

***“Who Was Jesus? Part 1, When He was Just a Kid.”***

**[VIDEO: Visual Reality, Volume 10, “Who Was Jesus?”]**

So, how would you answer the question, “Who was Jesus?” We strive to be the kind of church where people can come with questions like this, and with answers like those you saw in this video. It’s a very good question and between now and Easter we’re going to be doing our best to answer it. To find out if Jesus was a mythical figure, a prophet, a teacher, a holy man, or something else. To look at what he did. **[STUDY GUIDE]**

Today is the first Sunday in this season of Lent. You see, in the Christian year there are seasons, just like there are seasons in nature. Lent is the season that we started on Wednesday at our Ash Wednesday service. It’s the season we’ll be in until Easter Sunday. Lent is a time for reflection, for deepening our faith, for spending more time with God. Over the centuries Christians have fasted during Lent. To fast means to give something up. For some that meant giving up a meal or two each day. For others it meant fasting one day a week. For some it has meant giving up certain foods or pleasures to make a sacrifice for God. Fasting in whatever form is a way to be more disciplined and as a way to make more time to pray, to identify sin in our lives and get rid of it with God’s help. Fasting helps us free up resources to share with people who have less than we do.

Now, I think that it’s a good thing to fast from something during Lent. To give up caffeine or desserts or playing video games. I encourage you to do that, it’s a way to honor our God, but here’s what I **really** care about you fasting...that’s giving up some of your precious time every day to read the scriptures—to take 10 minutes a day to read in the Gospel of Luke that we’re going to be looking at. My hope is that every one of the people at this congregation is reading the scriptures in this 40 day period. So that you feel his passion when we come to Maundy Thursday. So that when you come to Easter you are so ready to celebrate the resurrection of Christ. All it takes is just 10 minutes a day, and you will read the whole Gospel of Luke.

About every 3 years I want to come back to the Gospel of Luke and remind all of us of the Jesus we see in here. One of my favorite series of sermons is by a pastor by the name of Adam Hamilton on the Gospel of Luke and some of what he’s shared is what I want to share with you. You see, the Gospel of Luke is simply an awesome record of Jesus and his life and ministry. This is a Saint Paul’s gospel. The themes we’re going to look are the heartbeat of this congregation.

What I love about the Gospel of Luke is that Luke wants to paint a detailed picture of Jesus for us. So each week we’re going to look at the details in these portraits of Jesus, and maybe you’ll see some things you’ve never see before. Things about who he is and what he does and how the significance of his life impacts our lives today. I want you to be excited about that, excited about coming to hear these life changing stories of Jesus in new ways, or maybe for the very first time.

As we get started there are few things we need to know about Luke’s Gospel. First, we need to know that Luke traveled with the apostle Paul and helped to start many of the first churches in Israel. We know that Luke was a Physician and that’s important because there are several places in the gospel of Luke where he uses very specific medical terminology that wasn’t commonly used by ordinary people. It’s also important for us to know that Paul and Luke were in Rome at the same time and were killed at the same time for their beliefs about Jesus. This is important background information. It tells us that this Gospel that we’re going to study, the Gospel of Luke, was written by a man who was willing to die for that Gospel.

Think about that for a second. And let me ask you, how would you write a book if you had a pretty good idea that you would have to die for it? Would you make up all kinds of stuff that wasn’t based in reality? Or would you try to do your very best to write down things for those who would come after you. People you would never meet—your children’s, children’s children. Wouldn’t you write down things that were true about Jesus, so that they could have the best resources possible to come to believe in him like you had, and were willing to die for him?

Luke writes at the beginning of his Gospel why he’s putting all this down. He writes, **[SLIDE...]** **“Since many have undertaken to set down an orderly account of the events that have been fulfilled among us, <sup>2</sup>just as they were handed on to us by those who from the beginning were eyewitnesses and servants**

of the word, <sup>3</sup>I too decided, after investigating everything carefully from the very first, to write an orderly account for you, most excellent Theophilus, <sup>4</sup>so that you may know the truth concerning the things about which you have been instructed.” (Luke 1:1-4, NRSV).

What Luke would have done is taken those accounts written down right after Jesus' death and sorted through them and put them in an orderly account, an accurate account of what Jesus did and said. Luke wanted those who would come after him, after his impending death, to know the truth about Jesus. And here's what brings all this home. The reason why we're looking at the Gospel of Luke this season, is so that **you** might know the truth about Jesus, the same reason this Gospel was written almost 2000 years ago. So that you might be able to answer in an intelligent, informed way the question, "Who was Jesus, anyway?"

So over the next several weeks we're going to be answering that question by looking at parts of the Gospel of Luke. And I want to encourage you to bring your Bible to church with you every week during this series of sermons. Some of you do that already but many of you don't. My hope is that you will do that and if you don't have a Bible, please take one of the Bibles that is under a chair. We'll be looking at some details in the stories and you can look at them in your own Bibles and mark those places.

The story we're going to look at today comes from the first weeks of Jesus' life. There are only a handful of stories about Jesus' childhood. We have the accounts of his birth and all the events around his birth. We know that the shepherds came, then sometime after that the wise men. We know that Mary and Joseph took the baby Jesus to Egypt to flee from king Herod who wanted him dead. We know that when Jesus was 12 he got separated from his parents. You'll read that this week. But today we're going to look at a story about when Jesus was 40 days old. This comes from chapter 2 starting with verse 22 as Joseph and Mary present Jesus in the temple. It was a way of thanking God for the gift of a child and a way to present Jesus to God. In fact the law required that every parent make an offering of a lamb and dove, or two doves if you were poor. The offering was for purification because of the blood shed during childbirth. So Mary and Joseph were fulfilling the law.

Take a look at this scripture: **[SLIDE...]** “When the time of their purification according to the Law of Moses had been completed, Joseph and Mary took him to Jerusalem to present him to the Lord (as it is written in the Law of the Lord, "Every firstborn male is to be consecrated to the Lord"), and to offer a sacrifice in keeping with what is said in the Law of the Lord: "a pair of doves or two young pigeons."

Now there was a man in Jerusalem called Simeon, who was righteous and devout. He was waiting for the consolation of Israel, and the Holy Spirit was upon him. It had been revealed to him by the Holy Spirit that he would not die before he had seen the Lord's Christ. Moved by the Spirit, he went into the temple courts. When the parents brought in the child Jesus to do for him what the custom of the Law required, Simeon took him in his arms and praised God, saying: 'Sovereign Lord, as you have promised, you now dismiss your servant in peace. For my eyes have seen your salvation, which you have prepared in the sight of all people, a light for revelation to the Gentiles and for glory to your people Israel.'

The child's father and mother marveled at what was said about him. Then Simeon blessed them and said to Mary, his mother: 'This child is destined to cause the falling and rising of many in Israel, and to be a sign that will be spoken against, so that the thoughts of many hearts will be revealed. And a sword will pierce your own soul too.'

There was also a prophetess, Anna, the daughter of Phanuel, of the tribe of Asher. She was very old; she had lived with her husband seven years after her marriage, and then was a widow until she was eighty-four. She never left the temple but worshiped night and day, fasting and praying. Coming up to them at that very moment, she gave thanks to God and spoke about the child to all who were looking forward to the redemption of Jerusalem” (Luke 2:22-38, NIV).

Now, let's look at the painting that Luke is portraying in this passage. Let's look very closely because there are details here that Luke wants us to catch--details that are very important. First of all, in this painting, this word picture, you can imagine Mary, Joseph and the baby Jesus entering the temple. Picture them in your mind. Mary would have been in her mid-teens at that time. That was typically when women had their first

children at that time in history. They started families early because life-expectancy was only about 35 years. She was so young and walking in to the temple. The temple was being renovated at that time in history and it is magnificent. The Temple sat on a low mountain, and this would have been their view as they walked.

**[PICTURE: Temple simulation]**. As they walked into the temple courts they would have seen the Most Holy Place, the very center of the temple complex, rising 150 feet into the air. . **[PICTURE: Holy of Holies]** It had giant doors covered with gold. There was marble everywhere...a fantastic sight to see. The ceiling was 5 times the height of this ceiling. **[PICTURE: Temple aerial view]**. That's what Mary saw as a young mother holding that baby close to her chest. Joseph stands next to her. They both look around in awe. Do you see what's in his hands? It's a small cage with two doves in it.

The temple area is a busy place. The smoke rises from the altar where sacrifices are made, there are people in the prayer courts praying out loud. There were people selling animals for sacrifices and others who were exchanging Roman money for Hebrew money. It was noisy and loud. In the midst of that noise and activity an old man enters from one of the gates. **[PICTURE: old man]** We're told he was ready to die. He enters into that court area and is looking, looking intently. The Holy Spirit had prompted him to go to the temple that day. Suddenly he sees that couple with their baby. He makes his way to them as fast as he can, he walks with a limp. He is shouting something that Mary and Joseph don't quite understand. They're a little scared as this excited stranger comes up to them with this look of intensity on his face. They don't know what to think when this perfect stranger says, "Please, can I hold your baby, I have to see him, I have to see him with my own eyes. Please!" Mary sees something in him that lets her know it's OK and she hands over her baby with some hesitation. **[PICTURE: Simeon holding Jesus]**

There's Simeon. An old man, holding this baby as tears well up in his eyes saying, "Now, at last, Lord, you can take me because now I have seen the one you told me about, the one who will save his people. He's the one you promised, isn't he, Lord?!" He holds that baby close to his chest and praises God! But then he looks at Mary and his expression of joy turns to sadness. Mary's eyes meet his and he says, "Oh, but Mary, this child is destined to cause the piercing of your own soul." Words that would haunt Mary. She didn't understand what they meant at the time, but she would remember them on that day when her son was crucified—the piercing of a mother's soul.

Then all of the sudden somebody else approached them. This time it was a woman. She was 84 years old. **[PICTURE: Mother Teresa holding baby]** I picture her looking like Mother Teresa. In those days, when life expectancy was 35, she was considered ancient. She had lived to be 84 and had chosen to live in the Temple courts. She was there night and day, fasting and praying, waiting for the day when the messiah would come. Like Simeon, she is just drawn to this young family. Her whole life had been about that one moment in time. Can you see her? Can you picture her in your mind? Short, stooped over, her hands reaching out... "Simeon, Simeon, let me hold him. I must hold him." Mary takes baby Jesus out of Simeon's arms and puts him in the arms of this prophetess. She looks at the baby and says, "This, this is the one the prophets foretold!" She proclaimed that he was the "messiah, the chosen one of God."

Let this image come alive in your mind. There are three elements that I want you remember forever about this image. The first is the sacrifice that Mary and Joseph brought--two doves. That was the sacrifice brought by a poor family; people who could not afford to buy a lamb. I want you to remember this because Jesus talks about the poor a lot. He grew up in a poor home. There were nine mouths to feed in their house. Jesus had at least 6 brothers and sisters—there're listed in Mark's Gospel. Add Mary and Joseph and Jesus and that makes nine mouths to feed on the salary of a poor carpenter who didn't always have work. The fact is that Jesus grew up in poverty. Maybe that's why he would go on to say that, "whenever you feed the hungry or clothe the naked you are doing these things to me. And when you failed to care for the poor and needy, you failed me." Maybe that's one reason why Jesus told so many stories about the poor and how he had a special place in his heart for them. Jesus parents brought the sacrifice of a poor family. Jesus grew up in poverty.

Maybe it was that poverty that guided him in redefining greatness. He teaches that maybe all the stuff that we get entangled with, maybe it's not all that important anyway. Maybe, in fact, all our stuff can be a big problem. During this season you can do something for the poor: by filling up your love loaf, by continuing to

make offerings to the tsunami victims; by living simply so that other might simply live. Jesus knew poverty first hand and had a special place in his heart for the poor and we need to notice that.

The second part of the picture I want to point out is what Simeon and Anna said. Because they say some pretty wild stuff! But it wasn't the first time Mary and Joseph had heard some wild things like that. It happened first when the angel Gabriel appeared to Mary and said, "Mary, you're going to have a child and this child will be the Son of God!" She didn't understand what that meant. Joseph saw in a vision that the child was going to be born of the Holy Spirit and would be the savior of the world; he didn't know what that meant. Then after Jesus was born the shepherds came and visited and said, "We heard the angels and this is the messiah of God!" They didn't understand what that meant. And then the wise men came and gave him gifts and worshipped him. They didn't fully understand that either.

Now they go into the temple and Simeon and Anna affirm what Mary and Joseph had heard already. Over and over again you will read that Jesus is the one. This was no ordinary baby, in him God was coming near to us. In Jesus God was going to change the face of the earth. We need to notice what Anna and Simeon said.

And the last element of the picture I want you to focus on is the age of Anna and Simeon. Anna is 84 years old, we don't know exactly how old Simeon but we're told he's ready for death. Their age is significant. It's as if God is saying, "Look here. Don't miss this. Do you see their age? They're the ones I use most."

Some of the people in our church that I see God working so profoundly in their lives are our senior adults. When we came to Saint Paul's 10 years ago we found a vital, strong church. But there were several people who talked me and said, "Aaron, we're a strong church, but we know that there are things that we need to do and have to change if we're going to reach the lost and be more relevant." You might assume that those were younger people or young families saying those kinds of things, but actually they were the retired people! Senior citizens who had caught God's fire and wanted to share it! So many of our most dedicated workers, the ones who make the meals and do the behind the scenes work are over 65. If you come up here any day of the week you will see people giving of themselves to work with people of all ages, and many of them are older. They drive vans and keep our name tags up to date and in order and fold our newsletters and do so much. They do it because they see God at work and they are simply excited about that! I talked to Pauline Lewis at our lunch for our Senior Citizens last week. She had been up here two days in row the better part of both of those days cooking for kids, and youth and adults and other senior citizens. And Willa Rickman who teaches her Sunday School class every week—she's in her 90's and is one of the most encouraging people I've ever, ever been around. She sends me more encouraging notes, cards and letters than all the rest of you combined! She is doing God's work! And Anna Mae Higginbotham. I love to brag about her too. In her 90's she was speaking every other week at Souls Harbor and leading people to Jesus Christ!

Here's what I'm getting at: Please don't ever think that retiring means retiring out of doing God's work! Some people think that. Some people as they retire think, "Hey, since I'm retired I don't really want to do anything in the church. This is my time just for me. I want to play golf and travel. I'll give my tithes to the church and be in church when I can, but I'm just not going to commit to doing anything right now." I say that simply unacceptable. To that I say, "Don't you understand that your whole life was preparing you for this time of retirement? And God has been waiting for this for you." God is saying, "For your whole life you've been working 40 or 50 hours a week, but now you're mine." I want to say, "Don't you understand that God created you for more than golf and traveling around? God wants to use you. All your life experiences have been getting you ready for a time such as this."

When I retire do you know what I want to be? I want to be a volunteer church custodian. I really do! I know that doesn't sound very ambitious. But I want to do that! I want to sweep and mop and fix things. I love to fix things. I want to sip coffee with people as they pass through the church and hear their stories and minister to their souls and hold their kids and hand out candy. I want to cook in the kitchen for fellowship meals and wash dishes and drive vans for kids coming to Cross-training on Wednesdays or whatever day it will be. I want to live in the Temple of the Lord.

If you look at the Bible you see that most of the people that God used to do amazing things were over 65! And those of you who are here today and you're 35 and you're putting your money away in your IRA's every month. I want you to think clearly about what you're doing with that money. I want you to think clearly about what your retirement plans are going to be. As you dream about retiring in Hawaii and doing all sorts of different things, I want you to remember that retirement isn't retirement from the service to the Lord. Instead those can be the best years to serve him. Be thinking about that and planning for that. Be thinking, "What am I going to do for Christ's kingdom once I don't have to go to work everyday to earn that paycheck?" Yes, you can play golf more often too! But don't forget that until that moment when you breathe your last breath, God is still laying claim to your gifts and your life and you have a purpose and meaning.

This is our first glimpse at the real Jesus. Who was he? He was the fulfillment of prophecies and promises. He was born among the poor to bless the poor. And right off the bat he showed us that God is the God of the young and the old. Even when he was 40 days old, he was changing the world. And for today that is the Good News. In the name of the Father and the Son and the Holy Spirit. Amen.

This is just one portrait of Jesus from the Gospel of Luke, I hope you'll be here next week as we see Jesus wrestling with Devil in ways that you and I do every day too.

*I thank Rev. Adam Hamilton, pastor of The United Methodist Church of The Resurrection for his sermon series on this topic.*