

## Jesus growing up

31 1 16

Almighty and ever-living God,  
clothed in majesty,  
whose beloved Son  
was this day presented in the Temple,  
in substance of our flesh:  
grant that we may be presented to you,  
with pure and clean hearts  
by your Son Jesus Christ our Lord.

Our text may be found in today's gospel from Luke chapter 2 and verse 40:

'The child grew and became strong, filled with wisdom;  
and the favour of God was upon him.'

Today, two day's early, we celebrate Candlemas, the Feast of the Presentation of Christ in the Temple, the Purification of the BVM. What I love about the four gospels is that they are not an exhaustive account of the life of Christ. They have things in common like the miracle of 'The Feeding of the 5,000'; they have things unique to each. In Mark, for example, the mention of the pillow in the boat on which Jesus lays his head to sleep while the disciples are terrified that they are about to be drowned by the sudden night storm on Lake Galilee. In Matthew, for example, Joseph's sadness that his fiancée, Mary, is pregnant; that he's not the father because he has not yet slept with her; and his kindness in wanting to break

off their engagement discretely. In John, for example, the raising of his friend, Lazarus; how Jesus wept at the grave of someone he loved; how he called him forth, thanking God for answering his prayer even before Lazarus stumbles out into the light of day. And in Luke, who may well have spoken directly to Mary herself, for example we have today's account of the Presentation of baby Jesus by his parents in the Temple to make the sacrifice of thanksgiving for the birth of their first-born son.

You know the details too well for me to have to go over them again this morning: the meeting with Simeon and with Anna; their prophetic words, predicting that the infant Jesus is the Messiah that God had promised to his Chosen People, Israel.

Let me instead, this morning, reflect briefly on what is not, what is not present in the gospels – the childhood of Jesus. All four evangelists write at length about the last week of his life, about his death and resurrection. But I wonder what Jesus was like as a boy. What was it like for him to grow up? Mark jumps straight in with an adult Jesus at his baptism. John's opening is mystical; again, we really start the narrative with John the Baptist. Matthew has the annunciation to Joseph, the visit of the Wise Men and the Flight to Egypt. Only in Luke do we get the annunciation to Mary, the visit of the shepherds, the presentation in the Temple and, when Jesus was twelve, the Passover visit to Jerusalem. All we have is our text from today's gospel:

‘The child grew and became strong, filled with wisdom;  
and the favour of God was upon him.’

and a parallel text some twelve verses on:

‘And Jesus increased in wisdom and in years;  
and in divine and human favour.’

So what does Luke tell us to help us fill the silence about Jesus before he began his public ministry ?

First, the physical. Obviously, Jesus grew up from the baby that Simeon cradled in his arms into the man that Mary cradled in her arms at the foot of the cross on Good Friday. Obviously, Jesus was fit and strong and healthy otherwise he could not have walked around Galilee and up to Jerusalem several times during his three years of preaching and teaching and working wonders. To be embodied, to be in the flesh, is what the Incarnation is all about.

Second, the mental. The word Luke uses is σοφία (sophia) ‘wisdom’. Jesus is wise. He not only knows the word of God but understands the word of God and can communicate the word of God in ways that folk can understand because he is the Word of God. Jesus is literate in that he can read Hebrew scripture aloud and he understands what is written therein.

Third, the gift of grace. The word Luke uses is χάρις (charis) which literally means grace and the NRSV translates as favour. Jesus finds favour in the sight of God and in the sight of Man. (Curiously the word χάρις is the very same word that the angel Gabriel uses when he speaks to Mary at the annunciation.) Mary’s son, Jesus, is gifted with a positive attitude to him not only by God his Father who at Jesus’ baptism and at his transfiguration expresses his love for his Son but also

by the many whose hearts were touched by Jesus. Of course, with those who opposed him, he found little favour but then you can't please all the people all the time not even if you are the Son of God !

So I'd like to say, as someone who's lived the majority of my life in the second half of the C20, that I'd love to know more of what it was like for Jesus the boy, for Jesus the young man. But that is not to be this side of the grave: instead, let us content ourselves with the knowledge Jesus grew up strong, physically, mentally, finding favour with God and with Man.

I have spoken in the name of the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit, Amen.

*Preached at the Eucharist*

*St Bartholomew's, Dinard*

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G: Sermons 33 : Jesus growing up

