

# *Amazed and Angry*

## WEEKLY BIBLE STUDY

3<sup>rd</sup> in a four-part series

December 14, 2014

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*Matthew 12:46–50 (Common English Bible)*

<sup>46</sup> While Jesus was speaking to the crowds, his mother and brothers stood outside trying to speak with him. <sup>47</sup> Someone said to him, “Look, your mother and brothers are outside wanting to speak with you.”

<sup>48</sup> Jesus replied, “Who is my mother? Who are my brothers?” <sup>49</sup> He stretched out his hand toward his disciples and said, “Look, here are my mother and my brothers. <sup>50</sup> Whoever does the will of my Father who is in heaven is my brother, sister, and mother.”

*Luke 2:41-52 (CEB)*

<sup>41</sup> Each year his parents went to Jerusalem for the Passover Festival. <sup>42</sup> When he was twelve years old, they went up to Jerusalem according to their custom. <sup>43</sup> After the festival was over, they were returning home, but the boy Jesus stayed behind in Jerusalem. His parents didn’t know it. <sup>44</sup> Supposing that he was among their band of travelers, they journeyed on for a full day while looking for him among their family and friends. <sup>45</sup> When they didn’t find Jesus, they returned to Jerusalem to look for him. <sup>46</sup> After three days they found him in the temple. He was sitting among the teachers, listening to them and putting questions to them. <sup>47</sup> Everyone who heard him was amazed by his understanding and his answers. <sup>48</sup> When his parents saw him, they were shocked.

His mother said, “Child, why have you treated us like this? Listen! Your father and I have been worried. We’ve been looking for you!”

<sup>49</sup> Jesus replied, “Why were you looking for me? Didn’t you know that it was necessary for me to be in my Father’s house?” <sup>50</sup> But they didn’t understand what he said to them.

<sup>51</sup> Jesus went down to Nazareth with them and was obedient to them. His mother cherished every word in her heart. <sup>52</sup> Jesus matured in wisdom and years, and in favor with God and with people.

*Being the mother of Jesus must have been a life filled with unique blessings and challenges. Today, we’ll look at a couple of events from their life together and try to discern a bit more about the implications of the incarnation.*

In this “out of the box” Advent series, we are reflecting on the birth of Jesus by looking through Mary’s eyes and working backward, from Jesus’ resurrection to his birth. Having reflected on Mary and the crucifixion of Jesus last week, this week we move further back in time to Jesus’ public ministry and even his youth. In this, we wonder what it would have been like to be Jesus’ mom. The Gospels don’t tell us much, but they certainly reveal that Mary faced a lot of challenges being the mother of the Christ.

*Jesus and his mom*

On a day like many others, Jesus is busy teaching when he is told that his mother and his brothers are waiting outside for him. Jesus seizes the moment and makes the seemingly scandalous pronouncement that his mother and his brothers are those who do God’s will, not the flesh-and-blood standing outside. It’s as if he says that blood may be thicker than water, but obedience is thicker than blood. Stop and think about how that must have sounded to Mary. Though she surely understood Jesus’ unique vocation, it still must have hurt. How could it not?

Contrary to what it may seem, in this moment, Jesus is not tossing out one of the Ten Commandments. After all, he came to fulfill the Law, not abolish it. Rather, he is teaching everyone that their new family in him shares a kinship deeper and stronger

than any kinship based upon blood relationships. All believers are brothers and sisters in the body of Christ, a family created by the Holy Spirit that is eternal and unbreakable.

It isn't that Jesus is forcing his mother or us to make a choice between God and family, but he is cautioning us about the choice we must make if it arises. In his commentary

#### What Happened to Jesus' Childhood and Youth?

One question often asked in my classes is "Why don't the Gospel writers tell us more about Jesus' childhood and youth?" This is an understandable question. Luke and Matthew tell us about Jesus' birth and the immediate aftermath. Luke gives us one story about Jesus when he was twelve (today's passage.) But that is it. The next time we meet Jesus in the Gospels, he is at least thirty!

Though modern biographies usually spend considerable time on the upbringing and development of their subject, ancient "biographies" did not. In the ancient world, the closest things to modern biographies were writings they called "lives," such as those written by Plutarch and Suetonius. The purpose of these writings was to present an unveiling of the subject's public life and show why their character should be emulated. The ancient writers couldn't make things up, but they could move events around and even embellish them in order to make their point. Sometimes these "biographies" were structured chronologically, but some were also structured around themes in the subject's life. Childhood experiences mattered little, as did anything that happened prior to the subject's maturity and entry onto the public stage. The ancients had no illusions about understanding psychological motivations. Even physical appearances didn't matter to them; thus, we have little idea what Jesus looked like. We should not approach the Gospels as we would a biography from our day.

One caution – though Matthew and Mark are closest to an ancient Greek or Roman "Life," none of the Gospels can be easily categorized. These are Jewish writings and are deeply influenced by the Hebrew Scriptures.

on Matthew, Eugene Boring writes:

"Matthew's point is that those who have accepted Jesus' message, and thereby have been called to place the kingdom of God above even family loyalties . . . have found a new family in the community of disciples. [By stretching his hand out to the gathered disciples] Jesus signals his compassionate and direct response to those in need, his mighty act of deliverance to disciples in distress."<sup>1</sup>

When we come to faith in Jesus Christ we are taken into a new family. It doesn't replace the family into which we were born, but it does transcend that family.

We not only gain countless new brothers and sisters, but also gain Jesus as our brother (Matthew 12:50.) Take that in for a moment. God our Father and God our brother. The apostle Paul had much to say about our adoption into Jesus' family. The page four textbox takes you through Paul's extended metaphor of our adoption into God's family and the inheritance we have in Jesus.

You might take a few minutes the next time you are at church to look at each person as you would family. The body of Christ is neither a club nor an organization though it might take on the trappings of either. We are a family – brothers and sisters with one Father.

*Jesus, young and free (of mom!)*

If we continue to make our way back in time, we find ourselves in the midst of the single story we have from Jesus' youth. This incident certainly wouldn't have been any easier on Mary than the last one!

In the first few centuries after Jesus' resurrection, many stories and legends circulated about him. In these fanciful stories, the youthful Jesus amazes his friends, helps his parents, punishes his neighbors, and even turns a wooden toy into a living bird!<sup>2</sup> But the New Testament

<sup>1</sup>From Boring's commentary in the *New Interpreter's Bible*, p. 298.

<sup>2</sup>There are many purported "gospels" about Jesus. We have portions of nearly 20 and know of about another dozen. But most of them were written in the 3<sup>rd</sup> century or later. A few were written in the late 2<sup>nd</sup>

Gospels avoid all that. As noted in the accompanying text box, the Gospel writers tell us almost nothing about the young Jesus. Only Luke gives us anything and his story is remarkable for its lack of miracles, angels, or other special revelations. Indeed, the circumstances and his parents' reactions seem quite ordinary.

At that time, it was customary for Jewish men to go to Jerusalem at least three times a year for religious festivals. Entire families would accompany the men at least once a year for the Festival of Passover in the spring. In today's passage from Luke's gospel, Joseph, Mary, and their children are part of a large group of Galileans making their way to Jerusalem. The journey might have taken them ten days or more. After the festival was over, everyone headed back north to Galilee. You can picture a large group making their way up the dusty road, with packs of children and teenagers doing their own thing while the adults tend to the work of the journey. It is certainly no surprise that Mary and Joseph expected Jesus to be running around with cousins and friends. But, actually, Jesus took it upon himself to stay behind in Jerusalem!

Having raised several sons myself, I'd bet Mary and Joseph headed back to Jerusalem both anxious and angry. Sure enough, when they find Jesus, who is only twelve, at the temple, Mary angrily asks Jesus how it is that he could treat his parents in such a manner. I'm sure she didn't know whether to be angry with him or to hug him . . . probably both. After all, it had been several days. Whether you've had a teenager or simply been one, most of us can identify with the parents in this story. But with whom does Jesus identify?

During the days away from his parents, Jesus amazed all the adults (Pharisees, scribes, and priests) in the temple with his understanding and his answers to their questions. But Jesus' responses to his mother's questions are the center of this story. Jesus wonders how she couldn't know that it was "necessary" for him to be in "in my Father's house" (v. 49). *Necessary*. What an interesting choice of words. Not "ought to be" or "want to be" . . . but "necessary." Even at this young age, Jesus knew that his life would be driven by the divine imperative. He would do what he did because that would be the vocation laid out for him by God. His life would not be controlled by fate. He was not working toward some impersonal destiny. No one would coerce him into anything. He would simply *do* as he must, regardless of the consequences. God was revealing the boy's vocation to him and Jesus would be 100% faithful to that vocation, even if it took him to death on a cross.

But what must this young boy, soon to be man, do? Jesus is actually very ambiguous about this. The NRSV translates Luke's Greek, "I must be in my Father's house." However, "house" is not in the Greek; in fact, there is no word there at all! Hence, the KJV translates the phrase, "I must be about my Father's business." In the NRSV footnote, there is yet another rendering, "I must be about my Father's interests." Regardless of exactly what Jesus meant, in these few words he claims for himself a special relationship with God. God would shape his life.

Many of us spend decades trying to find our identity, to come to know who we are and to find purpose in our life. Surely, in this story, Luke wants us to understand that by the age of twelve Jesus had found his identity, affirming it in his unique relationship with YHWH, the God of Israel. While still a boy, Jesus understood that he was called to obedience. He will *do* as he *must*. Jesus had grown up fast. The boy Jesus understood that "*there are some things we do just because of who we are: 'It is necessary that I be in my Father's house.'*"<sup>3</sup> . . . and often in the presence of his mother!

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century. None were written in the first century. Such writings are often called something like the "Lost Books of the Bible." Hogwash. They weren't lost, just never accepted by the Christian community and were then set aside. Only the four New Testament gospels were written in the first century and have always been embraced by the Christian communities.

<sup>3</sup>from Alan Culpepper's commentary on Luke in the *New Interpreter's Bible*, Abingdon, 1995.

## We're Adopted!

So how is it that we are part of God's family? What does that really mean? The apostle Paul develops the metaphor of adoption and inheritance to describe our becoming God's children. In chapter 3 of his letter to the Galatians, Paul depicts the Old Testament Law as a custodian, who took care of God's children. The Law showed them how to live, and disciplined them.

Paul then mixes two metaphors. Paul begins with the image of an heir. Then, as now, fathers would set up estates for their children and appoint guardians or trustees who would control the estate until the children had come of age. Unlike today, under Roman law, children with a guardian had the legal status of a slave. In Paul's metaphor, it is God the Father who has set up the estate. The law is the guardian. It is all humanity who have lived as minors, as slaves even, under the guardianship of the law, bound to the "elemental spirits of the earth" (v. 3).

But . . . in an act of cosmic significance, God has intervened . . . the time has been fulfilled – the minors have become of age. The slaves have been freed!

How could this be? Paul explains to the Galatians that God has sent his own son – quite human (born of a woman) and quite Jewish (born under the law) – who has "redeemed" humanity, so that everyone might be adopted as God's children. Here, Paul introduces his second metaphor, that of adoption. This becomes a little clearer when we remember that Paul is writing to Christians who had not been Jewish; the adoption language would have been especially meaningful for them – as it is for us. Jewish-Christians would have seen themselves as having received their inheritance by birth. Paul makes clear that Gentile-Christians could claim adoption into God's family . . . a slave to a child (adopted or otherwise) to an heir! Whether born a son or adopted as a son, Paul sees no distinction before God. By sending his Son to free us from our prison, God has brought both Jew and Gentile into his newly created family.

This "legal" adoption is not the end of Paul's story. God sent his Holy Spirit to us as the sign and pledge of our adoption into God's family. As Cousar writes, "Just as an orphan taken into the home of foster parents may initially mistrust or at least wonder about the reception given by the new parents and may require some gesture to get over the feelings of being an outsider, so God's adopted children move about in fear until the Spirit operates at a deep level 'in our hearts' to corroborate not once but repeatedly the reality of the Father's love." It is striking that Paul uses the Aramaic word, "Abba," and striking that the early church preserved the original Aramaic as the writings of the New Testament were preserved and passed on. Clearly, we are to understand and find great joy in the intimate relationship we enjoy with God. God's Spirit helps us to overcome the timidity of newly adopted children and enables us to pray to God in this most intimate way.

## Questions for Discussion and Reflection

1. Imagine for a moment that Jesus was your son and you heard him pose the question, "Who is my mother?" How do you think you would have reacted? Surely there were many blessings being Jesus' mother, but you might spend a few minutes reflecting on the challenges. What do you think would have been the most difficult part for Mary as Jesus grew up and began his ministry?
2. Nearly every parent I've known bemoans their belief that "kids grow up too fast." I'm sure that Mary must have uttered a sentiment much like that while searching for her son. You might consider three main characters in this drama: Mary, Jesus, and the on-lookers in the temple. How might each of them have understood the scene where Mary confronts Jesus? . . . *First*, what does this scene reveal to us about Mary? What have we learned new about her character or her role as Jesus' mother? . . . *Second*, what does it reveal to us about Jesus? How might he have behaved differently from or similarly to other twelve year-olds? What do your answers reveal about your own understanding of the incarnation (the Christian proclamation that Jesus was "God-made-flesh," fully God and fully human)? . . . *Third*, imagine that you are one of the on-lookers in the temple when Mary comes storming (that is how I picture her!). Imagine that you've spent much of three days being amazed by Jesus' understanding of the Law, the Writings, and the Prophets. When you got home, what would you have told your family?

## Daily Bible Readings

Before reading each passage, take a few minutes to get a sense of the context. Your study bible should help. Jot down a few questions that come to mind from your reading of the passage.

<p><b>Monday, Genesis 27:1-45</b> The treachery in Isaac's own household; Jacob and his mother scheme to steal his brother's blessing</p>	<p><b>Tuesday, Mark 3:31-35 &amp; Luke 8:19-25</b> Two other versions of today's story from Matthew 12. How do they differ? How are they similar? What can we learn by comparing them?</p>
<p><b>Wednesday, Mark 7:9-13</b> Here, Jesus lifts up the importance of honoring parents, including economic support in their declining years. He claims that, by over-emphasizing traditions around monetary offerings to the Jerusalem temple, the Pharisees are discouraging people from taking care of their parents, i.e., keeping God's commandment.</p>	<p><b>Thursday, Matthew 1</b> Jesus as Messianic King: Son of David (from the genealogy) and Son of God (from the story of Joseph's obedience)</p>
<p><b>Friday, Hebrews 8</b> Jesus as high priest; Christ's covenant</p>	<p><b>Weekly Prayer Concerns</b></p>

## **Scott Engle's Weekday Bible Classes**

Join us whenever you can. Each week's lesson stands on its own. This is very "drop-in." Bring something to eat if you like. Bring a study Bible. On occasion Scott has to cancel class, so if you are coming for the first time, you can check [www.scottengle.org](http://www.scottengle.org) to make sure the class is meeting.

### **Monday Evening Class - now studying 1 Kings**

Meets from 7:00 to 8:15 in Piro Hall

### **Tuesday Lunchtime Class - now studying Daniel**

Meets from 11:45 to 1:00 in Piro Hall

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## **Scott's 11:00 Sunday Class in Festival Hall**

This is a large, lecture-oriented class open to all ages.

**Dec 14: The class potluck Christmas brunch  
You are welcome to join us!**

**Coming in January:**

*Paul and Women in the world of the first Christians*

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Scott's Weekly Bible Studies are available at [www.standrewumc.org](http://www.standrewumc.org). Just go to "worship" and then "sermons." You'll find the study with each week's recorded sermon. There is also a complete archive of the studies at [www.scottengle.org](http://www.scottengle.org)

## **Sermon Notes**

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