of God. But the earliest heresy concerning the Son seemed to be a denial that Jesus was fully human. Some were teaching that Jesus merely *seemed* human or simply *appeared* human but that he wasn't *really* human. This is why John writes in 1 John 4:2-3, "By this you know the Spirit of God: every spirit that confesses that Jesus Christ has come in the flesh is from God, and every spirit that does not confess Jesus is not from God." Clearly, in order to be a believer, you must acknowledge that Jesus is fully human.

Look at how Luke shows us this reality. At the end of our text, in verse 52, Luke writes, "And Jesus increased in wisdom and in stature and in favor with God and man." Now, sometimes a text like this can leave us confused because we think, "Isn't Jesus God and isn't he perfect? And if he is, how can he increase in wisdom?" And the answer is that God Jesus is indeed God the Son, he is also fully human. In other words, everything that it means to be a human is true of him. He had a human mind like we have so that in his human mind he only knew what the Father revealed to him. It's why at times he knows something supernaturally (like the precise thoughts of men's hearts) but at other times could say that he doesn't know something (like the time of the resurrection). He's speaking of his human mind. He also had a human will and soul so that he could have a sinless fear of death and dread of the cross, like we see in the garden.

He was just as we are, yet without sin. So, yes, he's perfect, but he still had to mature as a man, like any human does. Just as he wasn't born as a fully mature man, so his mind and will aren't fully matured at age twelve. So he continued to grow and develop. He increased in wisdom and in stature, and the grace of God was on him so that others saw that in him.

Throughout these two chapters Luke has continually shown Jesus to be superior to John the Baptist. Putting the narratives of their conceptions and births beside one another, you can see that Luke wants us to recognize Jesus' superiority to John. However, note the similarity of language here. After John's birth, Luke wrote, "And the child grew and became strong in spirit" (Luke 1:80), similar to what we see here. Luke's telling us that Jesus is fully human.

Now, when we say "fully" human we mean two things. First, we mean that he has everything it means to be human, as we've noted—a body, soul, mind, will. But, second, we also say "fully" in contrast to "merely." That is, Jesus was *fully* human, but he wasn't *merely* human. The divine Son of God took on a fully human nature, yet he also had a fully divine nature. In his divine nature, he is omnipotent, omnipresent, and omniscient, for example. And in his human nature, he can learn, grow, and increase in wisdom (as Luke notes here). This is why we say Jesus is the God-man.

And in the history of the church, it has been noted that Jesus became fully man because if he did not become fully human he could not save humans. To save our bodies, souls, minds, and wills, he had to have a body, soul, mind, and will. He had to be one of us, and he was. In fact, he still is. Yes, his human nature was glorified after the resurrection, but he is still the *God-man*, reigning over all at the Father's right hand. He is our high priest who can sympathize with us in our weakness because he knows what it's like to live as a human in this world.

One of the things the unbelieving world will claim is that we declare Jesus to be someone he wasn't. But the reality is that we're only recognizing what he claimed for himself. He is the unique and perfectly obedient Son of God who took on flesh so that he might save us. And he is our reigning king, waiting for the day when he will come and gather us to himself. May that day come quickly. And until then, let us remember who he is and what he has done for us as we come to the table. Amen.