

The Boy Jesus at the Temple: Luke 2:41-52

At one level this story of an insolent youth upsetting his parents is no more edifying than the other unflattering and sometimes downright psychopathic infancy traditions picked up elsewhere in the Infancy Gospels of Thomas and James. Luke, however, makes much of this unpromising material to underline the pain that is to be associated with Jesus' pathway.

Luke uses the story, as Coleridge suggests (Mark Coleridge, *The Birth of the Lukan Narrative*, 1993: 211), as an opportunity to go beyond the OT references and angelic pronouncements to have Jesus pronounce upon his own special place as Son of God. The disquiet and inability to understand displayed by his parents is linked by Fallon (Michael Fallon, *The Gospel According to St Luke*, 1997: 59) to the disciples failing to understand Jesus' pronouncements whenever they refer to the Son of God and his upcoming Passion. The upset caused to Mary is the first fruits of Simeon's prediction of the piercing of her soul (Brendan Byrne, *The Hospitality of God*, 2000: 37). Johnson notes that the use of "it is necessary" is taken up later by Luke and related to the necessity of suffering (Luke Timothy Johnson, *The Gospel of Luke*, 1991: 61). He also notes the lost/found, death/resurrection symbolism evoked by the use of three days of searching and the repetition of Jesus questioning of the need to search for him both here and in the tomb stories. Mary's pondering in her heart is likewise recapitulated by the women at the tomb.

Luke use of this story elevates it above whatever source he had for it, to introduce Jesus as a free agent proclaiming himself as Son of God, in addition to the prophetic and messianic roles already assigned to him in the infancy narrative, and particularly to set up the uncomfortable but unavoidable suffering involved in Jesus' life. Luke makes the reader share Mary's unrest and wonder where being about his Father's business will lead the boy.