

Jesus' Youth

Jesus' early years as an infant, little child, teenager, and young adult are not recorded in the gospels. The only glimpse that we have of young Jesus is recorded in the gospel of Luke when he was twelve years old. None of the other gospels record anything about Jesus between His birth and His public appearance at the age of thirty years. There are a number of apocryphal myths which pretend to describe Jesus' early years. The myths are recorded in some books referred to as The Infancy (2nd century), Infancy Story of Thomas (4th - 5th century), the Gospel of Psuedo-Matthew (8th - 9th century), and the Life of John (5th century). They claim to give us events that occurred in His early life. These books portray Jesus as abusing His divine power. These mythical events never occurred, and the books were written long after the death of Jesus. These books have been rejected by both Protestants and the Roman Catholic Church as not being inspired scripture. Only the gospel of Luke gives us any clue about the early life of Jesus. Luke describes only one event in Jesus' youth. It is his visit to Jerusalem for the Feast of the Passover when He was 12 years of age.

FEAST OF THE PASSOVER. The Feast of Passover occurs once a year, at the time of the full moon in the month of Nisan which starts in March and ends in April. In ancient Israel every Jewish family was encouraged to travel to Jerusalem for three major feasts: the Feast of Tabernacles, the Feast of Weeks or Pentecost, and the Feast of the Passover. Devout Jews would make the trip year after year and others would come less frequently. Therefore, it is not surprising to read in Luke that Joseph and Mary went to Jerusalem every year for the Feast of the Passover.

Every year his parents went to Jerusalem for the Feast of the

and a "Son of the Covenant" or a "Son of the Law." A Bar Mitzvah was held as a celebration of this significant step in his life. After the Bar Mitzvah he was expected to 1) keep the Law, 2) learn a trade, and 3) attend a great Jewish feast. This trip to Jerusalem occurred one year before He would be declared to be a man in the Jewish culture. The second reason is that the annual Passover, a great Jewish feast celebrating Israelites' exodus out of Egypt, was occurring once again. But the third and most important reason has to do with Jesus and what occurred during this visit.

*Y*es, Jesus astonished people because He was not an ordinary boy. He stunned everyone. That is what we would expect of God.

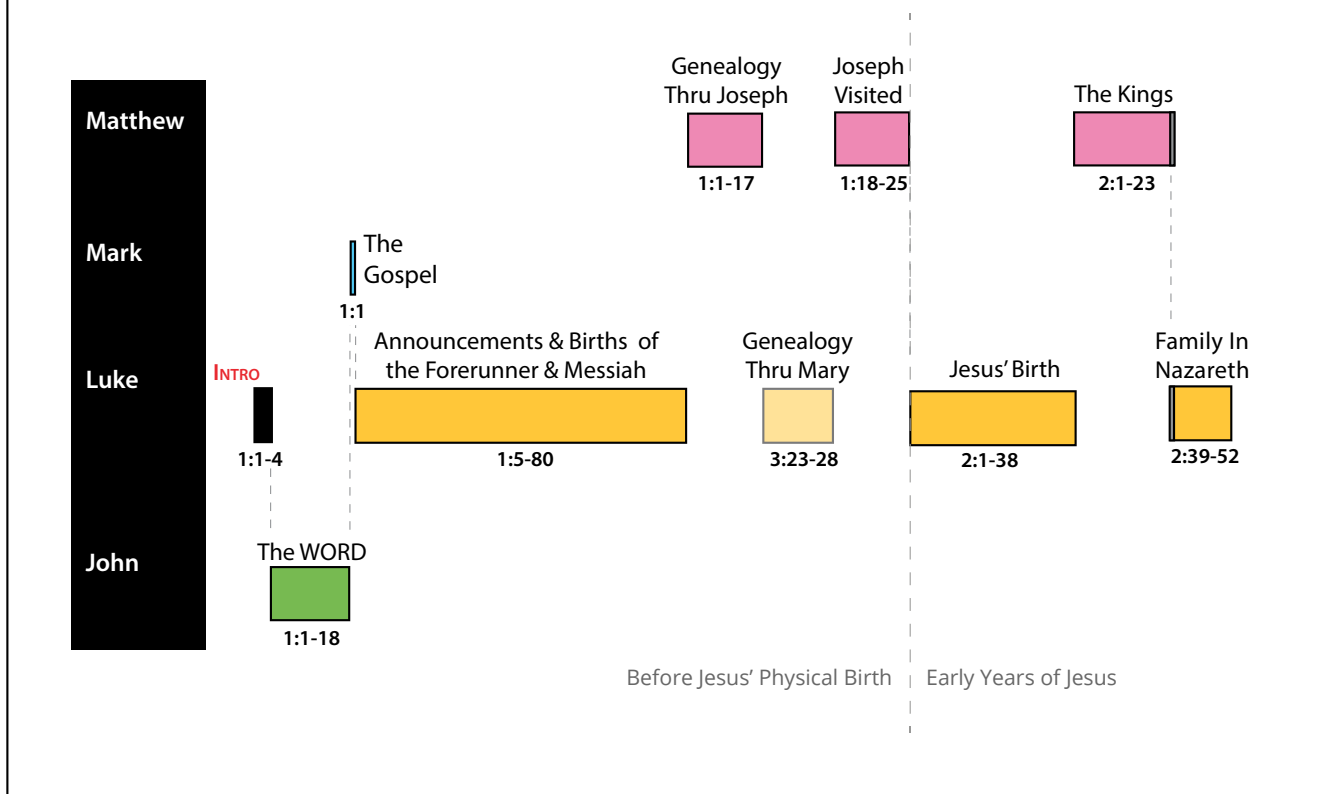
Passover. When he was twelve years old, they went up to the Feast, according to the custom . . . (NASB) Luke 2:41-42

Why did Luke tell us about this trip to Jerusalem? There appear to be three reasons. The first reason is that when a Jewish boy reaches the age of 13, he is declared to be a man

. . . and as they were returning, after spending the full number of days, the boy Jesus stayed behind in Jerusalem. But His parents were unaware of it, but supposed Him to be in the caravan, and went a day's journey; and they began looking for Him among their relatives and acquaintances. (NASB) Luke 2:43-44

Life and Heart of Jesus

Before Jesus' Physical Birth - Early Years of Jesus

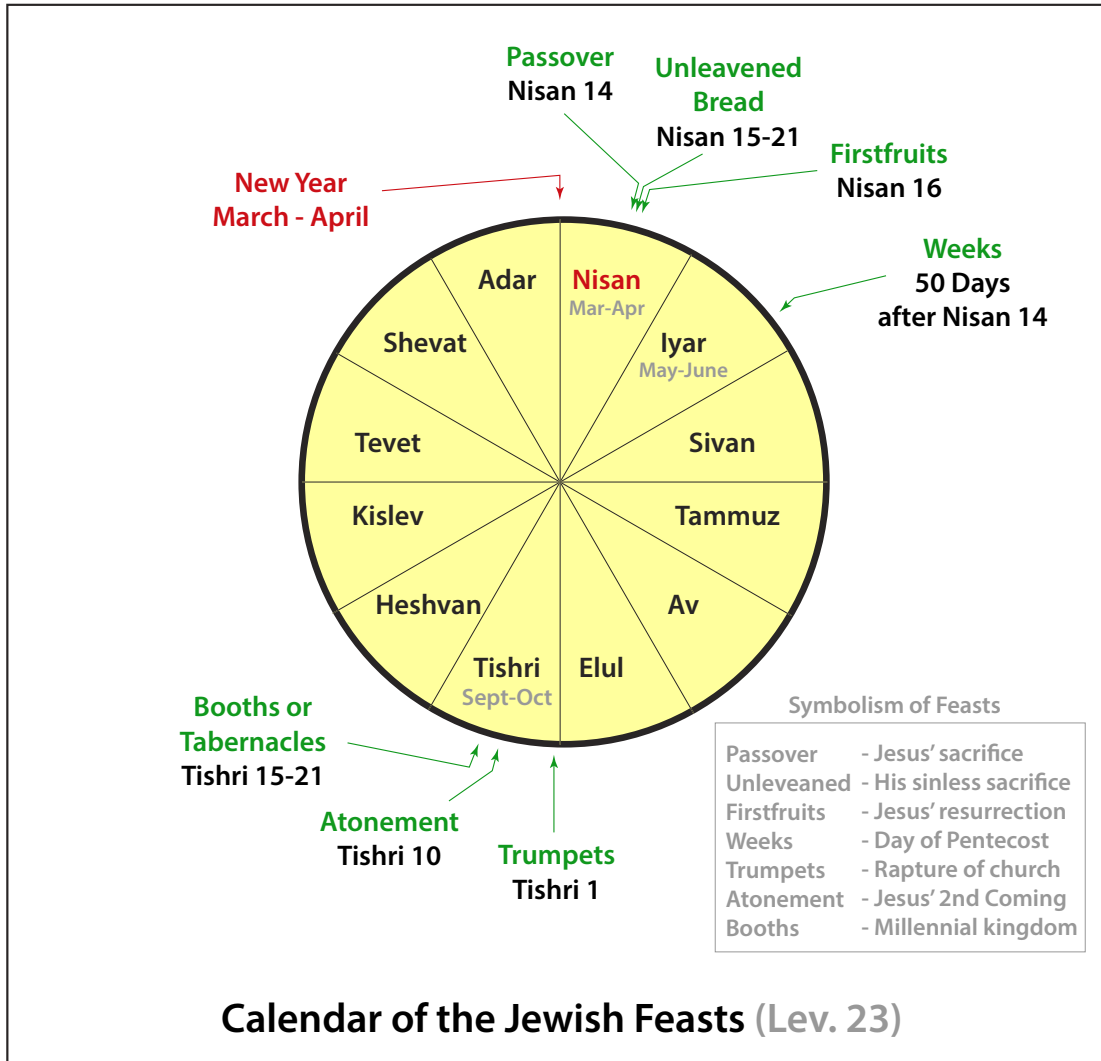


THE SEARCH. Luke tells us that they stayed “the full number of days” at the feast. According to Jewish tradition the Feast of Passover lasted seven days, but the rabbis taught that a devout Jew only had to stay for three days. We are not sure if they stayed 3 or 7 days. Jesus’ parents did not know that He was not with them when they left the feast to return home to Nazareth. They traveled a full day before they discovered that Jesus was missing. At first this might seem that His parents were negligent, but according to the custom of the day the women walked in front of the caravan and the men walked behind. Therefore, it is very possible that Mary thought that Jesus was with Joseph and maybe Joseph thought He was with Mary. After they had searched for Him among their relatives, they stopped their search when they discovered that Jesus was not with them.

for Him. Then, after three days they found Him in the temple, sitting in the midst of the teachers, both listening to them and asking them questions. (NASB) Luke 2:45-46

So Joseph and Mary returned to Jerusalem and searched for Him three days for a total of five days. The Greek language tells us that they were searching and searching. Have you ever lost your purse, wallet, credit card, check book, car keys, or child? Do you remember how you felt? I have misplaced my car keys, and I remember searching and searching. It was not a comfortable feeling. There was a sense of panic once I discovered that I could not locate them. At first you think you will find them, but you do not. Then that sick feeling takes hold of you. That is how Joseph and Mary felt, not for one hour or one day, but for four days. When they finally found Him, they must have been upset because He was just sitting, listening, asking questions, and answering

When they did not find Him, they returned to Jerusalem looking



questions of the rabbis. His parents were relieved and upset all at the same time. The Greek implies that He was repeatedly asking and answering questions of the rabbis.

And all who heard Him were amazed at His understanding and His answers. (NASB) Luke 2:47

ASTONISHMENT. In the Greek language the most important part of the sentence is placed first. In verse 47, the Greek places the word “amazed,” or the Greek word EXISTEMI, at the front of the sentence. That means the Holy Spirit wants us to know that the amazement of those who were watching Jesus is the key point of the passage. He wants us to know that they were very amazed. Those who were watching Jesus were greatly amazed to the point of being overwhelmed. A.T. Robertson comments that the Greek word for “astonished”

means that Joseph and Mary were “completely amazed” or “so amazed that their eyes had popped out.”

When they saw Him, they were astonished . . . (NASB) Luke 2:48a

Not just the crowds were astonished, but even His own parents. Again the Greek sentence places the word “astonished,” or EKPLESSO, not at the front this time but near the front of the sentence. Jesus’ parents were astonished at what they experienced. They had never seen anything like this before from their son. Both the crowds as well as Joseph and Mary were absolutely, unbelievably amazed.

Jesus stunned those who were watching because they had never seen a twelve year old boy ask and answer questions like this young boy was doing. It is one thing to be able to

ask difficult questions, but it is something else to answer them. Jesus stunned everyone! That is why the Holy Spirit includes this event in Luke's gospel. Jesus was no ordinary child.

DIDN'T YOU KNOW? We do not know if Jesus' parents waited until He had finished talking with the religious scholars. But at some point they finally asked Him, "Why?"

... and His mother said to Him, "Son, why have You treated us this way? Behold, Your father and I have been anxiously looking for You." And He said to them, "Why is it that you were looking for Me? . . ." (NASB) Luke 2:49b

Jesus' response might seem to be rude to some of us, but His response depends on His attitude - how He said, "Why is it that you were looking for Me?" Since scripture does not record everything that occurred, Jesus might have told His parents before they left with the caravan that He was going to visit the rabbis. We do not know. His response to mom could have very simply had the attitude of an apology and sound like this, "Mom, I thought you knew? Why were you looking for Me?" Another child could have also spoken these words with a rebellious, unloving attitude, but verse 51 tells us that He did all of this with an attitude of submission. Here is part of verse 51,

... and He continued in subjection to them . . . (NASB) Luke 2:51b

Jesus' response to His mother was one of submission. His attitude was one of grace. Is it possible that mom did not understand an earlier request that He made? That seems to be the case.

MY FATHER'S HOUSE. With the same attitude he tries

to help His mother understand that He was also being obedient to His real Father - God the Father.

... Did you not know that I had to be in My Father's house?" (NASB) Luke 2:49c

But mom and dad did not understand His words.

But they did not understand the statement which He had made to them. And He went down with them and came to Nazareth, and He continued in subjection to them; and His mother treasured all these things in her heart. (NASB) Luke 2:50-51

They did not understand that He was God in the flesh and that God the Father was His real Father. Mom remembered His words because they were unusual and unexpected. She did not understand her son. He was born into this world by her - a virgin. He was not an ordinary child.

He did not come into this world to simply live life and then die. He did not come into this world searching for the meaning to life and asking, "Why am I here?" What is the purpose of life? Because God had told Him somewhere during His childhood. He knew why He was here, but mom must have missed this important fact. So she was stunned when she saw Him asking and answering

tough questions. He was very unusual. He was God in human flesh. He had come to do His Father's will - not His own!

A MYSTERY OF GOD. Then the Holy Spirit records the following fact for us.

And Jesus kept increasing in wisdom and stature, and in favor with God and men. (NASB) Luke 2:52



Now we shall ask a question, “Why is it that God needs to grow in wisdom?” And according to Luke 2:41 we read almost the same words,

The Child continued to grow and become strong, increasing in wisdom; and the grace of God was upon Him. (NASB) Luke 2:40

So, why does God need to grow in wisdom and gain favor? We can understand asking tough questions and amazing people, but should He need to learn?

And why doesn't God just give us this answer? The answer to these questions begins with realizing that God wants us to search to understand Him; and by seeking Him, we will understand Him more. Matthew 6:6 tell us,

. . . and pray to your Father who is in secret . . . (NASB) Matt. 6:6

God exists in secret. Matt. 13:11 tells us that God does not always explain everything clearly to us. He hides some truths. Isaiah 45:15 makes it very clear that God does in fact hide Himself from us.

Truly, You are a God who hides Himself, O God of Israel, Savior! (NASB) Is. 45:15

He wants our searching. He wants us to search and seek for Him (Jer. 29:13-14a). God wants our searching because it draws us to Him. Why did Jesus need to grow in wisdom? The result of our search for the answer to the question will reveal a mystery about the God-human. So here we go.

HE CAME LIKE A MAN. We are given a hint about why Jesus had to learn in Phil. 2:5-7

Have this attitude in yourselves which was also in Christ Jesus, who, although He existed in the form of God, did not regard equality with God a thing to be grasped, but emptied Himself, taking the form of a bond-servant, and being made in the likeness of men. (NASB) Phil. 2:5-7

In this passage we learn that Jesus existed in the “form” of God. The Greek word for “form” is MORPHE and it means

that Jesus was the essence of God. He was completely and totally God. In this passage we also discover that Jesus was in the MORPHE of a human. He was totally and completely human and looked like a man - “likeness of men.” He was totally and completely both God and human. Now that is a mystery. How did that effect Him? How did God do this?

The answer to these questions is found in the phrase “emptied Himself.” The Greek for “emptied” is KENOSIS. In some way the divine part of Jesus emptied Himself. What did He empty Himself of? John 17:5 gives us one clue,

Now, Father, glorify Me together with Yourself, with the glory which I had with You before the world was. (NASB) John 17:5

Jesus says that He once had glory, and it appears from the event that occurred on the Mount of Transfiguration in Matt. 17:2 that Jesus hid the radiance of His glory when he was born in our human world.

Six days later Jesus took with Him Peter and James and John his brother, and led them up on a high mountain by themselves. And He was transfigured before them; and His face shone like the sun, and His garments became as white as light. (NASB) Matt. 17:1-2

He hid the light of His glory while He lived as a man.

Jesus had willingly “emptied” Himself or let go of some other things too! Matt. 24:36 tells us that Jesus did not know everything,

But of that day and hour no one knows, not even the angels of heaven, nor the Son, but the Father alone. (NASB) Matt. 24:36

Why didn't Jesus know everything since He was God? The answer is that He willingly limited the use of His divine knowledge while He was among us so that He could experience life as a human. Otherwise, He could not have experienced human life and understood us.

Therefore, He had to be made like His brethren in all things, so that He might become a merciful and faithful high priest in things pertaining to God . . . For since He Himself was tempted

in that which He has suffered, He is able to come to the aid of those who are tempted. (NASB) Heb. 2:17-18

CONCLUSION. We know that Jesus limited Himself in at least two ways when He entered this world as a human. He limited His knowledge and He hid His glory. Therefore, he had to grow in wisdom as a child; but He learned quickly because He was a perfect man. He limited His glory. Otherwise He would have never died because people would have been afraid of Him. He experienced life as a man - sleeping, eating, growing tired, and ultimately dying. He was God who became a man with the goal to experience life as we would. But His goal was not to live like us but to die for you and me in order to forgive our sins, and He did. Yes, Jesus astonished people because He was not an ordinary boy. He stunned everyone. That is what we would expect of God.