

Title: "The Jewishness of Jesus!"

Text: Luke 2:41-52; Deuteronomy 6:1-9

As we continue to "re-introduce" ourselves to Jesus this Fall, I want you to turn with me to a little story from Jesus childhood that I don't think I have ever preached on before.

It is found in Luke 2:41-52, and it is that one story we have of Jesus' early life between his infant birth and his adult baptism and subsequent ministry.

It is the one place where we catch a glimpse of Jesus boy.  
-He's about 12 years old.

Luke is the only Gospel writer who includes this story in his gospel,  
-and he probably heard this story directly from Jesus mother Mary.

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"Every year Jesus parents went to Jerusalem for the Feast of the Passover."

My friends, as we are re-introducing Jesus this Fall, I don't want us to miss an essential part of who Jesus was and is:  
-He was Jewish.

Now that may not sound like an astounding revelation to you,  
-but I think most of us assume that Jesus was a Christian.

But for all the 33 years Jesus lived as a man on this earth,  
-there was no such thing as a Christian.  
-There was not yet any such thing as Christianity.

So I want us to pay attention for the next couple of weeks to the fact that Jesus was born and raised as a Jew in Israel.  
-His parents were faithful Jews.  
-They went up to Jerusalem for the Feast of Passover every year, and brought their sacrifices to the Temple.  
-They went on Sabbath days to their local synagogue to hear the Torah read and expounded upon.  
-They prayed every day, and taught their son to do the same.

This little glimpse we see of Jesus at 12 years old is of a young Jewish boy who thinks of God as “his Father”  
-and loves the Scriptures,  
-and enjoys sitting among the teachers of Israel, listening to them and asking questions.

And the teachers of Israel seem to enjoy talking with him, too.  
-They have not sent him away as a “just a kid.”  
-They seem to be quite taken with this young man.  
-It says here that “they were amazed at his understanding and his answers.”  
-So you see, they were also engaging Jesus with questions and exploring the depths of what he knew.

And this was a very “Jewish” thing to be doing: sitting at the Temple and talking Torah with the teachers and Elders of Israel.  
-And Jesus is reveling in it!  
-He seems to be having so much fun that he doesn’t realize the Festival in Jerusalem is all over  
-and his family and friends have all headed home!

And when his family comes all the way back to Jerusalem to find him,  
-his mother Mary may have been a little exasperated with him, but it says here that “she treasured all these things in her heart.”  
-She held on to these memories of how Jesus was growing up....as a good Jew.

Luke says Mary saw Jesus growing in wisdom and stature, and in favor with God and his people.

My friends, that is a statement of what every good Jewish parent longed for their children to be and to do.  
-To grow in wisdom and stature and in favor with God and God’s people.

You and I want our kids to be happy and healthy and wealthy.  
-Jewish families in Jesus’ day wanted their kids to have godly wisdom and stature, to live in God’s favor, and with the respect and favor of their community.

That's how Jesus was being raised by Mary and Joseph.

-He was being raised as a good Jew.

-And Mary treasured seeing that it was being realized in her first born son, Jesus.

Now why am I highlighting Jesus' essential "Jewishness" today?

-Well, it's because understanding Jesus "Jewishness" helps us to understand Jesus.

-It helps us to be re-introduced to who Jesus really was, and how he thought, and why he did and said the things he did.

We need to realize that Jesus was not a 21<sup>st</sup> Century modern American Christian.

-He was a First Century Palestinian Jew, living within the broader Roman Empire.

And next week I'd like to introduce you to that broader geo-political context in which Jesus lived.

-But for today I would simply like to look with you at what Jesus, as a young boy of 12, would have learned growing up as a Jew in Israel.

And I'd like to begin by introducing you to the *Shema*.

-The Hebrew word "*shema*" means "hear," and it is the first word of that passage we read earlier from Deuteronomy 6 that proclaims,

"Hear, O Israel, the LORD our God, the LORD is one.

Love the LORD you God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your strength."

My friends, that was and is the essential Creed of Judaism, and it is called the "Shema" because of that first word, "Hear."

And as it goes on to say in Deut. 6, those words were to be:

-fixed on their Jewish hearts,

-and impressed upon their children,

-and talked about when they sat at home or walked along the road, and when they lay down to sleep and got up in the morning.

- Those words were to be on their hands and on their foreheads (symbolizing that those words were to guide the work of their hands and the thoughts of their minds)
- And they were to write them on the doorframes of their houses and on their gates,
  - so that coming or going they would remember to love the Lord their God with all their heart and soul and strength.

That was the place of the *Shema* in the life of a faithful Jew growing up.

It was the first prayer a Jewish child would be taught to say.  
-And so Jesus, every day when waking up in the morning and going to bed at night, would recite the *Shema*.

And as you can see in Deuteronomy, it was also a lifestyle every Jew was meant to live.

- They weren't just words one was to learn to recite.
- Loving God wherever you went, and whatever you did, was a life to be lived.
  - It was a lifestyle to be passed on to your children.
  - It was a lifestyle that was to impact the way you treated your family and your neighbors.
  - It was a lifestyle that impacted how you did your work and treated your co-workers.
  - It was a lifestyle that enabled one to "grow in wisdom and stature, and in the favor of God and God's people."

This is the lifestyle Jesus was raised to live, and Mary treasured watching Jesus grow to thrive in that lifestyle.  
-He was becoming a person who loved God His Father with all his heart and soul and mind and strength.

And so it is no wonder when later in his life, when the adult Jesus encounters an expert in the law who asks him, "Of all the commandments, which is the most important?"  
-Jesus answers by reciting the *Shema*: "Hear, O Israel, the Lord our God is one, and you shall love the Lord with all your heart and all your soul and all your strength.

That, Jesus says, is the first and greatest commandment.

And there was not a Jew around who would have disagreed with him.

But here's where it gets really fascinating:

-Jesus then goes on to amend the *Shema*.

-He adds to it!

-He tells this expert in the Law that there's a second commandment that's just as important as the first:

"Love your neighbor as yourself."

"All the law and the prophets hang on these two commandments together," Jesus said.

Wow, Jesus amends the *Shema*!

-That's a little "cheeky."

And it's not because the commandment to love your neighbor as yourself is a bad thing.

-No, that is a commandment that is also right out of the Torah.

-The expert in the Law would know he was quoting Leviticus 19:18.

But Leviticus 19:18 was not the *Shema*.

-It was indeed important to love one's neighbor,

-and that would be a part of what living out the Torah would look like.

-But the *Shema* was the *Shema*!

-And you weren't supposed to mess with it.

I mean, you all know the Apostles' Creed that we recite.

-What if some Sunday I had us all stand and recite the Apostles' Creed,

-but I added a few more lines after "and the life everlasting?"

-What if I told you I just thought there were a few more things that should have been said in the Creed, so I amended it?

-I would hope you'd give me a good talking to!

-It's not up to me to amend the Creed.

So you need to know, that for Jesus as a Jew to amend the Jewish creed, the *Shema*,

was a pretty eye-raising thing to do.

Jesus was taking the “Love God” *Shema*, and making it a  
“Love God, Love others” *Shema*.

He was taking the Jewish Faith, and “tweaking it.”

- He wasn't criticizing it. He wasn't trying to replace Judaism.
- He was actually doing with this expert in the Law, the very same kind of thing he had been doing with the teachers at the Temple when he was 12 years old.
- He was discussing the Torah.
- He was wrestling with the texts.

And in tweaking the *Shema*, He was simply bringing forth an emphasis of the Torah that had not been emphasized in quite that way before.

- And it was surprising for him to do that, but the funny thing is,
- once he had raised “loving others” up to the level of “loving God,”
  - and said that all the law and prophets hang on both of these commandments together,
  - good Jewish people could see how true it was.

- They could look at the 10 commandments themselves, and see that actually,
- the first four commandments were focused on loving God with all one's heart,
  - and the last six commandments were focused on what it means to love your neighbor.

- They could look at the words of the prophets and see that indeed, everything they said centered on calling people back to a love for God,
- and calling people to live righteously and lovingly toward one another.

- Those who knew their Scriptures, could clearly see that loving God *and loving others* truly were at the heart of what a life of living Torah looked like.
- The “Jesus” version of the *Shema* really was true to Torah.

And so more and more Jews began to follow this Jesus.

And you know what they called him? Rabbi.  
-That is a very Jewish term. It means “teacher.”  
-And some people called him, “Rabboni” which is more personal and means “my teacher.”

Jesus had not had formal training to become a rabbi,  
-but we can see that even from the time he was 12 years old, he was acting like a rabbi.  
-He was engaged with the other teachers of Israel in an ongoing dialog about the Scriptures;  
-what they mean and how to live them.

Jesus was not against Judaism.  
-He wasn't trying to start a new religion called Christianity.

He was actually proclaiming and living the *Shema* in everything He did.  
-And in amending the *Shema* to include the love of others,  
-he was actually helping that expert in the Law, and all the rest of us learn to live the *Shema* more fully than we ever had before.

Because in loving others, we ARE actually loving God and obeying all the law and the prophets.

That's good Judaism.  
-Jesus was a great Jewish Rabbi.  
-We would say the best Jewish Rabbi ever.

As we get re-introduced to Jesus this Fall, I want to spend some time over the next couple of weeks continuing to explore with you what kind of new perspectives we gain on Jesus from seeing him as a Jew and as a Rabbi.

For today, as we come to the communion table to renew the Covenant in Jesus' body and blood,  
-invite Jesus to be your Rabbi, your teacher,  
-And to fill you with His Holy Spirit so that you might go forth to live the Jesus' *Shema* in your life,  
'loving God every day with all your heart, and loving others every day as yourself.'  
-Let's pray.