

+ Luke 2:41-52 + Such an Amazing Boy! + First Sunday after Christmas + 27 December 2009 +

He seemed like such an ordinary boy, but deep down they knew he was extraordinary. Twelve years had passed since the birth of Joseph and Mary's son. Amazing things had happened leading up to that birth. While they were still engaged, an angel appeared to Mary and informed her that she would be the virgin mother of the long-promised Messiah. Later when Mary visited her cousin Elizabeth, she received a strange greeting. Elizabeth called Mary **"the mother of my Lord"** and blessed both Mary and her unborn child. On top of that, elderly Elizabeth was miraculously pregnant with a child, who would **"make ready a people prepared for the Lord."** This unborn forerunner leaped within his mother's womb at Mary's greeting. Mary's son was the Son of God. Such an amazing boy!

When Mary had started to show signs of pregnancy, Joseph assumed she had been unfaithful. He planned to divorce her quietly so she would avoid condemnation. One night, though, an angel appeared to him. **"Joseph... do not be afraid to take Mary home as your wife, because what is conceived in her is from the Holy Spirit."** So Joseph took Mary in as his wife. Her child was the Son of God. Such an amazing boy!

Nine months passed quickly, when a decree was issued that everyone had to return to their family's town of origin to be registered for a census. Caesar needed revenue to run his empire. Joseph and Mary came from the line of David, who came from Bethlehem about three to four days' journey from Nazareth in the north to the southern capital region around Jerusalem. So Joseph and Mary prepared for the journey and made their way up and down the rocky hills and dusty roads of Palestine to busy little Bethlehem.

While there, Mary started having contractions. Joseph hurried from inn to inn looking for a place to stay, but every room was filled with distant and not-so-distant relatives. He started to get a little frantic as Mary's contractions increased and they still couldn't find a place to stay. Finally one innkeeper told Joseph he didn't have any rooms available, but did have a stable, more likely a cave where the animals of his guests were kept. It wasn't ideal, but it was warm and quiet amongst the cattle and sheep. **"While they were there, the time came for the baby to be born, and she gave birth to her firstborn, a son. She wrapped him in cloths and placed him in a manger, because there was no room for them in the inn."** The child was born! Mary was exhausted, yet filled with joy. Joseph cradled the little boy in his loving arms as any daddy would, but there lay the most beautiful sight ever seen—God in the flesh. Such an amazing boy!

Later that night a scraggly bunch of shepherds almost tripped over themselves peering into the stable. "Do you see it? There! A baby! Wrapped in cloths! Lying in a manger! Just like the angel said!" Mary and Joseph could only stare in amazement as these unkempt, ripe-smelling shepherds threw themselves to the floor before their newborn son with tears streaming down their cheeks. "Messiah!" "Lord!" "Savior!" Before rushing out, the shepherds explained what happened out in the fields. A glorious angel had appeared out of nowhere and terrified them, but the angel had good news, **"Today in the town of David a Savior has been born to you; he is Christ the Lord."** Suddenly the sky filled with the heavenly host singing, **"Glory to God in the highest, and on earth peace to men on whom his favor rests!"** Mary could only **"treasure up all these things"** and wonder about them. Her son was the Son of God. Such an amazing boy!

The family began to settle into a routine. As God had commanded his people, eight days after his birth, Joseph had Jesus circumcised, marking him as a child of God. At that time, he named the boy Yeshua or Jesus. It was a common name, but one which the Lord had commanded for this amazing boy, who would **"save his people from their sin."** Joseph and Mary began to adapt to ordinary life with a newborn.

About a month later, the little family made their way to the temple in Jerusalem to offer the required sacrifice of purification for Mary following childbirth. Even then, the Lord reminded them who their son really was. There was an old, faithful believer named Simeon, known around the temple because the Holy Spirit had actually promised that he would see Messiah before he died. Without warning, he rushed up to the new parents and joyfully grabbed the child right out of Mary's arms. This was no kidnapping, but a faithful believer praising his God, **"My eyes have seen your salvation, which you have prepared for all people!"** Joseph and Mary could only marvel at what took place. As he handed the child back to Mary, Simeon told her, **"This child is destined to cause the falling and rising of many in Israel, and to be a sign that will be spoken against...And a sword will pierce your own soul too."** An aged prophetess named Anna came up to them too and gave thanks to God, telling everyone about him. All Mary and Joseph could do was marvel at their amazing boy.

The couple returned to Bethlehem and got used to life with a baby. Then one day great men from the east called Magi appeared at their home bearing expensive gifts of gold and fragrant incense and myrrh. These men had traveled hundreds of miles to worship an infant king—the Son of God, but there was trouble brewing and the Magi departed shortly thereafter. About the same time, an angel appeared to Joseph in a dream telling him to pack up the family and leave for Egypt to get away from jealous King Herod. Joseph obeyed and they fled. When the time was

right, one more angel told Joseph to bring the family back to Israel. This time, though, the family headed north back home to Nazareth and they settled in.

Years passed. No more new revelations or angel appearances or strange occurrences. Little Jesus started to grow up like other boys his age. He was bright. He was strong. Mary and Joseph got used to seeing this boy as “their” son. From all that they had seen and heard, they knew he was extraordinary, but even so, he seemed like such an ordinary boy, but without sin.

At age twelve, Jesus became a “son of the covenant”, required now to observe all the laws and festivals of the Old Testament. Spring came and it was time for everyone to go up to Jerusalem to celebrate the Passover. Jesus was getting old enough that his parents didn’t have to have him with them all the time. Mary and Joseph assumed he was with family and friends, when it was time to go home, and they would see him in the evening.

After traveling all day, however, Jesus was nowhere to be found. “Where is he?” The worried parents searched everywhere for their son, but he was still nowhere to be found. Finally they headed back to Jerusalem. They searched the great city for three days until they came to the temple courts, where there was something unusual going on. There was Jesus, their son **“sitting among the teachers, listening to them and asking them questions.”** Jesus was engaging in their conversation and stunning the experts in the Law with his wisdom! **“Everyone who heard him was amazed at his understanding and his answers.”** “Who is this child from backwater Galilee confounding the rabbis? Such an amazing boy!”

...But Mary and Joseph didn’t see that. They saw their son Jesus. Filled with frantic anxiety, Mary couldn’t help, but blurt out, **“Son, why have you treated us like this? Your father and I have been anxiously searching for you.”** You can’t blame Mary for talking like that. Any parent whose child has gone missing would talk the same way, but this was no ordinary child. He had to humbly remind his parents whose son he really was. **“Why were you searching for me?” “Didn’t you know I had to be about the things of my Father?”** Jesus wasn’t being disrespectful. He was simply reminding them that he had to be there. He was not Joseph’s son, but the Son of God.

His parents didn’t understand, but even so, Jesus humbly submitted to their authority. Mary didn’t understand, but she still **“treasured all these things”** and never forgot them. Jesus grew **“in wisdom and stature...in favor with God and men.”** As Jesus grew into an adult, God was well pleased with him and so was everyone around him. “Such an amazing boy!” Little did most people realize, but this amazing boy would one day reveal himself to be an extraordinary Savior, living a perfect life, dying an awful death on a cross, and gloriously rising from the dead for the sins of all mankind, but to most, he was just ordinary.

So ordinary, yet so extraordinary. That always seems to be the way our God operates. He uses seemingly ordinary ways to reveal himself and his salvation—a divine Savior in the flesh, words on a page, water poured over the head, bread and wine eaten. It all seems so ordinary that it’s easy to take Jesus and his salvation for granted or even be underwhelmed by it all. Perhaps you expect the true God to be more glorious, flashy, successful, powerful, but then you see the weak infant in the manger, the bloody body hanging on a cross, or hear the words, see the water, taste the bread and wine and wonder how he can do anything at all through such un-amazing means.

It’s easy to be like Mary and Joseph and take for granted the Savior and his “ordinary” ways. I mean, you hear about him Sunday after Sunday, perhaps even in daily Bible readings or devotions. You get used to him being there very day and forget how extraordinary he really is. After a while, the Savior seems limited, ordinary, little, a spiritual buddy and not the Savior who gave his life and took it up again to pay for every one of your sins. That’s why you and I are so amazed when Jesus does act like who he really is—the true God.

That’s why Jesus comes to you through his Word and Sacraments and reminds you who he really is, why he came, and how he saves and strengthens you. You need the reminder like Mary and Joseph. Really isn’t it all amazing? The Word made flesh lying in a manger. The Savior of the world crucified on a cross. The tomb left empty by its occupant. Really isn’t it all amazing? The words of Holy Scripture change hearts and strengthen faith. The water and word of Holy Baptism create faith and welcome the baptized into the Savior’s waiting arms. The bread, wine, body, and blood of the Holy Supper provide forgiveness and life. By grace through these ordinary means, your Savior opens your eyes like he opened the eyes of his parents to see that the ordinary things of our God really are extraordinary and do extraordinary things. After all, they are what brought you here and will bring you home to heaven someday. There is no other way. With Christ’s forgiveness and life-giving presence, you see Mary’s ordinary boy for who he really is—your extraordinary Savior. Such an amazing boy! Amen.