

# Jesus

by F. LaGard Smith

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*Jesus' story reveals his life, ministry, and mission as the Messiah, and offers a model for our own lives as we seek to understand our mission and role.*

**Duration:** 41:35

**Scripture:** Obadiah 1:1

**Topics:** "Jesus"

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## Description

In this sermon, the speaker emphasizes the importance of knowing and sharing the story of Jesus. They question whether believers truly love to tell the story and are passionate about sharing it with others. The speaker encourages deep personal study of the Bible to truly know the story of salvation and rescue through Jesus Christ. They also emphasize the need to respond to this story and make it our own, as well as the responsibility to share it with those who do not know it.

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## Transcript

Tell me the story of Jesus, tell of the cross where they nailed him, writhing in anguish and pain. Tell of the grave where they laid him, tell how he liveth again. Love in that story so tender, clearer than ever I see.

Stay, let me weep while you whisper, love paid the ransom for me. Tell me the story of Jesus, write on my heart every word. Tell me the story most precious, sweetest that ever was heard.

We've gathered around the table to remember and to retell the story of Jesus and his great sacrifice in his death on the cross. But now I want to take us all back to 33 years prior to what happened that we've just remembered, to what makes it all a very mysterious kind of beginning. Turn with me, if you will, to Luke chapter 2, Luke chapter 2. I'm going to read to you there beginning in verse 22 where Jesus is just a little over a month old.

According to the law, the time of purification was 40 days for a male child and Jesus' parents would have been required by the law to bring him to the temple for this consecration purification ceremony. Beginning in verse 22 of Luke 2. When the time of their purification according to the law of Moses had been completed, Joseph and Mary took him to Jerusalem to present him to the Lord. As it is written in the law of the Lord, every firstborn male is to be consecrated to the Lord and to offer a sacrifice in keeping with what is said in the law of the Lord, a pair of doves or two young pigeons.

Now there was a man in Jerusalem called Simeon who was righteous and devout. He was waiting for the consolation of Israel. Now that's a buzzword for Messiah.

Consolation of Israel was a buzzword for Messiah. And the Holy Spirit was upon him. It had been revealed to him by the Holy Spirit that he would not die before he had seen the Lord's Christ or the Lord's anointed one.

Moved with the Spirit, he went into the temple courts. When the parents brought in the child Jesus to do for him what the custom of the law required, Simeon took him in his arms and praised God saying, Sovereign Lord, as you have promised, you now dismiss your servant in peace. For my eyes have seen your salvation, which you have prepared in the sight of all people, a light for revelation to the Gentiles and for the glory to your people Israel.

The child's father and mother marveled at what was said about him. Then Simeon blessed them and said to Mary his mother, This child is destined to cause the falling and rising of many in Israel and to be a sign that will be spoken against so that the thoughts of many hearts will be revealed and a sword will pierce your own soul too. On the screen we have a painting of this scene.

I don't know how clear it is for you, but this is Rembrandt's idea of Simeon holding Jesus in his arms. This painting was completed in 1669, which was the year of Rembrandt's death. In fact, it may have been the very last painting that Rembrandt did because it was unfinished.

You might be able to see in the top right hand, next to Simeon is in darkness, shadows, a woman. Some think her to be Mary, but I think she's far too old to be Mary. Perhaps the prophetess Anna, who will figure into the story as well.

But it does seem that Rembrandt was captivated by this passage in scripture. If for no other reason that he painted this scene not once, not twice, but three times. And I'm wondering what's going on.

Maybe it was some commissions that he had and people just liked the story and they wanted him to do it. But I like to think that Rembrandt is taken by this whole story and this scene because of something that is fairly extraordinary when you get to thinking about it. Here is this old, devout, Jewish, godly man who has been long expecting the Messiah to come and waiting for it.

And he's been told by the Holy Spirit, he's here. Go to the temple, he's here. And he sees this child led by the Spirit.

He knows this is the long expected, long awaited Messiah. He takes him into his arms, but think about this for just a minute. What we know is that Simeon is holding God in his hands.

God in his hands. Have you ever thought about that? Everybody who held the little baby Jesus in their arms were holding the sovereign God of the universe in their arms. They were holding their own creator in their arms.

That's worth painting a picture about. Now in fairness, Rembrandt knows that there's nothing more to the story in terms of Simeon's understanding than that this is the consolation of Israel, the glory to Israel, the Messiah. And in fairness, that's probably all that Simeon thought.

He probably didn't make that giant leap to being this is also the Son of God in the sense that we understand God incarnate, God in flesh. But still, what a marvelous story to have this old man's dreams fulfilled, his prayers answered. And here is this Messiah of Israel in his own arms.

Isn't that fabulous? Rembrandt paints it, but we also have a song that alludes to it. Turn to number 108 in your books. Number 108, I think it's the only song that I know of that seems to refer to this particular occurrence.

It's, Come thou long-expected Jesus. Come thou long-expected Jesus, born to set thy people free. From our fears and sins release us.

Let us find our rest in thee. Israel's strength and consolation, remember that's Messiah. Hope of all the earth thou art, dear desire of every nation, joy of every longing heart.

Born thy people to deliver, born a child and yet a king. Born to reign in us forever, now thy gracious kingdom bring. By thine own eternal spirit, rule in all our hearts alone.

By thine all-sufficient merit, raise us to thy glorious throne. Let's just sing this before we proceed further. Come thou long-expected Jesus, born to set thy people free.

From our fears and sins release us. Let us find our rest in thee. Israel's strength and consolation, hope of all the earth thou art.

Dear desire of every nation, joy of every longing heart. To deliver, born a child and yet a king. Born to reign in us forever, now thy gracious kingdom bring.

By thine own eternal spirit, rule in all our hearts alone. By thine all-sufficient merit, raise us to thy glorious throne. Born a child and yet a king.

Born a child and yet a king. Well, yes, every king is born a child, but this is the king of kings, the Lord of lords, the sovereign creator of the universe, born a child. Now you think about this.

Simeon knows that he's holding in his hands the Messiah of Israel. But the more intriguing question is, at this point, 40 days into his life, does this baby Jesus know that the man who's holding him is Simeon? Does this baby Jesus know what's in Simeon's mind? If he is God in flesh, does he know the joy that Simeon has in holding him at that moment? As a 40-day-old child, does he know he is the Messiah? Simeon knows he's the Messiah. Does the child know he's the Messiah at that point? Oh, does he know that he is God wrapped in human flesh? Strangely, I don't think so.

We have a couple of clues. One clue comes in verse 40 of chapter 2. And the child grew and became strong. He was filled with wisdom, and the grace of God was upon him.

This is later. Time has passed from the passage that we're dealing with here. This is later.

He's filled with wisdom. And so you might first get the idea, well, suddenly he's filled with wisdom. Suddenly God comes into a little breathing, crying baby.

And maybe God wasn't in him until that moment in time. But just when you might even speculate about that, when you rush down to verse 52, which happens after he's 12, and Jesus grew in wisdom and stature and in favor with God and man, it looks like it's not just a momentary zapping of a child with the

godness that he is, but a process of wisdom filling him. The second clue comes later in Jesus' ministry, when Jesus claims to be the Son of God, and some of Jesus' former neighbors who saw him growing up, who were next door to him, whose children played with him, they said, How can he be the Son of God? Isn't this Joseph's child? Isn't this his son? We know him.

There's nothing extraordinary that we've ever seen from him. Oh, nice kid. I mean, model child, envy of the neighborhood.

Every parent wanted a kid like Jesus. But there was nothing otherwise extraordinary. He didn't do any miracles.

Certainly none of those that were reported and are still lingering around in some of the strange, weird things you can read in New Age bookstores today, where when Jesus was just a small child playmate like some of these kids on the second row here, where he was just kind of playing with his powers of divinity, they say, and he would cripple his playmates and then heal them and bring them back to life just because he could, and it was fun to do. And then he took those clay birds, just a model of a bird, and he'd blow on it, breathe into it, and suddenly it would take life and fly away. All those rumors are out there, but there's nothing of that in Scripture, and certainly nothing that would give us a hint of his own self-awareness of who he was.

And so that brings us to kind of Act II. Let me have you bring up on the screen another painting here. And this painting is done by William Holman Hunt, a British artist.

1860 is the date of this painting. Hunt wanted to be ethnologically correct, so he traveled to Israel to see how he ought to paint the people in Israel, at least in 1860. He wanted to be at least that accurate.

A little bit of a problem there. In the background is some architecture that is distinctly resembling the Crystal Palace in London during his day, so it's kind of an amalgam. But that aside, it's bringing us to the second part of our reading today, and that will bring us down to verse 41 of chapter 2. If you look on the screen, that's the finding of the Savior in the temple.

And here's the text from which that is taken. Every year his parents went to Jerusalem for the Feast of the Passover. When he was 12 years old, they went up to the feast according to the custom.

After the feast was over, while his parents were returning home, the boy Jesus stayed behind in Jerusalem, but they were unaware of it. Thinking he was in their company, they traveled on for a day. Then they began looking for him among their relatives and friends.

When they did not find him, they went back to Jerusalem to look for him. After three days, they found him in the temple courts sitting among the teachers, listening to them and asking them questions. Everyone who heard him was amazed at his understanding and his answers.

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. Why were you searching for me, he asked.

Didn't you know I had to be in my father's house? But they did not understand what he was saying to them. Now, in a couple of weeks, when you get to this study in your Bible classes, I want you to pay particular attention to this little segment of Scripture, because it's an amazing passage, just because it's

the only account we have of anything in Jesus' first 30 years beyond what we read earlier about being in the temple and being consecrated there. It's the only thing out of his boyhood, out of his early manhood, all the way up to the age of 30 when he begins his ministry, it's the only account we have of Jesus at all.

I'm guessing it's got to be important. What could be so important that this is the one focus that we get, the only little window, there it is, that's all we know about Jesus. Why? I think it's because it's his coming of age, his becoming a son of the law, which all the Jewish boys would have done as they transitioned from 12 to 13.

This is going to be a very special Passover for Jesus. So let's kind of tease this out for just a moment. He's in the temple with Israel's finest scholars, and he is asking questions, which tells me he didn't just come waltzing in and say, hey, I'm God in flesh, I'm the Messiah, I'm the consolation of Israel.

Listen up. He's there to learn. The second thing is that even his answers, which were equally amazing as his questions, even from his amazing questions, they were not saying, look at this 12-year-old.

This must be the long-awaited Messiah. Look at this 12-year-old. He must be God incarnate, the creator in flesh walking among us.

They didn't say that. He's there asking questions and answering questions. He's in dialogue.

He's talking about the scriptures. He's having to learn. The first thing that comes to my mind is that if even our Lord had to study to learn, it might be important for us to study to learn.

Ever thought about that? He actually had to study in order to learn about God at the age of 12. But the second thing is even more intriguing. What is he learning? What is he studying? Well, if you look back at this picture, you can see the fellow over here on the far left that has the Torah scrolls, but for the moment the scrolls are rolled up.

They're not reading from the scrolls right now. But three fellows down from him, you'll see one that has a smaller scroll. I'm guessing that's one of the prophets, Isaiah, Jeremiah, that he's reading there and they're having this conversation.

This is probably very typical of the Passover schools that took place. During the Passover, anybody and everybody could come into the temple and have access to the finest scholars available to Israel. They were all there at the Passover schools.

I mean, if you're used to your country bumpkin rabbi off in the boonies, it's kind of nice to come into Jerusalem and have an opportunity to engage the finest minds. And so I think this is probably an elongation of that. He probably started this, Jesus, during the Passover and just got so wrapped up in it, he just kept coming back and coming back and he missed the train.

As folks are looking for him and he's so wrapped up, he's talking to the doctors about the law. Now, what are they talking about? Well, let's go back to the scroll. Probably the prophets.

And what are the prophets always talking about and what are the Jewish rabbis always thinking about? I'll tell you, they're obsessed with the Messiah. Like Simeon, everybody's looking for the long-awaited Messiah. You know, it's kind of like today, a whole bunch of Christians are really obsessed about Christ's return.

And I say obsessed, Lord, come quickly. Lord, come quickly. But here they are.

They're trying to figure out when is the Messiah coming, who will the Messiah be, where will it all happen, and so forth. And they're digging into the scriptures to try to figure this thing out. If we're right about all this, just imagine Jesus, the 12-year-old, is listening to all of these readings about the coming Messiah.

Now, think about this for a minute. If he is the Messiah and he's hearing all these readings about the Messiah, all of these readings about the Messiah must be saying things about who? Him. And so, maybe from Jeremiah.

We hear chapter 23, the branch of David, a descendant of David. Well, Jesus knows that he's a descendant of David. His family's really proud of that fact.

Maybe from Micah 5, that a ruler would come out of Bethlehem, a ruler who had ancient roots. That's kind of interesting, isn't it, from ancient times. But Bethlehem, where was Jesus born? Bethlehem.

How about Hosea 11? This is a little more subtle, but it's the kind of thing that the rabbis would have been really on to. When God calls his son out of Egypt. Of course, he's talking immediately about Israel and the nation of Israel, but there's that double entendre.

There's that allusion to calling his other son out of Egypt. And Jesus knows his family, to escape Herod, went down into Egypt, and then they were called back when they went to Nazareth. He starts to put all of these passages together.

And what is he coming up with? He's coming up with this notion that it seems so bizarre, but so irrepressible. I mean, he doesn't want to be presumptuous and arrogant, but it sure looks like it's all pointing toward him. Now, I see a lot of skeptical faces out there.

You're saying, well, God, what in the world? Let me just try to get you on this one. How else are we going to understand that question that Jesus asked his mother, that troubling question that Jesus asked his mother? Because when she finally gets there with Joseph, she says, like any good mother would do, Joseph, what are you, Jesus, what are you doing? You have stayed behind. We've gone on ahead.

It's been three days. We were worried sick about you. We thought you were kidnapped.

Who knows? What are you doing here? And this little precocious brat says to his mother, well, didn't you know I needed to be in the temple, in my father's house, about my father's business? Didn't you know that? How insolent can he be? How disrespectful of his mother, Mary? But come on. You just have to know that's not the tone with which he said it. It can't be.

It's inconsistent with his character as Messiah and Lord of the universe. Well, if that's not how he said it, then how did he say it? And I think there's only one alternative. I think that Jesus looks into his mother's eyes with his own eyes intensely penetrating into hers, saying, Mother, didn't you know? Waiting for confirmation of what he's just figuring out.

Didn't you know? Haven't you always told me my birth was special? Well, just how special was my birth? And you've always said, Jesus, when you grow up, you're going to be a great Messiah. But then every proud mother in Galilee says, my son's going to be a great Messiah. And then there was Abba.

Abba, who says to me on occasion, Jesus, you don't have just one but two fathers to please. And there was that time when I cut my hand in the carpenter's shop, and I remember Abba saying, watch it, son, careful. You're spilling royal blood there.

Mother, didn't you know? Maybe I'm completely off base on all of this. But if I am, what's your understanding of that one line? Didn't you know? Are you just ready to say he was an impotent brat? I don't think so. This one line is a caution to us when we study Scripture, not to read casually, but to think critically.

And the whole scenario, thinking about did the baby in Simeon's arms have to grow into an understanding of who he was? And when he is a boy in the temple, asking these questions, reading the Scriptures to find out who he was. If there's anything that's valuable to us this morning about all of that, maybe it's this, that we too need to be reading Scripture to find out who we are. There's some very interesting parallels with Jesus' own discovery of his life.

When he's born, we all know he's born in Bethlehem. There's no room at the inn. He's born in a manger.

He's born into a hostile world. Well, we're born in fine hospitals, most of us, but even so, we're born into a hostile world. There's temptations, there's struggles, there's conflicts, there's strife.

It's a hostile world out there that we're born into. And unlike Jesus, who when he went down into Egypt and came back was innocent, the parallel that's always given of our going down into Egypt, captivity, has to do with our sin, that we sin and therefore are down in Egypt being held captive by sin and called out of Egypt through the salvation that is offered through us through Jesus Christ. We've got all of that.

And so you can see how our life leads us to the same conclusion that we need to be about our Father's business in our Father's temple. When we read Scripture, we need to dig into it looking at all of those people whose lives are revealed to us in Scripture because it's not just their lives, it's our life. Their struggles, their fears, their sins, even their hopes and their joys.

When we read about Simeon, it should be our struggles. It is our struggles. It should be our joys.

It is our joys. Reading Scripture is like looking into a mirror of the soul. It's just what we need more and more and more of is to study the Scriptures.

And yet there is this instant caution from our particular narrative. And the caution is that Jesus' own parents, Joseph and Mary, who both spoke to Gabriel the archangel, imagine this, just imagine speaking to Gabriel the archangel and then knowing of the virgin birth. Even knowing that, first of all, they come running back to Jerusalem searching for Jesus and for a while they can't find Him.

Searching and can't find. And when they finally do find Him, they don't understand. They don't understand.

They're astounded by what Simeon says. They're astounded by what's going on in the temple. They just don't get it.

Who more than they should get it? And then, of course, you've got all these guys here who are studying the Scriptures intently trying to identify who the Messiah is and look who's standing right next to them. Now, in fairness to them, they don't know what He knows and so they miss Him. Here's what's really intriguing to me.

I'll bet you some of these guys, 21 years later, were part of the Sanhedrin that condemned Jesus to death for falsely claiming to be the Messiah and they had been studying those scrolls for years, their whole life, and they missed Jesus. They absolutely missed Him. In John 5, we have Jesus upbraiding the Pharisees.

Remember what He says to them? You search the Scriptures diligently thinking that in them you have life, but you don't come to Me. You're searching, but you miss Me. You're searching, but you miss Me.

Everybody's searching, but they're missing Him. What about us? When we read the Scriptures, if we're searching for Jesus, are we missing Him? Now, in fairness, I guess in fairness, I probably need to chide some of you in the audience today because it begs the question of whether we're searching the Scriptures or even reading the Scriptures. I want to be kind, but I also want to be candid.

There are some of you here who really don't know your Bibles at all. I mean, you really don't. I think you're going to be a bit embarrassed someday when you get to heaven and a gentleman walks up to you and introduces himself and says, Hi, I'm Obadiah.

What do you think of my book? That's going to be a moment, isn't it? But what about the rest of us who have read the Scriptures over and over and over again for a lifetime and we're familiar with them? We know everything there is to know about the Bible. Well, maybe not everything there is to know about the Bible, but enough to get by, surely. We may miss a few facts here and there, but we got the general theme line.

I don't think so. Familiarity breeds contempt. Are we so familiar that we stop thinking about that with which we are familiar? Are we reading without studying? Really hard studying.

Are we studying without searching intently? Are we searching intently without applying it to ourselves? I am so happy that this congregation is committed to Bible study. There weren't a whole lot of people here. I think a lot of people are out of town today, but there was the introduction of the new program of Bible study that you're going to have.

And that's a great thing. More and more congregations, I think, are starting to see that we are no longer the people of the book that we ought to be and are starting to get more serious about Bible study. But I want to share one little concern that I have with you as you launch forth into this program.

And it's a concern that I've had all the way back to the time when I was a 12- or 13-year-old whippersnapper. And I probably was. I wasn't precocious, but I was a brat.

And even in those days, as I sat in Sunday school classes, I was thinking, History, it's great. You need it. You need to know the context of what you're reading.

You need to know facts. You need to know geography. You need to know dates.

You just need to know a lot of background. But when push came to shove, all I ever saw in Bible classes was history, history. It was all history.

Rarely was it, this is a message about us. This is a message about the one who has come to save us from our sins. This is a story of God's creation and his love for us.

How are we responding to it? There's always history that never seems to get on track with anything else. A lot has been made of the wordplay between history and his story, but you can never make too much of it. Because the Bible is not just history.

It is, from start to finish, his story. If we never move from history to his story, we've missed it. Absolutely missed it.

And then again, if we never move from his story to make it our story, we've missed it. We've really missed it. And if it really is our story, there are a lot of people who don't know that story.

And we need to tell them that story. Turn to page 275 in your books again. Number 275.

I'm going to sing this for our last song, but I just want to look at this for a moment. There's a line in here in verse 4 that I just love. I love to tell the story, for those who know it best seem hungering and thirsting to hear it like the rest.

Those who know it best are hungering and thirsting. It's just you can't get enough of it. If you know this story, you just can't get enough of it.

There's no way. It's profound. It's moving.

It's exciting. It's joyful. We ought to feel like Simeon with this story, holding it in our hands and then passing it on to others.

We're going to sing this song in a minute, but I think we need a reality check before we do. I don't know about you, but we're going to be singing these words. I love to tell the story.

I love to tell the story. Oh, I love to tell the story. How I love to tell the story.

Really? Do we? Do we love to tell the story? Are we passionate about telling the story? I fear most of us are not passionate about telling the story of Jesus. Can I say with all kindness that I can muster, if we aren't really passionate about telling the story, I don't think we really know the story yet. Because this is a story, if you really, really, really know it, you can't help but tell to others.

9-11, Twin Towers, person's trapped, 25th floor. Fireman comes in, big old bulky New York City fireman comes in, throws that person over their shoulder, takes them down out of the building, watches the building crumble, and you look back and say, he saved my life. You think people in that situation are not telling that story over and over and over again? You can count on it.

We have a story of salvation and rescue that is more powerful than any of the 9-11 stories. How often are we telling that story? If you don't know the story in that kind of deep, personal kind of way, if you don't know it, it's time that you did. It's time that you opened the word of the Lord and just dug in and searched and contemplated and grappled and thought critically about it.

It's just time. You need to make that commitment, not only to the Bible classes here, but in your own personal study. If you don't know it, you need to know it.

And if you do know it, if you do know the story, maybe not in depth, completely every detail, but if you know the basic story of your sin and your salvation through Jesus Christ, if you know that story and you've yet to respond to it, why have you not? How could you not respond to it? So we need to stand and sing

this with each having something to respond to. Do we love to tell the story? Do we know the story? Do we know the story but haven't responded to it? This is the greatest story ever told. Let's stand and sing together about it.

I love to tell the story Of unseeing things above Of Jesus and His glory Of Jesus and His love I love to tell the story Because I know it is true It satisfies my longing That nothing else can do I love to tell the story It will be my theme in glory To tell the old, old story Of Jesus and His love I love to tell the story It is blessed unto repeat What seems each time I tell it More wonderfully sweet I love to tell the story For some have never heard The message of salvation From God's own Holy Word I love to tell the story It will be my theme in glory To tell the old, old story Of Jesus and His love

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