

Twelve Year Old Jesus in the Temple - L Whitwell - 29/12/24

1 Sam 2:18 – 20, 26; Colossians 3:12 – 17; Luke 2:41 – 52

We know, from the Bible, much about Jesus birth, a lot about his ministry years from his baptism to his ascension and very little in between.

Historians of that time fill a few gaps for us. At about 5 or 6 years old, boys would have gone to Jewish school, started memorizing the Torah and learning about the laws contained within those first five books of the Bible. They would have attended the local synagogue, participated in the weekly sabbath, celebrated Jewish festivals, especially the Feast of Tabernacles, Passover and Pentecost. They would have learned the ways of God from their own parents, from all these events and would have observed much as they took part. Jewish boys today have their Bar Mitzvah ceremony when they are about 13 years old. They are prepared for that. It is usually the first time they will read from the Torah in the synagogue. It is not certain whether boys in Jesus' day had this ceremony, but it is possible that in their 12th year the parents made sure they attended the temple and explained more of the rituals there as manhood, and it's responsibilities, began when they were 12 or 13 years old.

Luke 2 gives us a tiny glimpse of Jesus childhood. He records Jesus' circumcision and his parents purification offering in the temple where the prophetic words from both Simeon and Anna affirmed Jesus as the long awaited Messiah. Luke 2:40 records that Jesus grew up healthy and strong, filled with wisdom, and God's favour was on him. I imagine he sat on Mary's knee,

cried when he fell, played with other children, tried to **help** or copy Joseph in simple carpentry and so on. He was fully human. He didn't arrive as a baby with instant knowledge.

I wonder if any of you have ever lost one of your children. A friend, with many children arrived at church one day and realized she'd left the few weeks old baby in the house. I worked in a Children's Home in the mid 70's and was responsible for taking a van load of children to the pictures one Saturday. We instructed our group to wait when the movie ended and then we would leave. We did, but when I checked the children back into the van, one was missing. A lovely and very friendly girl with Down Syndrome. I rang my Salvation Army boss, so he was aware. It was scary. We spent quite a time looking and told the theatre staff but to no avail. I returned the children and the staff member back to the Home and then went back into town. I was met by my missing child with 'where were you? I couldn't find you'. She had walked up the street and then back. Praise God for that. She was happy and oblivious to any understanding that **she** had wandered off but I was so relieved. The following week my boss sent me with another group, so I didn't lose confidence in my care of the children.

Mary and Joseph lost Jesus. They had been in Jerusalem for the Passover. It was usual in those times for all the family groups and often others from their local town to stay and especially travel together – women and children in the front and men and older boys chatting and conversing at the back. With Jesus being 12 years old, each could easily have thought Jesus was in the other group. After a day of travel they realized he was missing.

They hurried back to Jerusalem. They eventually found Jesus. Imagine what had been going through their minds. Mary knew, from the angel's visit and her visit with Elizabeth, that Jesus was born to be the Messiah but seemed surprised to find him in the temple in discussion with the religious teachers. It was the custom in those days for the religious leaders to teach by answering questions and by asking questions themselves. All there were surprised at his level of understanding and knowledge. That tells me he was listening in class and developing his personal relationship with God his heavenly father over those 12 years. Yet, I love the glimpse we have into Mary's mother heart. You can almost feel her pain as she says to Jesus, 'why have you done this to us? We have been frantic, searching for you.' Jesus reply shows his growing self – awareness of his purpose on earth. 'Why were you searching for me? Didn't you realise that I am doing what I am supposed to be doing. I am learning the Father's business.' He then returned to Nazareth with them and was obedient to them while Mary added this to the treasure she pondered in her heart. Jesus continued to grow in wisdom and stature, in favour with both God and man.

What is the challenge for us in this?

Like the four walls of Hauora or wellbeing, a metaphor of a Maori meeting house to explain wellbeing, Jesus grew in Taha tinana – physical wellbeing or stature, Taha whanau – family and social wellbeing which is favour with man, Taha hinengaro – mental and emotional wellbeing and Taha wairua – spiritual wellbeing which is favour with God. His wisdom grew as he naturally matured.

It would have been enhanced by his growing knowledge of Scripture and his deepening relationship with God his Father.

Other Scriptures tell us he was fully human and as such identifies with us in all we experience – including loneliness, pain, rejection, sorrow as well as the delight of weddings, barbecues and more.

Like us, the people in Colossians 3:12 – 17 were learning what it was like to become more Christlike. May I suggest we read this again at home as we look to a new year of following God as his disciples.

A missionary from Japan used this passage some years ago in terms of the layers of a ceremonial kimono. The final glory or beauty is the sash – the obi of love which ties all the other virtues together. May we allow God's love to work his beauty in us, so we reflect in growing measure, more of his compassion, forgiveness, patience, gratitude, all Jesus' virtues of grace. Amen.