

Mary, Joseph and the Boxing Day Sale

Hespeler, 26 December 2021 © Scott McAndless

1 Samuel 2:18-20, 26, Psalm 148, Colossians 3:12-17, [Luke 2:41-52](#)

Now, every year the parents would participate in the annual Boxing Day sales. They would pack the whole family into the van and head out together with all of the aunts and uncles to the big box stores. And, in the year when the boy was about twelve years old, they did so as usual. Their anticipation of the big day had been growing for weeks as they watched for the various ads that had been appearing on the internet and on television. It looked as if there were going to be some truly memorable savings this year.

Joseph had had an eye on a brand-new flat screen TV that he knew would fit just perfectly in the den. If he could just manage to get there for the door crasher special at one store, he might be able to get a Samsung at a price so unbelievable that it was like he was losing money if he didn't buy it. Mary was looking to update her wardrobe and also wanted some new appliances for the kitchen. But, in order to hit all of the right sales at the right time, their actions would have to be very carefully coordinated.

The Day Begins

It was still dark when they arrived in the parking lot, but they could already see the long lines of customers waiting for the doors to open. The anticipation was palpable and there was so much tension that it seemed like a fistfight might just break out at any moment. The extended family pulled together in a huddle. "Okay," Joseph said, "you all know what sales and bargains you are looking for, so just go and get in the right lines and get your elbows up and grab that merchandise! We'll meet up back here in about seven hours and tally up all our loot. Everyone got their credit cards? Alright, let's go!

Everyone raced off so quickly that they didn't even notice that the twelve-year-old was left standing there alone. I guess that they all just assumed that he had gone with somebody else. The young boy stood there for a few moments shaking his head before wandering off.

The Spoils

When the family had all gathered later (and it was more like eight hours later by the time they had all arrived) they were all talking excitedly about all the bargains that they had found. Some were also having a few second thoughts as they considered what the credit card bill was going to look like in January. Joseph, for his part, was staring dubiously at the huge cardboard box that stood at the back end of his van. Somehow it might not be quite as easy to fit in as he had thought.



Eventually all of the excited talk died down and the family decided that they should leave the parking lot and meet up for a late, late breakfast at Denny's. Mary and Joseph weren't particularly worried when they noticed that they didn't quite have the full complement of kids in the back of the van. They just figured that one of the kids must have caught a ride with Uncle Jake or Grandpa. So it was only once everyone had arrived at the restaurant and they paused to do a proper headcount that they realized that the twelve-year-old was not with them.

A Frantic Search

As you can imagine, things got pretty frantic after that. Mary and Joseph hopped in the van and raced back to all of the stores that they had visited, and they searched in every nook and cranny. They went to the toy departments, to the electronics and even the boys clothing department. They described the boy to everyone that they met, but it seemed as if no one had seen him. They were getting really scared.

Eventually they realized that they just needed to calm down a bit so that they could think. So, they pulled off the road and into a church parking lot. They sat there for a moment trying to do some deep breathing, and then they looked up at a little display that the church had put up on its lawn.

The Nativity Scene

It was just your typical nativity scene, nothing special. The church had obviously been using the same figures for years now and they were looking worn and aged. The whole thing looked a bit shabby when compared to the bright and shining displays that they had been dealing with all day. And, of course, now that Christmas was over, the church had turned off the flood lights that had once made the scene much more visible. That's probably why it took a while for Mary and Joseph to realize that there was one extra figure in the scene that didn't quite belong. Yes, quietly staring at the centre of the display was their young son.

"When his parents saw him they were astonished; and his mother said to him, 'Child, why have you treated us like this? Look, your father and I have been searching for you in great anxiety.'"

A Twelve-Year-Old's Wisdom

But their son just looked up at them and said, "Wasn't it just a couple of days ago when you told me that this person..." (He gestured towards the child in the manger) "...this person was the greatest who had ever lived? But somehow, I noticed that there aren't any flat screen TVs or Food Ninjas in that stable. In fact, it seems pretty clear that they didn't have any of the so-called good things in life that you've been running after all day.

I mean, on one level I get it. I do enjoy my toys and my games and I love the new phone that I got for Christmas. But it was only a couple of days ago when you told me that this child, the one in the manger, that he and everything that he stood for was worth more than all the possessions in the world. I was just a little amazed at how quickly everybody seemed to forget that today. I was just here sitting and thinking that it might be nice if we could remember it a little bit longer.

A Jarring Transition

There is a rather jarring transition between verse 40 and verse 41 of the second chapter of the Gospel of Luke. From the beginning of the chapter up until verse 40, we have the story of the birth and infancy of Jesus. And, of course, you are all pretty familiar with that story. It is full of signs and wonders. There is an angel appearing to shepherds and then being joined by heavenly choirs. And when the shepherds come to see the child who is lying in the manger, they tell the story of what they have experienced and everyone is filled with wonder and amazement.

And one point in particular is underlined. Mary, Jesus' mother, gets it. After the shepherds leave, we are told that **"Mary treasured all these words and pondered them in her heart."** And one of the things that she must have pondered would have been God's odd choice to reveal such important information to a lowly band of shepherds.

Encounters in the Temple

We have also been told about what happened when Mary and Joseph took the child to the temple when he was only about a week old and how they met two prophets there who said some pretty amazing things about their baby. One of them, Simeon, in particular spoke directly to Mary and said, **"This child is destined for the falling and the rising of many in Israel, and to be a sign that will be opposed so that the inner thoughts of many will be revealed—and a sword will pierce your own soul too."**

So, just in case, you know, the whole story told by the shepherds didn't quite get through to her, you're really can't get more explicit when it comes to promise and warning than that. So, very clearly, Mary has had a whole lot to hold onto and ponder, and that's without even getting into her own personal experience with an angel visitor in chapter one.

So, when we get to the end of verse 40, Jesus' parents really have this whole thing figured out. Or at least Mary does. The Gospel of Luke actually doesn't say anything about Joseph hearing or understanding any of it, so, maybe he did or maybe he didn't. But at the very least, you would think that all that they have just been through should leave an impression.

All is Forgotten

But then we get to verse 41 and all of a sudden all of that seems to have been forgotten. And I realize, of course, that it is twelve years later. But it is just odd that, when we next see the holy family, they are behaving just like any other Jewish family. They go down, together with a large group of extended family and neighbours, to Jerusalem for the most important festival of the year.

The Passover is a celebration of the time when God saved the people of Israel from horrible slavery in Egypt. So, it is obviously an important spiritual occasion that they want to be part of. There is also some serious foreshadowing going on as far as the Gospel is concerned because we all know what happens when Jesus goes to Jerusalem for Passover at the end of this book.

Not Just a Religious Occasion

But don't think for a moment that the family only had religion on their mind when they went. Nazareth was a nowhere town – a place where nothing happened and that trade goods rarely

reached. So, they probably were overwhelmed by the big city and all of its allures – the markets, the entertainment and music and spectacle. People came to Passover from all over the known world, so just seeing the people from everywhere would have been overwhelming.

So, yes, the hicks from Galilee were having a big time down in Jerusalem and while their attention was diverted by the big city lights, their son went missing. Of course, this is a nightmare for any parents. And maybe it is not too surprising in their case.

They were clearly living in a small town where everybody looked out for everyone else's kids. They lived in the community where they could just assume that their neighbours or relatives would look after their son if they weren't around. You can hardly blame them if they don't know how to deal with the very different kinds of dangers in a big city. No, we cannot fault Mary and Joseph for going down to Jerusalem or for losing track of their son.

What Jesus Blames them for

But Jesus does blame them for one thing. He blames them for searching. **“He said to them, ‘Why were you searching for me?’** I know that seems weird because, of course, that is what a parent is going to do when a child is lost. But what Jesus seems to be saying is that they shouldn't have *needed* to search. They already had all the information they needed to know where Jesus would be.

But here is the really damning thing we are told about Jesus' parents: **“But they did not understand what he said to them.”** They didn't have a clue what he was talking about. And isn't that kind of amazing? I mean, after everything that they had seen twelve years ago, everything they had been through, they should have known something. Jesus says to them, **“Did you not know that I must be in my Father's house?”** Or that phrase could also be translated as **“Did you not know that I must be about my Father's work?”**

What Have we Forgotten?

Yes, the damning thing was that, in twelve short years, they seem to have forgotten what Jesus was supposed to be here for, what he meant and what he stood for. It seems unbelievable that they could, but they did.

But maybe it is not so unbelievable. I mean, *we* forget it so much quicker than that. We sing *“Good Christians all rejoice,”* but in days we are giving into despair and hopelessness. It is like we never really believed it. We sing *“Let every heart prepare him room,”* yet do we neglect to prepare room for him to truly change our own heart? Most of all, we sing, *“Jesus your King is born, Jesus is born, in excelsis Gloria,”* and yet we do not allow him to rule over our own lives, much less than the world.

If what we have just celebrated is true, it really does change how we look at everything. It gives us a different perspective on what is valuable and what matters. It may have taken Mary and Joseph twelve years to forget, but are we going to let it go in a matter of days? I pray that we don't.