



uncommon
THE HOLY ONE OF GOD IS COMING

LESSONS:

1. Was Jesus just Common? (12/7)
2. He would be Compassionate and Holy (12/14)
3. His Birth would Announce His Kingdom (12/21)
4. **His Childhood Among the Religious (12/28)**
5. **His Life Growing Up Among the Gentiles (1/4)**
6. The Challenges of the Jewish Religion (1/11)
7. The Challenges of Gentile Religions (1/25)
8. The Creator Among the Created (2/1)
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12. The Hope of the Nations (3/1)

Lesson 4&5 | His Childhood Among the Religious (12/28) and His Life Growing Up Among the Gentiles (12/21)

Objective | As we have already said, Paul reminds us that “*at the right time*, Christ died for the ungodly” (Romans 6:6) and to the Galatians he wrote, “*when the fulness of time came*, God sent His Son.” (4:4). So, there is value in understanding, along with the written text, the events and the environment that led to God sending His Son into the world. This study will consider the amazing story of the incarnation (God made flesh) in a world, within the social, political and religious struggles of His own day.

So, what happened in the thirty years from the time Jesus was presented at the Temple (Luke 2:22-24) to the time when He was presented at the beginning of His ministry: at His baptism, His temptation and His Declaration in which He was rejected (Luke 3:21; 4:1-13; 4:14-21). The gospels do not show us explicitly the events of his youth except Luke, who shows us life with his parents at Jewish festivals. However, there is much we can learn from even that.

The first statement:

- 2:39-40 | *“When they had completed everything according to the law of the Lord, they returned to Galilee, to their own town of Nazareth. The boy grew up and became strong, filled with wisdom, and God’s grace was on him.”*

It may sound trite, but “**he grew up.**” Among the Roman world, the life of children was horrendous because of “the exposure of infants, very often but by no means always resulting in death, was widespread in many parts of the Roman Empire” (W.V. Harris, “Child Exposure in the Roman Empire” JRS 84, 1994). Even the term for this in Greek (*brephektonos*) was “child-murdering.” And if they lived, they were added to the half-million plus yearly demand for slaves in the first century (ibid). Add to that, some slaves were expected to meet sexual demands. Most children lost any chance to having innocence because of the world in which they were born. Children would have had little hope for tomorrow and would have been “torn away from thinking about themselves as the Lord’s wondrous creation” (Morton, 46).

However, Jesus was born to a virgin who accepted the societal censure she faced and wrapped him up in swaddling clothes, and in the arms of loving parents. Even though they were clearly poor, He was able to grow up and become strong. He would have known the life of hope and destiny because of the parents who were graced with his arrival to them. It was no small duty to hold the Creator of the world in their arms – but apparently, they were determined that the sunshine of His future amidst the darkest of times for children would be the destiny they would have a hand in bringing to Jesus.

Mary “treasured” her treasure “in her heart” (Luke 2:19,51). Her faith at the announcement of Gabriel and Joseph’s faith at the angelic vision to marry her all testify to the home in which Jesus was born “at the right time.” They had a commission more daunting, I suspect, than most parents. But the focus of optimism for them would have played a large part in the home life in which Jesus grew. In *The Optimistic Child*, Martin Seligman told a story of how a mother changed the experience of a sprinkler her toddler from fear to frolic by showing him the way to handle the moment. He highlighted for parents that, “It is not the noise of the rattle that makes a baby laugh, it is the fact that she rattles the rattle” (278). They helped him “become strong, filled with wisdom, and God’s grace was on him.”

- Luke 2:51-52 | *“Then he went down with them and came to Nazareth and was obedient to them. His mother kept all these things in her heart. And Jesus increased in wisdom and stature, and in favor with God and with people.”*

Not only did Jesus “become strong” and “increased in stature”, he “was filled with” – and “increased in wisdom.” Luke’s words must reflect that this was the same wisdom the Wise Man said was “the fear of the Lord is the beginning of wisdom and the knowledge of the Holy one is insight” (Proverbs 9:10). And even in His public ministry, Jesus says that the “wise man” will hear these words and do them (c.f. Matthew 7:24-26). And in this expression of wisdom as the call to living with love (5:43-48) with no hate or malice (5:21-26), living with authentic faith without showiness (6:1-24) and trusting God each step of the way (6:25-34). Jesus was not raised to be the man of His time. He was raised to be the Compassionate Creator and true Son of Man for all of us. He was uncommonly common – and nothing like men were raised to be in their day.

His Upbringing of Wisdom in Nazareth compared to the Apocryphal writings. In the “lost books of the Bible” as they have been called – or more specifically the Gnostic gospels (as referenced in Dan Brown’s *The Da Vinci Code*) portray a different Jesus than in the Synoptic Gospels (Matthew, Mark, Luke) and tell sensational tales of Jesus flying, raising smoked fish from the dead (the gospel of Peter), teaching marriage as a foul and filthy way of life” (the acts of Andrew) and kissing Mary Magdalene (the gospel of Philip). Further, they portray the boy Jesus as unkind, cruel and wicked. In *The Infancy Story of Thomas*, it is said that “After this, Jesus again went through the village and a child ran and knocked against his shoulder. Jesus was angered and said to him, “You shall not go further on your way” and immediately he fell down and died” (quoted in Morton, 135). In the Arabic Infancy Gospel, Jesus turned children who were hiding from Him into goats – only saved by their mothers who urged Him to change them back (Ibid). This is not the picture of the wise young boy in the Synoptic Gospels: He was uncommon and not the common mischief of childhood.

The Society that Jesus was raised in. Just four miles from Nazareth was Sepphoris, a community that would have known the harsh iron rule of Roman rule. After 3 BC, Sepphoris was the center of a building boom, providing work opportunities for craftsmen such as Joseph, which may explain their trek from Egypt ends in Nazareth. During Jesus’ childhood, Sepphoris was the provincial capital of Galilee and the city where the villagers took care of their official business. When Jesus was about 10, the village revolted against Rome to which Gamaliel would refer (c.f. Acts 5:37) was led by a Judas who would be “motivated both politically and religiously” (Loftus, *the Anti-Roman Revolts of the Jews and the Galileans*, JQR 68 (October 1977)). So young Jesus would have seen the power of Rome against Jews in this. The utter ruin they would have left in the wake of its destruction – and perhaps – along with his father, been part of the rebuilding of this community only about an hour away by foot. And they rebuilt Sepphoris to be the administrative capital of Galilee and was said to be more cosmopolitan and implicitly, more Roman and pagan. In fact, Herod set out to make Sepphoris the “ornament of all Galilee” (Josephus. *Antiquities* 18.27). In contrast, Nazareth was certainly a small, relatively poor village and it must have signaled a dramatic change to have so great a city as Sepphoris emerge before its very own eyes only a short distance away. The contrast between village and urban capital could not have been more evident, though in everyday terms there was great continuity between village and town. The building campaign to rebuild the city was led by Herod Antipas, and undoubtedly had a significant economic and demographic effect on the local economy of workers and artisans – presumably Joseph (Matthew 13:55) as well as Jesus (Mark 6:3). The word used here is *tehton* that means a craftsman who would be skilled in the use of wood and stone and possibly even metal (J.I. Packer, “Carpenter, Builder, Workman, Craftsman, Trade,” ed. Lothar Coenen, Erich Beyreuther, and Hans Bietenhard, *New International Dictionary of New Testament Theology* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan Publishing House, 1986), 279.).



But how did the family of Jesus relate to these developments? Was it too urban, or too Hellenized? Or was it the presence of the royal family that had run amuck with the imprisonment of John the Baptist (Josephus Antiquities 18.5.2) that would have turned.

Not only was *Koine* Greek infiltrating the Jewish villages, but the presence of Roman religion was everywhere as well as evidenced in Scythopolis, another city, also near Nazareth, which had temples to the pagan deities of Dionysis and Herokles. Even in Caesarea, there was the worship of Isis. This has been happening well before Jesus' arrival. Even the Herodian Temple, which Jesus would have worshipped in, was architecturally Roman and Greek – not Palestinian. It was a portrait of Hellenistic-Roman style and a celebration of Gentile culture (Josephus, *Antiquities* 15.380-402).

Further, the lavish living of Gentiles among the Jews spread to Jews. It was evident in the building of the Herodian Temple. Further, the high priests in Jesus' day were being selected by the Herods, chosen from a select circle of priestly families who were made rich by the imperial appointments. So not only did Jesus see this in his hometown area, but he would also have seen it and been reminded about it at his family's every festal trip to Jerusalem as they stepped into the "temple of God." Plus, the evidence of Greek wealth. Purple cloth announced wealth (Luke 16:19) and it was a common theme of Jesus' adult preaching to warn of the dangers of wealth and its hedonistic lifestyle. Again, this would have been a common experience, even among those in Sepphoris where "In the period after the Exile a negative attitude to the poor predominated in normative circles.... Typical... in Sepphoris... where the scholars held the [poor*] with open contempt... and avoiding all dealings with them" (TDNT, 6.901, 6.899). These people, the *am hareez** were "the poorest people of the land" (c.f. 2Kings 24:14).

Though it was not a revelation at all, Jesus still proclaimed that the poor should be the object of love – and not disdain. Paul said, "*You yourselves know that I worked with my own hands to support myself and those who are with me. In every way I've shown you that it is necessary to help the weak by laboring like this and to remember the words of the Lord Jesus, because he said, 'It is more blessed to give than to receive'*" (Acts 20:34-35). This was the shared message of the Apostles for Paul wrote, "*They asked only that we would remember the poor, which I had made every effort to do*" (Galatians 2:10).

The Mosaic Law had taught this:

- Regarding the gleaning of the corners of the fields, "*Leave them for the poor and the resident alien; I am the Lord your God*" (Leviticus 23:22).
- In helping the poor, "*If there is a poor person among you, one of your brothers within any of your city gates in the land the Lord your God is giving you, do not be hardhearted or tightfisted toward your poor brother*" (Deuteronomy 15:7).
- And "*Do not oppress a hired worker who is poor and needy, whether one of your Israelite brothers or one of the resident aliens in a town in your land*" (Deuteronomy 24:14).

Jesus had grown up around hedonistic wealth and still had a heart for the poor. He grew up around self-centered hedonistic lifestyles and still had a heart for helping the weak. He was indeed a Son of Man who made God His center and life. And there is little doubt to me that Jesus would have been raised in a home where there was this respect for the Divine will of Yahweh (since as God Himself – He had the heart for the poor and oppressed).

Next Lesson: 6. The Challenges of the Jewish Religion (1/11).
Read ahead: Matthew 5:17-20; 6:1-4, 5-6, 16-18; John 7:40-52.

"Compassionate Creator: Becoming Human For Me" by Bruce Morton; Chapter 6 and 9
 Sold on Amazon and 21st Century Christian or other Christian Bookstores.