

From the Cradle to the Cross

December 26, 2021

Overarching Theme: In 2021, FUMC will be SENT with the peace of Christ!

Instructions:

When using this material as teacher, feel free to pick and choose the point you want to emphasize in the lesson. *The format of the curriculum is designed to have an abundance of information in which to refer as desired.*

Core Point:

On Easter evening, the Risen Christ appears to his gathered disciple for the first time since Good Friday and speaks these words: "Peace be with you. As the Father sent me, so I send you." Just as Jesus sent his disciples into a divided, conflicted 1st Century with his peace, so he sends us into a divided, conflicted 2021 with his peace.

Luke:

The Gospel in itself doesn't mention who the author is, however, many considerations support the early Christian tradition that the author was Luke, a physician, who became a close friend and companion of Paul. Although Luke was not an eyewitness of the life of Jesus himself, yet he would have gathered information from eyewitnesses along with his access to other accounts, even as he was involved in the growth of the early church which he records in his sequel – Acts of the Apostles. In the beginning of his Gospel account Luke mentions that he used great care in collecting information for his book. Luke's Gospel and Acts was dedicated to a certain Theophilus who probably was a high ranking Roman or it may be dedicated in a general way to all those who are lovers of God, as the meaning of the name suggests. This Gospel may have been written in Antioch in the second half of the first century, probably around AD 60, and it sets forth the words and works of Jesus as the divine-human Savior, whose compassion and tenderness extended to all who were needy. Along with affirming the divinity of Jesus, the Gospel affirms his humanity and in relation to this Luke stresses Jesus' relationship with people, especially identifying with and ministering to those who were neglected and rejected in the then Jewish society and Graeco-Roman world—women, children, outcasts, and the poor. The universal mission of Jesus is emphasized, fewer quotations from the Old Testament and references to prophecies are made in comparison to the other Gospel accounts, and words or

phrases familiar to Jews are avoided and instead classical Greek equivalents are used and by this we can conclude that Luke envisaged a Gentile rather than a Jewish reading of his Gospel account. This is the most comprehensive Gospel and the general vocabulary and diction show a high quality of literary style of different kinds of Greek employed and this tells us that the author was educated and a person of broad culture. Along with making frequent references to illnesses and diagnoses, Luke emphasizes prayer, miracles, and angels; records inspired hymns of praise; and gives a prominent place to women. In addition to presenting the story of Jesus' work in Galilee and his last week in Jerusalem, Luke includes more episodes of Jesus' final journey to Jerusalem than any of the other Gospel-writers. This special section (9:51–18:14) is not found in any other Gospel and preserves many of the most beloved of Jesus' parables such as the Good Samaritan, the Prodigal Son, the Unjust Judge, and the Pharisee and the Tax Collector.

- Adapted from The New Oxford Annotated Bible, p. 76 NT and Life Application Bible, p. 1782

Reflect on this Scripture:

Luke 2:39-52 NIV

³⁹ When Joseph and Mary had done everything required by the Law of the Lord, they returned to Galilee to their own town of Nazareth. ⁴⁰ And the child grew and became strong; he was filled with wisdom, and the grace of God was on him.

⁴¹ Every year Jesus' parents went to Jerusalem for the Festival of the Passover. ⁴² When he was twelve years old, they went up to the festival, according to the custom. ⁴³ After the festival was over, while his parents were returning home, the boy Jesus stayed behind in Jerusalem, but they were unaware of it. ⁴⁴ Thinking he was in their company, they traveled on for a day. Then they began looking for him among their relatives and friends. ⁴⁵ When they did not find him, they went back to Jerusalem to look for him. ⁴⁶ After three days they found him in the temple courts, sitting among the teachers, listening to them and asking them questions. ⁴⁷ Everyone who heard him was amazed at his understanding and his answers. ⁴⁸ When his parents saw him, they were astonished. His mother said to him, "Son, why have you treated us like this? Your father and I have been anxiously searching for you."

⁴⁹ "Why were you searching for me?" he asked. "Didn't you know I had to be in my Father's house?" ⁵⁰ But they did not understand what he was saying to them.

⁵¹ Then he went down to Nazareth with them and was obedient to them. But his mother treasured all these things in her heart. ⁵² And Jesus grew in wisdom and stature, and in favor with God and man.

This Week:

According to Luke's Gospel account, at the end of the birth narratives which conclude with the presentation of Jesus as a baby in the Temple at Jerusalem (which would have occurred around forty days after his birth) in keeping with Jewish law and custom, Joseph and Mary returned to their hometown of Nazareth in Galilee where Jesus' childhood was spent growing up and developing physically, with wisdom and God's favor resting on him. Jesus as the incarnate Son of God was divine as well as human in nature and character even as he lived life like any other child in a small town. However, going through the ordinary course of life in his earthly parents Nazareth home which had its challenges and difficulties of livelihood and security (Joseph being by trade a craftsman and builder of wood and stone), Jesus knew his identity as God's Son and his unique relationship with God as his true Father and he grew in this consciousness.

Luke emphasizes this in his Gospel account after the birth narratives by adding a story from the latter part of Jesus' childhood and he is the only Gospel-writer in the New Testament to do so. The story describes Jesus' knowledge of who he is and what is his purpose for coming into the world, looking forward in preparation for his ministry for the bringing of God's salvation to the Jewish people and beyond to all who would believe. However, Luke presents this story in a restrained manner which shows Jesus to be different from other children and yet not in an exaggerated manner as some of the extra-biblical writings of his time did, like the Infancy Gospel of Thomas. For Luke this story of Jesus in the Temple at Jerusalem serves as a bridge between the birth narratives and the ministry of Jesus, in which Jesus is shown as drawing awareness of his identity and his relationship with his heavenly Father and also with the religious teachers of Israel and the Temple in Jerusalem.

Jesus' earthly parents being pious Jews made their annual Passover pilgrimage from Nazareth to Jerusalem with family and friends, a journey that would take about four to five days, and this story is in that setting when Jesus was twelve years old. On this occasion when it was time to return to Nazareth after the completion of the festival, Jesus stayed behind in Jerusalem and Mary and Joseph didn't at first realize this as they assumed that he was among the others traveling with them in a culture where community life was strong. Sometime later on the first day of their journey back they realized that Jesus was not among them and so

they hurried back to Jerusalem to look for him. Their worried and frantic search for over three days finally resulted in finding him in the Temple courts engaged with the Jewish religious teachers, listening to them, asking them questions, and giving his answers in a way that amazed those who were there by the depth of his understanding. His anxious parents were astonished to see him in a manner of being comfortable without them and Mary expressed their distress by words of reproach for their child. Jesus' response to them is central to the story and these are the first words of Jesus in Luke's Gospel. His reply to their correcting him was to humbly ask them on why they would search for him as they should have known where he was or what he was doing; involved in the work of his Father. Jesus' answer was not understood by his parents, although Mary kept these words in her heart and mind, as it held hidden truths about his identity as God's Son and his need to fulfil his heavenly Father's purposes. Therefore, this story shows us that Jesus from his childhood knew what his unique relationship to God was and that this would direct his life from the cradle to the cross. However, he did not disown his relationship to his earthly parents and so the story ends with Jesus returning to Nazareth, submitting to their authority, and continuing to grow in wisdom and age and although by nature being fully divine and human, he was shaped by the experiences of the grace of God and of others. About 18 years later he would begin his public ministry when he would proclaim the coming of God's Kingdom through him, demonstrate its power, and finally die and rise again so as to make God's forgiveness and eternal life possible to be received by all who would believe.

- Adapted from The New Interpreter's Bible Commentary, Vol IX, pp. 73-78

Questions to Ponder for Accountability in the Group:

1. Does this story help you learn more about the unique divine and human personhood of Jesus and that he was conscious of being the Son of God right from his childhood and not just from the start of his public ministry with his baptism?
2. Jesus' identity was defined by his relationship with his Father. What defines your identity – family ties, life experiences, educational qualifications, achievements at work, etc.? Would these be good parameters to measure one's self-worth or would it be better as a Christian to base it on one's relationship with God and why?
3. How important is faith in God for you in directing and shaping your life, especially when going through difficult and challenging times? Is living to fulfill God's purpose for your life the reason for your faith or is faith for you as merely appealing to God for help in times of need, for finding forgiveness, for consoling one's conscience, or for meeting religious obligations?

Activity for the Life of a Disciple:

1. Remember to find encouragement for the day by reading the daily devotional from FUMCC and/or to journal in the '*Morning by Morning*' gratitude resource.
2. Ponder and pray on this scripture this week: Luke 2:49 NIV
⁴⁹ "Why were you searching for me?" he asked. "Didn't you know I had to be in my Father's house?"
3. Prayerfully approach God asking for a deeper realization of your identity as God's child and for that to strengthen you in faith through all times, especially the tough ones, so as to know and fulfill God's purpose for your life.