

Sermon – 19/09/2010 am

The Boy Jesus

Study Text: Luke 2:39-52

‘I believe in God the Father Almighty, Maker of heaven and earth; and in Jesus Christ his only Son our Lord, who was conceived by the Holy Spirit, born of the Virgin Mary, suffered under Pontius Pilate, was crucified dead and buried’. The Apostles creed jumps from Jesus being born to him suffering under Pontius Pilate. What about the years in between? What about the childhood of the man who is the Son of God?

Many ask this question as they study the life of Christ. Some go off to fill in the gaps from their own imagination. In apocryphal gospels and other writings you will find all sorts of stories about the early life of Jesus. We must be careful not go beyond what God has revealed to us in the Bible. All that he tells us about the life of Jesus between his infancy and the beginning of his ministry at 30 years of age is found in this passage before us. At 12 years of age Jesus went with his parents to the feast of Passover in Jerusalem.

Boy Growing Up

At 40 days Mary and Joseph took their baby to Jerusalem to present him to the Lord (2:22). Simeon and Anna saw the baby Jesus in the temple and prophesied that he would redeem Israel. Having performed their duties under the law Mary and Joseph *returned to Galilee, to their own city, Nazareth* (2:39). Luke does not mention the visit of the Magi and the flight to Egypt that Matthew records in his gospel. Matthew indicates that it may have been two years before the family returned to Israel to settle back in their home town of Nazareth.

Jesus was fully human and grew up physically and mentally as children do. He grew up as the eldest son in this family, with four brothers and sisters also. Jesus learnt carpentry, most probably from Joseph. Jesus was also the Son of God. He was filled with wisdom and the grace of God was upon him (2:40). As the Son of God he was born without original sin and he lived a sinless life. This made him different from the other children but we will not speculate beyond what we have here in the Bible.

Looking ahead to him as a teenager, Luke tells us that *Jesus increased in wisdom and stature and in favour with God and men* (2:52). He was always obedient to his parents. As a perfect child Jesus pleased his Father in heaven as well as his parents on earth – even though his knowledge and wisdom gave Mary cause to wonder.

Yet we must remember that the boy Samuel also grew in stature and in favour both with the Lord and with men (I Samuel 2:26). When Jesus began his ministry preaching ‘the kingdom of God is at hand; repent and believe the gospel’ the attitude of men towards him did not remain favourable.

Boy in the Temple

Jews were supposed to go to the temple, the men at least, for the three annual festivals, Passover, Pentecost and Tabernacles. Mary and Joseph faithfully went to the feast of Passover every year (2:4). Luke tells us about the time they went up with their son Jesus when he was 12 years old.

Jewish boys were admitted into responsible membership of the community at the age of 13. They were made a 'son of the law' or 'Bar Mitzvah'. They were then obliged to attend the festival as an adult. You will hear of this ceremony still today in the Jewish community. It seems that 12 year olds were taken to the festival by way of preparation for their 'Bar Mitzvah'.

The Passover was celebrated over seven days with the actual Passover meal being on the last day. When the Passover was over Mary and Joseph set out for their home in Nazareth. People usually travelled to the Passover in family or community groups. Women would go ahead with the children and the men would come behind as they walked the dusty road home.

Since Jesus was 12 his mother may have thought he was with his father. Joseph on the other hand may have thought he was with his mother. In any case they did not realize that their boy was not with them until they came to rest at the end of the first day's journey. When they realized that he was not with either of them they began searching for him among their relatives and friends. We can imagine their concern when they could not find him.

It was probably at first light the next day when Mary and Joseph set out to retrace their steps. After three days, one of which was taken up getting back to Jerusalem, they found Jesus in the temple. Was this the first place they looked? Would you expect to find a 12 year old boy in the house of God? This would be the last place many parents would look for their 12 year old son. But that is because many parents do not bring their children to the house of God. Children today ask what it is like inside a church and what goes on in here.

Mary and Joseph taught their children the Scriptures. They taught them to love and obey God. They taught them to come to the house of God and delight in worshipping the Lord.

When Mary and Joseph found their son they were amazed (2:48). Mary spoke to Jesus by way of complaint more than reprimand. 'Son, why have you treated us like this? Your father and I have been anxiously searching for you' (2:48). We can understand a mother being worried and anxious in such circumstances. We can feel the relief that she must have felt in finding Jesus.

Mary was also upset that he did not appear to be concerned about her. They found Jesus sitting in the temple engaged in discussion with the teachers. But when his parents found him he went home with them and was subject to them as required under the law.

They found the 12 year old Jesus sitting with the teachers in the temple. The method of learning in those days was to listen and ask questions of teachers, and to answer questions also. These teachers, and others listening, were astonished at the questions asked and the answers given by this boy. He showed a depth of understanding and insight way beyond his age. Why were they surprised that the Son of God demonstrated exceptional knowledge and wisdom even at this young age? Some of them no doubt would later reflect on this incident, as his mother surely did.

The first recorded words of the incarnate Son of God come in the form of an answer to his mother. He gently answers Mary's complaint about the way he was treating her. *Why do you seek me? Didn't you know that I must be about my Father's business?* (2:49); some translators have 'my Father's house'. There is no actual word for 'house' or 'business' in the Greek.

Mary knew her son was the Messiah. She was told this by the angel, by the shepherds and others when he was an infant. But she did not understand all that being Messiah meant. She did not understand what Jesus was saying to her at this moment (2:50). She said 'your father and I were worried about you', while Jesus spoke of another as 'my Father'.

If Mary and Joseph had plans for the life of their son Jesus, those plans had to be radically adjusted after hearing what he said. Mary was told by the angel that her firstborn would be called the Son of God (1:35). Consistent with this revelation her firstborn now declared in the temple that he must be in his Father's house. Jesus had a self-awareness that he was the Son of God and that his heavenly Father had sent him into this world for a purpose.

Boy's Parents

Mary said to Jesus, *Your father and I have sought you anxiously* (2:48). Joseph of course was not the biological father of Jesus. Jesus was conceived of the Holy Spirit in the womb of Mary. But Joseph was his legal father. It is interesting that in this very passage Jesus refers to his heavenly Father. It is also interesting that this is the last mention of Joseph in the Bible. It is almost certain that he had died by the time Jesus began his ministry at about thirty years of age (3:23).

Through his servant Luke, the Lord God in his providence chose to tell us this amazing incident in the life of his Son, Jesus Christ. We learn that Jesus was an obedient Son. He was a Son like no other. Although upset with him on this occasion, his mother must have noticed differences in his behaviour compared to his sinful brothers as she brought him up in the training and admonition of the Lord (Ephesians 6:4). *His mother kept all these things in her heart* (2:51). We also learn that Jesus was aware of his divine sonship at the age of twelve.

While refraining from speculation beyond what is given here in the Bible about the early life of Jesus, we might pause to reflect on the faithfulness of his parents in bringing their son to the house of God at the age of twelve, knowing that at this age he was ready to take responsibility for his spiritual life. They had of course brought him to the house of God when he was a baby. As Jews they would have taught their covenant children from the Scriptures how to obey and worship God.

What about children in our homes and in our society? We are told that they are growing up more quickly than ever before. This may be true physically but is it true spiritually? Joseph and Mary did not encourage their children to go searching for truth in all manner of religions. They did not assume their children would find the truth by themselves. They brought their children to the house of God. They taught their children according to the Scriptures which state *Train up a child in the way he should go, and when he is old he will not depart from it* (Proverbs 22:6).

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