

The Boy Jesus Manifests His Deity

Luke 2:41-52

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⁴¹Every year his parents traveled to Jerusalem for the Passover Festival. ⁴²When he was twelve years old, they went up according to the custom of the Festival. ⁴³When the days had ended, as they were returning, the boy Jesus stayed behind in Jerusalem. His parents did not know it. ⁴⁴Since they thought he was in their group, they went a day's journey. Then they began to look for him among their relatives and friends. ⁴⁵When they did not find him, they returned to Jerusalem, searching for him.

⁴⁶After three days they found him in the temple courts, 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. His mother said to him, "Son, why have you treated us this way? See, your father and I have been anxiously looking for you."

⁴⁹He said to them, "Why were you looking for me? Did you not know that I must be taking care of my Father's business?" ⁵⁰They did not understand what he was telling them.

⁵¹He went down with them and came to Nazareth. He was always obedient to them. And his mother treasured up all these things in her heart. ⁵²Jesus grew in wisdom and stature, and in favor with God and with people.

Dear students of Scripture,

If we are reading Luke's Gospel as both he and the Holy Spirit wish us to, then from this text we would develop a sense of respect for this amazing child. Since his conception Jesus has been only gradually revealing himself. He was revealed to Mary, then to Elizabeth and the unborn John. He was shortly thereafter partially revealed to Joseph, and fully at his birth, when he was also revealed to some "shepherds out in the field, keeping watch over their flock by night" (Luke 2:8, ESV). Between two months

and two years later he was revealed to some Gentile magi from the east. Here he reveals himself while still a boy right in the center of Judaism's religious capital. Before he enters fully into his public ministry, which occurs at his Baptism, we are invited to pause at this account and contemplate who Jesus is and the mission he is to perform. The crux, therefore, of our understanding comes from Jesus' words, "Why were you looking for me? Did you not know that I must be taking care of my Father's business?" In these questions, **the boy Jesus manifests his deity** in two areas: **I. in wisdom**, and **I. in duty**.

I. In Wisdom

In our Introit today we heard this sentence: "I saw the Lord sitting on a throne, high and lifted up."¹ This comes from Isaiah's prophecies, chapter 6, when he saw a mighty and glorious vision:

I saw the Lord sitting upon a throne, high and lifted up; and the train of his robe filled the temple. Above him stood the seraphim. Each had six wings: with two he covered his face, and with two he covered his feet, and with two he flew. And one called to another and said:

'Holy, holy, holy is the LORD of hosts;
the whole earth is full of his glory!'

And the foundations of the thresholds shook at the voice of him who called, and the house was filled with smoke. (Is. 6:1-4, ESV)

The early Christians who started the practice we have of including certain readings each week and certain Introits and Psalms and Graduals noticed a parallel. Just as Isaiah

¹ *Evangelical Lutheran Hymnary* (Mankato, MN: Evangelical Lutheran Synod, 1996), 142.

was able to *see* God in the temple in his vision, so Luke's readers are able to *see* God in the flesh sitting in the temple. Just as the divine and almighty God was surrounded by the mighty seraphim, his messengers and servants, so the boy Jesus was surrounded by the teachers, his human superiors. Just as the Lord was proclaimed "Holy" by his appearance in Isaiah's vision, so the boy Jesus was proclaimed to have "understanding" in his humble appearance in the temple.

What we are to realize from this connection is that the God of glory, the God who terrified Isaiah in his holiness and caused the prophet to cry out, "Woe is me! For I am lost; for I am a man of unclean lips, and I dwell in the midst of a people of unclean lips; for my eyes have seen the King, the LORD of hosts!" (Is. 6:5, ESV), appeared in humble form as a boy, who, rather than being a terror to sinful man before him, was a wonder and a student, *learning* from sinful man.

In the season of Epiphany we celebrate the way our God has *revealed* himself in Christ, or *shined his light* in Christ. The miracle is exactly the difference between God in the temple in Isaiah's vision and the boy Jesus in the temple in Luke's account: God in his glory is deadly to sinners; God in humility, cloaked in Christ, is salvation to sinners.

And yet, even in this humility, the divinity shines out. "After three days they found him in the temple courts, sitting among the teachers, listening to them and asking them questions. And all who heard him were amazed at his understanding and his answers." Jesus demonstrated great understanding in both listening, asking, and answering. And yet this was not the only time he learned, because the account ends: "Jesus grew in wisdom and stature, and in favor with God and with people." Just

think, the divine God, the omnipotent, omnipresent, and *omniscient* God, condescended to become a man – and to live as a man exactly as all men live: from infancy on upward. He had to go to school just like other human beings. He had to discover the workings of the world just as other human beings do. He had to learn something like multiplication tables, his colors, reading, writing, history, science, religion. Jesus had to memorize Scripture passages just like our Catechism students. But because his divinity was united to his humanity, he was able even in this humility to demonstrate great wisdom.

And “Wisdom” is a key concept to understand in the Scriptures. “Wisdom” is often used as another name for the Second Person of the Trinity, much like “Word” at the beginning of John’s Gospel. We sometimes have difficulty seeing this because “Wisdom” is a grammatically feminine word in Hebrew, but, set such reservations aside, and allow me to read from the book of Proverbs. When you hear “Wisdom,” think of it as referring to Jesus, and although it may say “she” and “her,” understand these as genderless:

Wisdom has built her house;
 she has hewn her seven pillars.
 She has slaughtered her beasts; she has mixed her wine;
 she has also set her table.
 She has sent out her young women to call
 from the highest places in the town,
 ‘Whoever is simple, let him turn in here!’
 To him who lacks sense she says,
 ‘Come, eat of my bread
 and drink of the wine I have mixed.
 Leave your simple ways, and live,

and walk in the way of insight.’ (Prov. 9:1-6, ESV)

You can clearly hear Jesus’ voice in the words of “Wisdom,” personified as a woman. Therefore when the boy Jesus demonstrates such extreme wisdom, he demonstrates himself as the same Second Person of the Godhead.

Think of this, too, in our singing of our hymn today, that to “know [Jesus] aright” and to “have risen to wisdom’s great height” means to reach where Wisdom is to be found, that is, where Jesus – a.k.a. the divine Word, the divine Wisdom – has gone before us to prepare a place. Understand that in that verse: “And when, O my Savior, I know Thee aright / I then shall have risen to wisdom’s great height.”² Jesus, the boy who learned as all humans do, who then lived as all men do, who was tempted as all men are, who died as all men will – but all this he did perfectly and in our place – then also rose from the dead and ascended to heaven “that where [he is] you may be also” (John 14:3, ESV), has paved the way of wisdom for us. Now we, gaining true wisdom, “the wisdom from above” which is understanding in Scripture and faith (James 3:17, ESV), are promised to reach that high exalted height from this position of humility, following in the footsteps of that divine Wisdom, Jesus Christ.

II. In Duty

We are called by Jesus to both this wisdom and the duty that he also exemplifies and manifests. We see really four areas of Jesus’ duty in this account:

² J. H. Schroeder, “Eins ist Not: ach, Her dies Eine,” translated by F. P. Daume, *ELH* #182:5.

The very first is the duty of the whole family, as Luke records: “Every year his parents traveled to Jerusalem for the Passover Festival.” They were dutiful Jews, keeping the religious ceremonies as they ought – with even Mary making the pilgrimage, even though only men were required to do so. It is clear that the home made by Mary and Joseph was “a home of religious education, of careful holy teaching, of eager questions and answers. The boy Jesus had been well taught [at home]. Long before He sat in the midst of the [teachers], He must have learned at Mary’s knee.”³

Second, we see Jesus’ duty toward the things of God: “Why were you looking for me? Did you not know that I must be taking care of my Father’s business?” “These first recorded words of Christ have often been compared with his words from the Cross, [also recorded by Luke, ‘Father, into your hands I commit my spirit!’ (Luke 23:46, ESV)]. From birth to death our Lord manifested the Father. This was his own summary of His life, and it could not be more complete.”⁴

Third, Jesus demonstrated a great duty toward his parents. Although he disappeared from their sight, this was not out of disobedience to them, but rather he obeyed each in the appropriate place, and, when he was finished in the temple as a boy, “He went down with them and came to Nazareth,” and “He was always obedient to them.”

Finally, Jesus spent the first thirty years of his life demonstrating his commitment to the duty to prepare for his ministry. He spent his time in that quiet, secluded village

³ Lindemann, *The Sermon and the Propers, Volume I*, 160.

⁴ Ibid.

of Nazareth doing manual labor and studying God's Word, to the end that he "grew in wisdom and stature, and in favor with God and with people."

Now all four of these, and perhaps especially the last, were Jesus' commitment to his duty to *us*. He devoted and dedicated himself to *our need*. He was religiously perfect for us who are imperfect. He was the perfect child for us who are imperfect children. He was the perfect Savior for us who are perfect sinners. Like Mary, therefore, we can learn from Jesus, that divine boy, as his mother "treasured up all these things in her heart." And because Jesus stood in our place, we understand that we "are dear children of a loving, heavenly Father. We are brothers and sisters of the Son of God and co-heirs of the Kingdom"⁵ because Jesus shed his blood and died on the cross to take away the sin that divided us from God, and now he gives us that very body and blood to give us the seal of forgiveness, which is the very work his Father sent him to perform.

"Do this in remembrance of me" (Luke 22:19, ESV), Jesus said at the institution of his Supper. He said, "Do this in remembrance of me," because we need the reminder, because we easily forget our calling, we easily let that wisdom slip through our fingers: so it must be repeatedly, continually given to us, because we cannot maintain it ourselves. Jesus, therefore sustains us. He is continuing in his devotion to his Father's business, the business of saving sinners, and therefore he continues to devote us to his Father's business. The divine God almighty was hidden in a boy in the temple. Just so,

⁵ Ibid., 161-2.

he is hidden in bread and wine on an altar where no sacrifice is offered – because “when Christ had offered for all time a single sacrifice for sins, he sat down at the right hand of God, waiting from that time until his enemies should be made a footstool for his feet. For by a single offering he has perfected for all time those who are being sanctified” (Heb. 10:12-14, ESV). He has sanctified us – our entire lives – and he continues to sanctify us as we continue to come and learn at *his* knee, and to receive the gifts *he* offers, that divine Wisdom whose

holy life gave He, was crucified for me;
His righteousness perfect He now pleads before Thee;
His own robe of righteousness, my highest good,
Shall clothe me in glory, through faith in His blood.⁶

Likewise, this prayer we sing is answered:

In Thine image then awaking,
May my soul be all Thine own;
Of Thy holy life partaking,
Sanctified to Thee alone.
For all that I need here, to serve and obey Thee,
In Thee I receive – and my Savior, I pray Thee:
From things transitory, absorbing my love,
Withdraw mine affections, and fix them above.

Jesus, in Thy cross are centered
All the marvels of Thy grace;
Thou, my Savior, once hast entered
Through Thy blood the holy place:
Thy sacrifice holy there wrought my redemption,
From Satan’s dominion I now have exemption;
The way is now free to the Father’s high throne,
Where I may approach Him, in Thy name alone.⁷

⁶ ELH #182:6.

⁷ Ibid., vv. 7, 8.

That boy, that little boy from Nazareth, that carpenter's son, demonstrated more than valedictorian material: he demonstrated Wisdom with a capital "W." This is because he was God himself in the flesh. He came among us so that "we have seen his glory, glory as of the only Son from the Father, full of grace and truth" (John 1:14, ESV), and so that that grace and truth might be given and entrusted to us, that by his Wisdom and virtues, we are saved.

Amen.

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