

Your Appointed Time Update

Yea, the stork in heaven knoweth

her appointed times .. Jer. 8:7



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Divine Encounters

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. And when his parents saw him, they were astonished. And his mother said to him, "Son, why have you treated us so? Behold, your father and I have been searching for you in great distress." And he said to them, "Why were you looking for me? Did you not know that I must be in my Father's house?" Luke 2:46-49 ESV

As we turn our thoughts and studies towards Jesus' birth this joyous Christmas season, we find that Matthew and Luke are the only passages we have on the birth of Jesus, and even they don't go into great detail. Following Luke's path, in chapter two we find how he briefly describes his birth, his circumcision, and jumps all the way to the time when Jesus joined an advanced Bible study in the temple at the age of twelve. At this rapid succession of events, it is hard not to notice how much Jesus grew in stature, wisdom and favor with God and man as compared to how much Mary and Joseph apparently had forgotten over the years.

Luke particularly focuses on Mary as she receives one divine encounter after another, as well as how she processed this explosion of God-activity and information. One would have to assume that Luke is showing the reader that each message from God should be treasured and held dearly because one day in the not too distant future, it will, without a doubt, be needed to see you through life's journey. The first encounter Mary had was with Gabriel, the angel sent from the presence of God. He gave her a message concerning the holy conception of Jesus, the Son of God. From the onset, Luke specifically makes note that she wisely says, "Let it be to me according to your word" (Luke 1:38). This of course is on the heels of Zacharias' mishandling of a divine message delivered by the same angel concerning the birth of John the Baptist (Luke 1:19-20).

After Mary's encounter with the angel, God confirms his message when she visits Elisabeth who was pregnant with John the Baptist. The shepherds again confirm God's message as their steps were divinely

ordered to the birth site of Jesus. Luke again gives us another clue as to how Mary is processing all this information and explains that she "treasured up all these things, pondering them in her heart" (Luke 2:19). Eight days later, we advance to Jesus' dedication and circumcision. While at the temple, Mary and Joseph received two other confirmations. A devout man named Simeon who had been waiting a long time to see God's salvation, proclaimed that he could now depart in peace having seen the holy child. He also warned Mary of the agony she would face at the death of Jesus. Anna, a prophetess abiding at the temple, testified of the holy child to others who were also awaiting the promised Messiah.

Now at the end of chapter two, Luke lands us back at the temple twelve years later for the Feast of the Passover. We are told that this was a yearly event for Jesus' family, but this year we are told that "the boy Jesus stayed behind in Jerusalem" (Luke 2:43). It took mom and dad a whole day to notice that Jesus was not with the group. Frantically, they returned to Jerusalem. Three days later they found him in the temple sitting with the teachers, "listening to them and asking them questions" (Luke 2:46). I want to note two things here. First, from the scriptures it appears that it took them three days after returning to Jerusalem to find him in the temple. As an observer of the series of the events that Luke has taken us on, in a short amount of text but over the span of twelve years to be exact, why would the temple be the last place that the parents would look for Jesus instead of the first? Secondly, after all that was said of the holy child, why would the parents be "astonished" to find the Son of God in Bible study? Maybe it was the fact that he appeared to leading the class! No, the passage did not say he took over the Bible study, but it did say he was found listening and asking questions of the teachers. Luke does, however, especially notes how the teachers "were amazed at his understanding and his answers" (Luke 2:47). Although Jesus had amazing understanding at the age of twelve, I think this beautifully concurs with the point that Luke makes of how Jesus not only "increased" in stature, but he also "increased" in wisdom. Increasing in the things of God can only take

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place as we faithfully attend Bible study with learned teachers where we actively listen and ask questions. This is why people cannot grow spiritually the way God intends while attending only one service a week where questions are not even permitted.

Mary takes this all very personally and asks, "Son, why have you treated us so? Behold, your father and I have been searching for you in great distress." Then Jesus, well beyond his years, asks a most amazing question: "Why were you looking for me? Did you not know that I must be in my Father's house (Luke 2:39)?" At this point, for those of us who are parents, it is very hard for the parent in us not to come out, but as an observer, Luke surely wants us to see this in a different light. After all, given all the God-activity and prophecies concerning this holy child, isn't this where you would expect him to be? The account concludes by simply saying that the parents "did not understand the saying" (Luke 2:50). Luke also points out that Jesus didn't apologize for his actions, he simply adjourned his Bible study for the time being and was "submissive to them." Again, we find that Mary "treasured up all these things in her heart" (Luke 2:51). Maybe this event served as a refresher course for Mary.

But let's get back to the thought provoking question. It is hard to forget here that lost twelve year olds just don't ask parents, "Why were you looking for me?" But that is the point; Jesus was not lost. I purposely quoted the passage from the ESV Bible instead of the more familiar KJV because of the way it renders the latter part of the question: "Did you not know that I must be in my Father's house?" The question in the KJV Bible reads: "Wist ye not that I must be about my Father's business?" I think the ESV challenges us to see God' House in a different light! Now, I know as New Testament believers that we as living stones make up the house of God and not the brick and mortar, but think about what Jesus said. How reverent were you the last time you stepped in your house of worship? Did you skate in talking to your friends about what movie you saw last or what you were following on Facebook during the week? Did you even stop and think that this was a holy place to worship God? Just because we as believers are now the house of God, doesn't give us the right to disrespect our designated spot to worship in our attitudes and deeds. We should always remember that this is where we corporately meet with God on a weekly basis. Jesus, at the age of twelve even, knew full well that the place he entered and apparently had no intention of leaving was his Father's house. I am convinced that all of our worship services would have a different outcome if we entered God's house with the same reverence as Jesus did that day.

He went a step further though. He said. "I must be in my Father's house." As one preacher so aptly pointed out, you get breakthroughs in life when you turn your "shoulds" into "musts." As long as we think we should go to church, we will allow every excuse known to man

keep us from God's house, but when we turn the "should" into a "must," we'll get up and go even when we don't feel like it. At twelve, Jesus decided to "stay behind" for Bible study, but near the end of his life, righteous indignation or the zeal of the Lord consumed him so when he saw people that had the audacity to set up a convenient store on the doorsteps of God's house. Mind you, these convenient stores provided everything the worshiper needed for proper worship, the proper currency of money for your offering, turtle doves, pigeons, and the like. Jesus did not see this as a much needed service to the worshipper, but he saw it rather as a total distraction from what the main focus should be when we go to God's house, prayer.

Jesus recalls the words of Isaiah the prophet to rebuke the money-changers: "It is written, My house shall be called the house of prayer; but ye have made it a den of thieves" (Matt 21:13). No doubt if Jesus made a whip and drove the money-changers off the doorsteps of his Father's house, he wouldn't take too kindly to some of the merchandising that goes on in the name of God today! I am more certain that he is not happy about all the things we allow to distract us from our main focus of being a "house of prayer for all people" (Is. 56:7). Later Jesus has this to say about worship. He told the woman at the well that there was coming a day and now is, that the Father is seeking for true worshipers to worship God in spirit and in truth. He further explained to her, "God is spirit, and those who worship him must worship in spirit and truth (John 4:23-24)." God's message to us throughout the Bible concerning worship is clear: worship is a must and not an option.

The lackadaisical attitude we are describing here, is only a problem for those who attend the house of God and not for those who never "dart the doors." Flat out refusing to attend is a real problem, but we will have to leave that for another lesson. For those of us who do heed God's commandment to "go into the house of the Lord," the attitude we have about worship while at God's house is so important (Ps. 122:1). As a pastor, you are privy to many of the requests that members have before the Lord, and at the same time, you are very aware of the level of their service to God. It became evident to me while observing how people enter the house of God that God would release our blessings with the same intensity that we serve him with. Some people place such a priority on the things of God, on doing what he asks them to do, while others are so nonchalant and low-key about coming to God's house and his work. But sad to say, it is the nonchalant ones that have the most distress calls. God also wants to have divine encounters with us at his house more so than any of us can imagine, but taking our cue from a twelve year old, it is imperative that we go meet him and imperative that we go with the right attitude and the right purpose.