

A Perfect Creation

Wayne Waibel – 12/29/2024

“Jesus increased in wisdom and stature, and in favor with God and men.” What elevates this singular text beyond the usual inspiration is how closely it resembles the description of the prophet Samuel as a child. “And the child Samuel grew in stature, and in favor both with the Lord and men.” It’s not a stretch to comprehend that this description of Jesus and Samuel is the description of every child of God – no matter what their age.

The evangelist Luke writes his Gospel to the Gentiles in Asia Minor. The Jewish nation lived the story, but Luke comprehends that the vast majority of his readers are not going to have the same background, or appreciation for the nuances of the Jewish tradition.

That’s why he is very thorough and takes the time to explain things. He doesn’t assume the reader knows the details. But - as we all know – the details can also confuse as much as enlighten.

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When the faithful journeyed to Bethlehem to keep the traditions – they were traveling through some pretty rough territory filled with danger from man and beast, so they always traveled in large groups – safety in numbers.

In such a company, both relatives and friends formed a quick community that took care of one another – especially the children. In such a group it was safe to assume that even if you did not see your child, you could be rest assured that they were being watched over by someone else you could trust. Going a full day without seeing Jesus would not cause immediate alarm.

As far as grasping the depth of understanding associated with raising a child you knew to be the Son of God – they are still your kid and most parents treat them as though they were a child of God – because they are, and that’s a concept we celebrate at every baptism.

Let’s not lose sight of the fact that in the midst of all this we have a twelve-year-old Jesus full in the comprehension of not only the law and the prophets, but intimately aware of who He is and where He is going.

Youth can be a particularly challenging time for parents. The reality is that youth can be traumatic and treacherous and scary. But it can also be filled with wonder and delight and thrill upon thrill.

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In the world today our children are not allowed the unsupervised adventure that we often had as youths, but I don’t think the children of today mind it so much.

Just do a cursory inventory of the kinds of activities they get to engage in these days that were beyond our imagining when we were pre-teens. Xbox, Play Station, video streaming, endless accessible music, Alexa, etc. and that's just the electronic side of things.

Jesus – even twelve-year-old Jesus, is all about the future. He stays back when His family leaves because He is fully engaged in preparation for His eventual ministry.

For Jesus, it is a small wonder that He would remain at Temple to hone His priestly skills. He is simply allowing time and circumstance to mold His true nature. The alarm He causes His folks never really occurs to Him. New beginnings mark points of departure, not arrival.

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I can imagine the teachers in the Temple were impressed with the young Jesus as He navigated through the various questions and conditions that came before Him, and the general nature of His enquiries.

As with all the gospels, in Luke we have the birth story of Our Lord, and we have this passage today documenting His twelfth year, a passage where only He and His mother have speaking parts and then we close with the ministry of Jesus the Christ.

And what is said of His nearly two decades in between? “He grew in wisdom and stature and drew favor from both God and men.” Twenty years, and all that is said is that He grew in wisdom and stature and finds divine favor.

Presumably, the arch of His life follows the typical span of a Jewish boy. He loves and honors His parents. He has a preoccupation with the law and an understanding that Almighty God is His Father. How He processes that information is made manifest in His public life.

There is much to be learned from this very special Boy, and most who encounter Him realize it readily. So His education proceeds along a highly accelerated plane.

The Boy Jesus and the Man Jesus are not that different really, except that what He says and what He asks in His youth - morph into what He does and who He is as a Man.

I think it’s noteworthy that despite His knowledge and the sense He has of who He is, He does not forsake Judaism, or His parents. He admonishes them for not realizing He would be in the Temple about His Father’s business, but completely acquiesces to His Mother’s concerns and dutifully returns home with them and continues to honor them – as prescribed by Jewish law.

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While Jesus was unlike anyone the world had ever known, He was also very much like every one of us. He probably played games with His siblings and friends. I would not be at all surprised if He hadn't followed in Joseph's footsteps and become a carpenter – a tradesman – one who works with His hands.

We view the intervening years of Jesus growing into His ministry as wondrous and divine despite the fact that all we know about them is that He grew in wisdom and strength.

Perhaps it is enough to comprehend the basic outline of what that can look like.

Perhaps we see only obscure generalities instead of well-defined absolutes.

Perhaps we should satisfy ourselves in knowing that at the tender age of twelve, this Child of God elected to follow a trajectory that would culminate in the restoration of the foundational intentions of a perfect creation. Amen.