

Good News from Doctor Luke 4

Growing Up

Luke 2:21-52

A little church in Gloucestershire has etched into the Cotswold stone at its front: 'Sunday Services 11am and 6pm'. Clearly nothing was expecting to change. The church has been closed for many years. ICABOD. Brothers and Sisters, Luke tells us these events in Jesus' young life to emphasize that we all need to grow up in the things of God. Maturity is not an option it's a command. So let me paint you a picture: come with me now to the Temple for the first time, on a spring afternoon. The Temple building itself stands in a much larger open area, itself the size of a small town, with plenty of room for people to come and go, to walk about and meet one another. There are crowds milling about as usual, rich people strolling by with friends and hangers-on, soldiers from the occupying forces looking down from their watchtowers, animals and birds being bought and sold in the markets by the gate. There are plenty of beggars about, hoping to cash in on the pilgrims' sense of God's mercy and the obligation to be generous in turn. And there are old people, as always, sitting in the shade, under a tree here and a doorway there. Most people don't notice the young couple coming in with their baby. Happens all the time. No different from countless others. But, as they approach, you see one of the old men get up slowly from his seat. He has a strange look in his eyes. What's he thinking? What's he going to say? You are almost as alarmed as the parents are when he takes the child from them, but his movement and his embrace is as gentle and firm as the love of God. He has seen something nobody else has. He has been praying and waiting for this moment all his life and now it's come. This is the Messiah; he's seen him with his own eyes; now he can die in peace. A blessing and a prophecy follows: Mary was not surprised.

And then as if that were not enough another old codger steps up: this time a woman: Anna, described as a prophetess, very old and long since a widow. Not only was she committed to 24/7 prayer and fasting before it was even invented but she never left the temple courts: a special woman of God. Again a blessing, thanksgiving and prophecy over the child who would bring redemption to Jerusalem.

So how do we respond to what has happened: how did Mary & Joseph respond? What did it make you want to do, or to pray? Perhaps Luke wants us to simply be grateful for the old people you know who have been faithful to God throughout their lives, and who can now go to their graves in peace and gratitude, hearing the words: Well done good and faithful servant. Thank God I can say that and believe that of my own Father at this time. Perhaps it challenges us to reflect on what we should be praying for in our lifetimes, on the things we long to see happen in God's world, or in our own families, which we will go on waiting and hoping for and trusting that God will let us see. Perhaps it's more personal: about something in our own lives here and now which we want to bring to the Temple, into God's blessing, for His blessing; something about which we need to hear a word of wisdom and confirmation. Perhaps it was their absolute focus on that first coming or advent that puts us to shame when we consider how little focus and desire we have for the second coming of our Lord?

We grow up when we have life and hope spoken over our lives and choose to live in the good of it, whatever the circumstances say. Mary & Joseph honoured God with Jesus's life and followed the Maker's instructions to the letter: as a consequence Jesus became strong; he was filled with wisdom, and the grace of God was upon Him. (v40). Remember the timeline of those first few years: born in Bethlehem, thence to Jerusalem at 8 days old, back to Bethlehem, then before Jesus was two years old, off to Egypt,

and eventually back to Nazareth. Lots of Holy Spirit Wisdom exercised by Mary & Joseph the consistent presence in Jesus' life.

And so to 'The Temple' for the annual visit for Feast of Passover, and Jesus was now 12 years old. Reunion with Family & Friends, then back home, but Jesus was not with them in the long caravan train. As soon as they realised he was not there they returned to Jerusalem, and it took them another three days to find Him, an echo of how 21 years later the women and disciples found the Risen Lord after feeling like he was lost forever. Luke glosses over this separation but it must have felt like one of many swords to Mary's heart (Simeon's prophecy). Jesus is found in the temple courts (where else?) sitting among the teachers, listening and asking questions. The congregation gathered were amazed at his understanding and his answers. Mary and Joseph questioned him too: Son why have you treated us like this? Your Father and I have been anxiously searching for you. His parents too would be amazed at his answer: Why were you searching for me: Didn't you know I had to be in my Father's house? Luke records that they didn't understand what he was saying to them but I'm not so sure: given the amazing birth and the unexpected visitors, given the blessings and prophecies of Simeon and Anna, given the context of where they found Him? Mary & Joseph were growing up fast spiritually: Mary's parenting task was not yet completed and would not be till the cross, Joseph's task was all but complete: earthly Father gave way to Heavenly Father and Jesus's grew into His Identity as God's Son, and faithful Joseph was called home to glory. Praise God for faithful Christian parents.

Growing up in the things of God: in Paul's words we should be 'no longer infants tossed to and fro' (Ephesians 4:14), and although we start on milk we must go on to solid food (Hebrews 5:12, 1 Peter 2:2).

So how did this happen for Jesus and what does it say to us about our own growth and our discipling/parenting of others in Christ?

1. **Realise who you are in Christ.** Jesus, maybe as a result of the prophecies of Simeon and Anna, that his Mother would have reminded Him of, or maybe because of how God delivered them from the genocide of Bethlehem and got them to Egypt, or maybe because of the consistent prayer/instruction and care of His parents, realised that Father God was truly His Father. "Didn't you realise that I had to be in my Fathers House?" In this He is no different to you and me for when we die to self and are born again we realise our true identity as sons and daughters of the King, and of course its Satan's passion to rob us of this truth. Can I say that we never cease to become, in Christ we find our true self. Our sinful human nature means that we are bent in idolatry of one kind or another: only in Christ can we stand ten feet tall in the power of the Holy Spirit as the Man or women of God He intends for us to be.
2. **Spending Time with Father.** Jesus spent quality time with Father daily, He lived in the light of His presence constantly, and we would do well to do the same: *like* Sitting at his feet (in Mary mode Luke 10:42), Hanging on His every word (John 10:27 Sheep listen to the Shepherds voice), Asking for what we need (Luke 11:9/10), Bringing to Him our questions and burdens (Psalm 55:22): above all seeking His answers, His understanding, an surrendering to His sovereignty. If it was good enough for Jesus then..... What will be the epitaph on your grave: Gone to another meeting / or / a man/woman after God's own heart?
3. **Receiving and giving Godly / Consistent Parenting.** "Every Year" Mary and Joseph considered it important enough to go up to Jerusalem for the Feast of Passover. Their nurture of Jesus was regular and by example: we reproduce in our

children all the good things in our lives (and the bad things): genuine love for Christ and honouring of Him in lives is catching and winsome to our children. That's why parenting courses are important particularly when they also include the child's spiritual development. Parenting courses are also a great evangelistic tool. Being Godparents is not some kind of honorary title, it's a godly calling to nurture a child and prayerfully support the parents. Just so you can be Spiritual Parents to the multitudes by actively mentoring discipling another in the faith journey.

4. **Discovering Christ for yourself.** The one thing Godly Parents can't do is to make Christians: God has no grandchildren!! Jesus had to hang back in Jerusalem and at the Temple meet His Father and realise His true identity. He was only 12 years old. We soft pedal salvation at our peril as Church and as parents. Our JAM experience tells us that young people often make commitments to Christ as very early ages and follow them with further points of commitment during early teens, till the point when confidently they can affirm publicly their unique personal relationship with Jesus and be baptised. Let us not only pray for our Children to become Christians but let us not miss any opportunity for them to take even faltering steps of faith into that relationship.
5. **Jesus grew in wisdom and stature (echo of v40) (v52)** Memory verse for BB!!! From where does growth come: God, no other way. He makes available the gifts (Natural and Spiritual) we need and graces (Fruit of Spirit) to be like Father and like Son: Jesus. Luke emphasizes this for a second time (wisdom and grace all before he was 12!). Wisdom ultimately is God's whether intellectual or spiritual. Stature refers to physical growth which God's child will

always give time to, as their Body is a Temple of the Holy Spirit. 12 Disciples: men of stature, changed the world.

6. **Jesus grew in favour with God & Man (v52)** What a great place to be and of evangelism! The introduction of our heavenly friends to our earthly friends. Favour with God (means spiritual maturity), and favour with men (Means proper social development). And in Luke's beautiful and holistic narrative we see this phrase reappear as the key description of the Early Church, those first Christians who like Jesus enjoyed the favour of all the people, and were hugely fruitful as a consequence.

No wonder Mary 'treasured up all these things and pondered them in her heart' (v19 v51). Such treasure would sustain her in her Magnificat like trust and faith as she lost her husband. Such treasure would be food for her to grow up into Christ, her son and her Head.

A little boy was drawing a picture with great concentration. 'What are you doing?' asked his Mum. 'I'm drawing a picture of Jesus', he replied. His mum did not quite know how to respond. She queried, 'But no one knows what Jesus looked like?' 'They will when I've finished this picture.' May you life and mine be a living growing masterpiece of the Saviour and may people come to know Jesus through our growth and maturing.

Pastor David

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