**Jesus, the Obedient Son**

Based on [Luke 2:40-52](http://biblia.com/books/esv/Lk2.40-52)

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Christmas 2

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**There are themes, doctrines that continue to pop up throughout the season of Christmas.** First is that God has become one of us, a flesh and blood man in Jesus Christ. We call that the "incarnation." Christmas day we heard the Gospel of John 1:14 which reads, “And the Word became Flesh and dwelt among us.” Martin Luther was often preoccupied with this fact, and how much of an honour it is that the almighty and eternal God, alpha and omega, who can raise mountains and sink valleys with a word, had so honoured us as to become like us. **Angels sang when Jesus was born and they have less to sing about than we do**. For God did not become an angel; He did not honour angels by becoming like them. But angels and indeed all creation sings that God became a man. Imagine the sense of pride you would feel to find out that you were related to some famous and accomplished person. **That is nothing compared to the way we ought to feel knowing that we are related to and share the race of the God who created all things?** God is one of us, not in that he is sinful, but that he is human and shares our nature. That is the first especially Christmas doctrine.

The second is that, beyond becoming incarnate, that is a human being; God also *humbled* himself. We call that his "humiliation." Incarnation and humiliation...these are separate and distinct points. You see, God could have become a human being without humbling himself. He could have been born of a queen, wrapped in fine purple linen, and placed on an earthly throne. **No doubt he deserved to rule over all of us; no doubt this Christ child who is God had the divine right to be our master and tell us what to do on pain of death**. But instead, when God became man, Philippians says **he** ***humbled himself* by taking on the form of a *servant***. The rightful king and lord of all became a servant, submissive, obedient…even to death, even to death on a cross.

Our Gospel lesson today touches on both of these points. And as God’s Word is so marvelous, our lesson today expresses the tension between them. Our earthly minds can’t understand how someone can be both God and a servant, both all-powerful and humble at the same time. And this tension runs behind today’s story. **Jesus is twelve years old and his family, pious and obedient to the Lord, travels to Jerusalem for the Passover Feast.** And this is not jut going across town for church. This is a long trek to another city, on foot, for days. And when the days of the feast were fulfilled, Jesus’ parents begin to return to Nazareth, but after a day’s journey, they realized Jesus was not with them. (This may sound like negligent parenting, but they were likely travelling with a large group of friends and relatives, and it wouldn’t be odd for a parent to assume their twelve year old child is simply travelling with another group of relatives.) But when they realize he’s not with them, they turn back to Jerusalem and search for him. **After three days they found him in the temple, sitting among the teachers, listening to them and asking them questions. And all who heard him were amazed at his understanding and his answers**.

What a marvelous set up the Scriptures give us here. And so far it sounds about right for us. After all Jesus is God. **He needs to be in His Temple, in his Father’s house. He needs to be sitting with the rabbis and putting his wisdom on display as the child prodigy he is**. He is God’s Son, and so of course, and He can’t be trifling over human affairs, he can’t be bothered with attending to the schedule of his earthly parents. Sure the average child should listen to his parents, should stay put. When traveling, the average child shouldn’t wander off, but should obey his father and mother. But Jesus is beyond such human and earthly obligations as a son’s obedience to his parents, isn’t he?

Jesus is God and can do whatever he wants, that seems to work. But as the story continues, things get complicated. Yes this boy is God in the flesh, but he is also taking on the form of a servant. Yes he is the son of God but he comes not in glory but humility. Mary rebukes her son, saying, “**Son, why have you treated us so? Behold your father and I have been searching for you in great distress**.” Mary rebukes God! Who does she think she is. Well this is it, she is God’s mother, and she is being a mother to her son. That is her calling and she is faithful. And Jesus says, “**Why were you looking for me? Did you not know that I must be in my Father’s house?**” Jesus doesn’t put his mother in her place. Instead he explains himself--that he must obey his Father, meaning God--and that’s what he was doing. Jesus must obey his heavenly Father, but he doesn’t do so at the expense of his earthly parents.

When a step-father raises a step-child, there’s often this response to his attempts at discipline. Step-father says, “**Go to your room!**” The response: “**You can’t tell me what to do, you’re not my father**.” That’s rebellion. It’s also common for children to “play their parents off of one another,” if mom says no, ask dad, that way if they disobey mom, it’s because “**dad said I could.**” That’s disobedience. But Jesus doesn’t say or do these things, because Jesus is not rebelling against his earthly parents…he is obedient. **Jesus wasn’t just interested in making excuses, according to his humanity, the boy Jesus really thought his mother would understand why he had to be at the temple**.

If anyone had the right to say to his step-father-- “**You can’t tell me what to do, your not my father!**”—if anyone had the right to say that it’s Jesus; but he didn’t say that to Joseph. **If any child ever had a good case to make for pitting his Father’s authority against his mother’s, it’s Jesus, but he didn’t do that to Mary**. Amazingly, the scriptures point out that this was not a rebellion on Jesus part, or neglectful parenting from Mary and Joseph. It was a genuine misunderstanding, due to the incomprehensible circumstance that these parents were raising the very son of God himself. It says, “And they did not understand the saying that he spoke to them.” They did not understand. The boy Jesus was misunderstood, a theme for his whole life.

Here Jesus proves at the Temple that he understands more than the teachers, and his parents don’t understand. Who should be parenting who here? If anyone had the right to say, “**My parents are so out of touch, I don’t need to listen to them**” it’s Jesus, but he doesn’t treat his parents as though they don’t deserve to raise him. They are his earthly parents, and God gave them that calling, “that vocation.” God set them in authority over His Son. **And Jesus--who is not only God in human flesh, but also God in the form of a servant--honours his father and mother**. It says, “**And he went down with them and came to Nazareth and was submissive to them**.” Jesus, though he was in the form of God, kept the fourth commandment, he honoured his father and mother.

Jesus continued to honour his earthly father and mother. He submitted to Joseph’s teaching, and learned carpentry from him, the family trade. **And when his heavenly Father called him to active ministry, baptizing him with the Holy Spirit to begin his messianic work, Jesus did not cease to be a dutiful Son…but he obeyed his Father, even to death on a cross.**

And this tension of Christmas between God becoming a man and him becoming a servant continued when at a wedding in Cana the host ran out of wine, and his mother told him to do something about it. First he obeys his Heavenly Father, saying to his mother, “**Woman, what does this have to do with me? My hour has not yet come**?” He tells his mother the truth…that he did not come to use his God powers to simply lend a helping hand wherever he’s needed, but his miracles are all meant to point to the time of his glorification on the cross. **He makes the point, but then still submit to his mother, and honours her by performing his first miracle at her request**. Later on, when his time had come, Jesus was hanging from the cross looking down upon his mother and John his disciple. And he says to John, “**Behold, your mother**,” and he says to Mary, “**behold, your son**.” Even in death, Jesus is the dutiful son, who makes provisions that his mother is cared for at her old age and that his calling to honour his mother continues through his friend and disciple.

God--when he became man--had the vocation or calling of a servant, and so he obeyed earthly authorities, not only his parents, but the religious leaders and the government. When the chief priests and scribes had him arrested, he did not say “**Get your hands off me, do you know who I am? I’ll have your heads for this…I’m a king**!” Neither did he run to escape his captors. We know now--and Jesus certainly knew then--that in fact **the devil was at work in these sinful men as he was in Judas who betrayed him, as he was in Pilate who delivered him up**. But Jesus’ vocation, his God-given calling, was to be a servant of all, that means, though he was in the form of God, did not count equality with God a thing to be grasped. He wasn’t supposed to use his divine powers to crush evil. He knew that, even though these earthly authorities were sinful men and actively doing evil, he didn’t use that as an excuse to take matters into his own hands, but, “**as a sheep before the shearers is silent, he opened not his mouth.**” He knew that Satan may tempt and scowl and snort and scheme all he wants, but he’s not more powerful than God who works all things for the good of those who are called according to his purpose (Romans 8:28).

I think this is a central point to our Christian faith, and something that has led modern Christianity off the beaten path of the one catholic and apostolic church. We have forgotten the virtue of submission and obedience to earthly authority. Our constant temptation is disobedience and rebellion. God gives to each of us callings, “vocations”, stations in life and attendant responsibilities that He calls us to. **This doctrine of God has been replaced with the modern value of egalitarianism…the belief in the equality of all people, especially in political, social or economic life.** The bible teaches that servants should obey their masters, even when they’re not looking. Egalitarianism says, your boss is no better than you. You might have to listen to him to get your paycheque, but if you don’t agree with him, you don’t have to obey…especially if you can get away with it…calling in sick when you’re not; calling your cutting-corners “accidents”, fudging your time cards…after all, you put up with a lot from that boss of yours who thinks he’s so great. He’s nothing special, I don’t have to submit to him or serve him. We’re *equal*.

The bible says, “**Wives submit to your husbands in all things**.” Egalitarianism says, “Wives nag and pester your husbands until they submit to doing things your way, after all you have just as much say as he does. Your *equal*.” **I remember when I first read George Orwell’s disturbingly dystopic novel 1984, about a totalitarian society where the Government, called big brother had total control over every aspect of life.** And Big Brother encouraged children to rat out and betray their parents if they were doing something wrong, like speaking against the government. Egalitarianism says, “Only honour your parents or other authorities if you think they’re doing the right thing.” Egalitarianism, the modern teaching of radical equality has lodged a greater attack on the bible than any other. **The biblical virtues of loyalty and faithfulness are totally washed away when a culture loses its sense of “calling,” that some people are called by God to submit to others.** After all, if Jesus is a man like you and me; like Christmas teaches; and all men are equal…then the logic is inevitable…**I only have to listen to Jesus when I agree with him, ignore him when I don’t.**

Friends, the fourth commandment is still in effect today. **God still calls you to honour your Father and your mother, your government, your religious leaders, your boss and all earthly authorities.**  It is so tempting, to take matters into our own hands, to step outside of our place, our calling, and our vocation in order to do what we think is right and follow our heart instead of other people. But there is a word for that, ignoring or resisting those who have been given authority over you, it’s called rebellion. But Jesus never rebelled. When Pilate said to Jesus, “**Do you not know that I have authority to release you and authority to crucify you? Jesus answered him, You would have no authority over me at all unless it had been given you from above**.” Was Pilate abusing his authority? Yes. He was the governor of Judea, God gave him the authority of the sword to punish wrongdoers and protect the innocent. But Pilate used his authority to please the wrongdoers and allow an innocent man to be punished. **But here’s the point, Jesus recognizes that God gave Pilate that authority. Jesus knows that his father is working through Pilate even now in order to accomplish his purposes.** He is working through sinful Pilate, evil Pilate, in order to bring about the highest good. Jesus did not disobey Pilate, or the Chief priests, or even the Jews who shouted crucify him, because to disobey them would be to disobey his Father who set them over him. And it would prove him an unfaithful Son, because he would be shown to not trust his Father to deliver him. Jesus could have smote them with a word. He could have appealed to his Father and “**called down at once twelve legions of angels? But how then should the scriptures be fulfilled, that it must be so?**” (Matthew 26:53-54). His father has a plan, according to the scriptures

Jesus had multiple callings. Messiah, Servant, Human being, Son, Rabbi, probably more. **Each of these roles *God* gave him**. Though he was God, he did not have all authority in heaven and on earth until he Ascended into heaven. On earth, as a boy and a man in some roles he had more human authority, like Teacher and prophet. In others he had less, like Son and messiah. For the messiah, the chosen one, was chosen to be the *suffering* *servant*. As Isaiah wrote of him,

*“For* ***he grew up*** *before him like a young plant, and like a root out of dry ground; he had no form or majesty that we should look at him, and no beauty that we should desire him. He was despised and rejected by men; a man of sorrows, and acquainted with grief; and as one from whom men hide their faces he was despised, and we esteemed him not. Surely he has borne our griefs and carried our sorrows; yet we esteemed him stricken, smitten by God, and afflicted. But he was wounded for our transgressions; he was crushed for our iniquities; upon him was the chastisement that brought us peace, and with his stripes we are healed.*

*…* ***All we like sheep have gone astray; we have turned—every one—to his own way; and the Lord has laid on him the iniquity of us all.*** *He was oppressed, and he was afflicted, yet he opened not his mouth; like a lamb that is led to the slaughter,* ***and like a sheep that before its shearers is silent, so he opened not his mouth***

*…****Yet it was the will of the Lord*** *to crush him; he has put him to grief; when his soul makes and offering for guilt, he shall see his offspring; he shall prolong his days;* ***the will of the lord shall prosper*** *in his hand. Out of the anguish of his soul he shall see and be satisfied; by his knowledge shall the righteous one, my servant, make many to be accounted righteous, and he shall bear their iniquities* (Isaiah 53).

The gospel today ends with the claim that the boy Jesus increased in wisdom and stature and in favor with God and man. There’s that tension again, the Human God humbling himself, having all wisdom from eternity yet submitting himself to grow in it. And so it was in adulthood to. Jesus knew that his father had a plan, and that it was necessary that he be in His Father’s house, necessary that he be the temple sacrifice, necessary that he suffer at the hands of sinful men and die. **He knew this, but according to his humanity and his servanthood, he didn’t understand why.** And so the night of his betrayal he fell on his face and prayed, “**Father, if it be possible, let this cup pass from me; nevertheless, not as I will, but as you will**.” Jesus didn’t pester his Father, or bombard him with an endless barrage of “why, why, why,” like your children do in their disobedience, nor did he complain to his friends as you do when your boss gives an order you don’t agree with. Instead he came in full submission, acknowledging the Fathers authority, pleading for another way, but finally in faithful obedience saying, My Father, if this cannot pass unless I drink this cup (of wrath on the cross), your will be done.

And because he perfectly obeyed His Father, ***your disobedience is atoned for***. Because he perfectly submitted to his earthly parents, ***you are cleansed from you rebellion.*** Because he poured out his Spirit on the cross; **the Spirit was poured out on you in your baptism that you might walk in the newness of life**, obedient to God through obedience to those he has placed over you. For you are a disciple of Christ, you have been called to be a servant of all, becoming all things to all people that by all possible means those whom you serve might be saved, which is the good and gracious ***will*** of your Heavenly Father.