

Mary's astonishment

Christ Church: 29th December 2024 10.00 am. & online
Luke 2:41-52 (page 1,028-1,029)

Story of Gerald leaving the twins in their pram.

The passage, verse by verse

This is the only story we have of Jesus' childhood and it only comes in Luke's Gospel – possibly because of the impact on Mary. If you do not pick up the intense emotion of these verses, you cannot have understood what is being described.

- V41 Pious Jewish men were supposed to go to the temple three times a year at Passover, Pentecost and Tabernacles (Ex 23:14-17), but it was normal for most to undertake the journey once a year. It was an 80 mile walk for this party.
- V42 There would have been huge crowds. A Jewish boy became an adult at 13 (much later the ceremony of bar mitzvah = 'son of the law') so Jesus was on the cusp of adulthood.
- V43 The men and older boys in the large party would travel after the women and children so Mary and Joseph might have assumed Jesus was with the other parent. Parental culture then was very different from what we know today.
- V44 *Feel the awful shock* of losing their son. Put yourself in their shoes, knowing something of who their son was
- V45 This must have been a dreadful journey – and a dangerous one on their own.
- V46 Probably on the third day from finding him missing. *Feel the panic.* But where had Jesus slept? Who fed him?
- V47 A sign of future reaction to his teaching. Everyone was '*amazed*', implies 'impressed'.
- V48 But his parents are '*astonished*'. Imagine how this short speech came out! Note from two weeks ago that Mary does the talking, not Joseph. But this hardly flatters her.
- V49 The temple plays a huge role in the early Luke but 'house' is not in the Greek. 'My father' is not the expression others would use and it launched a completely new concept.
- V50 Would any of us have done any better?
- V51 See also v19. 'Submissive' may be a better word.
- V52 This summarises the next 15 or so years. See also v40.

Have we lost the ability to be astonished?

A younger generation than mine over-uses certain words to respond to almost anything. Examples from the past are 'cool', then 'wicked', then 'awesome', and now 'perfect'. We have devalued such terms.

But this passage is full of the unexpected, of emotion, of awe. The trouble is that we have normalised it all through over-familiarity of the story. We have in fact tamed the whole Christmas account into something that is comfortable and which lacks any challenge for us to be shocked.

Yet, in this passage alone the teachers and others were 'amazed', his parents were 'astonished' and the whole story is unexpected. It is, if you like, utterly cool, wicked, awesome and perfect!

We have turned Christmas into something that is commercial (parents spend an average of over £400 on each child), frantic (look at the shops) and over-exuberant (the man spending £540 at the supermarket for two days of celebration).

Yet the Gospel writers give us incredible stories that should amaze and astonish us, like Mary experienced. And so....

A time for contemplation

Perhaps we need to make time this busy Christmas holiday for peace to be alone or in a couple or in a family to open ourselves up to the whole gospel story that is incredible, amazing, astonishing.

For this we need to make time and space. Time without diary pressure with quality more important than length. Space away from distraction, perhaps outdoors.

This could be for meditation, discussion if more than one of you, to a background of 'O little town of Bethlehem' or in silence. Tell the Lord Jesus you need to be astounded once again at the unexpected nature of the whole story and of today's verses in particular.

We could try it now for a couple of minutes but find a longer time too. Then come to Communion where we remember the most awe-inspiring feature of Jesus' life of all, his death to pay the penalty for sin for all who will receive him as King of their life.

Is he King of yours?