

The Child Grew

Luke 2:21-40

December 31, 2017

First United Methodist Church, Lindstrom

(This is a manuscript prepared for sermon delivery and may not represent actual words spoken.)

And the child grew and became strong; he was filled with wisdom, and the grace of God was upon him.

Today we are on the eve of a new year. That is kind of exciting. There will be many celebrations this evening.

We are also still in birthday celebrating mode. God sent his Son. As we read earlier in the book of Galatians, "But when the time had fully come, God sent his Son, born of a woman, born under law, to redeem those under law, that we might receive the full rights of sons and daughters." Because God sent his Son, we call God Abba, Father, just as Jesus did. Along with Jesus, we are heirs. That is something to be celebrated.

So our text begins with letting us know that Joseph and Mary were obedient. We already knew that about them. But our text lets us know that they observed three ancient ceremonies.

First, there was the circumcision. Every Jewish boy was circumcised on the eighth day after his birth. This ceremony was so sacred that it trumped even the Sabbath law. Most things could not be done on the Sabbath. But if the eighth day fell on a Sabbath...well, they went ahead with that ceremony. It was also on that day the boy was given his name.

Second, there was the redemption of the firstborn. This has to do with that tenth plague and the firstborn in each Israelite household being spared. In Exodus, chapter thirteen, God said to Moses, "Consecrate to me the firstborn male. The first offspring of every womb among the Israelites belongs to me, whether man or animal."

Third, this consecration of the firstborn took place after the time of purification following

childbirth. When a woman had a male child, she was considered unclean for forty days. During that time she could not enter the temple. So Joseph did not take Mary to the temple until after the forty days. A sacrifice, usually a lamb, was offered. But if a lamb could not be afforded, then two doves or pigeons would suffice. Joseph and Mary offered the birds. Jesus grew up in a relatively poor home.

After all this, there was that deal with Simeon. Israel had long been waiting for their hero...this one anointed by God to come and set them free...this one who would restore them as a free state. Simeon waited. He was a man filled with the Holy Spirit. The Holy Spirit was upon Simeon long before even the Day of Pentecost. And the Holy Spirit let Simeon know that he would not die until he had seen this Messiah. So the Spirit nudged Simeon in the direction of the temple while Joseph and Mary were there with Jesus.

Simeon saw Jesus. He took Jesus into his arms. And Simeon had one of those now-I-can-die-a-happy-man moments. He praised God. He had seen God's salvation...a light for revelation to the Gentiles...and for glory to the people of Israel. Simeon made reference to the revolutionary nature of Jesus and his mission. Simeon said that Jesus would be the cause for both the rising and the falling of many. He told Mary that a sword would also pierce her soul.

Anna was there. She was elderly. Luke says she was very old. Anna had been a widow for a number of years. Paul wrote in his first letter to Timothy, "The widow who is really in need and left all alone puts her hope in God and continues night and day to pray and to ask God for help." This was Anna. Note our text says that she never left the temple, but worshiped night and day, fasting and praying. She was a fixture at the

temple. People saw her. And she told all those people about Jesus.

Joseph and Mary...they just marveled at the things being said about their boy. The final paragraph of our text says that when Joseph and Mary had done everything required by the Law of the Lord, they went home to Nazareth.

Now...the people waited a long time for God's Messiah to come. We are talking hundreds of years they waited. Finally...the Messiah had come...their hero...their champion...their king. But guess what? The waiting was not over. For Jesus still had to grow up. Jesus did not go straight from his cradle to his crown. He had to grow up. This whole thing proceeded very normally.

This is a verse that gets very little attention. "And the child grew and became strong; he was filled with wisdom, and the grace of God was upon him." I like that verse. Jesus was like us in every way. Jesus was born just like we were born. And Jesus even had to grow up. Even Jesus had a time of becoming. He grew and became strong. Became strong.

Once again we get this wonderful picture of humility.

Now Jesus was quite wise...wise at a very early age. I mean, in the verses that follow there is that story of Jesus in the temple. He was just twelve-years-old. Just twelve-years-old. He was in the temple courts. He conversed with teachers. Jesus listened to the teachers. Jesus asked them questions. And the Bible says that everyone who heard twelve-year-old Jesus was amazed at his answers.

No doubt it could be said of Jesus that he was wise beyond his years. But he still had to grow up. He grew and became strong. This fortieth verse, as I already said, is one of those verses that is on the obscure list. Even most scholars who write scholarly commentaries do not say much about it. But it reminds us that Jesus was just like us. He had to grow up.

Remember that all during Advent we considered just who this child is. We have considered that Jesus is the Good Shepherd.

He leads us and protects us. Jesus is the Light of the World. Jesus illuminates our darkness. Jesus is the answer to all we need to know. We saw that Jesus nourishes us. We saw that because of Jesus, we have been adopted into the family of God. We saw that Jesus came into this world just like us.

So take one last look. What child is this? He is just like us. Now, sure, he is the only begotten Son of God. He is divine. There is that. But for thirty-three years Jesus so humbled himself that he became like us...not kind of like us...but just like us. He even had to grow up. He, who was with God from the beginning...he through whom all things were created...he humbled himself and went through the natural process of growing up and becoming strong.

Why did he do that? He did it so that we could become just like him...sons and daughters of God. He did it so that we could grow up.

Last week we learned a bit of a lesson from Joseph. Joseph accepted Jesus as his very own...adopted Jesus as his very own. God accepts us as his very own. We are adopted into the family of God. We are God's sons and daughters. When we make that decision to follow Jesus, we are born into the family of God. Spiritual infants, you might say. But we don't remain infants. We grow up.

To the Ephesians Paul wrote, "...we will no longer be infants, tossed back and forth by the waves and blown here and there by every wind of teaching...instead...we will grow up into him who is the Head, that is, Jesus."

Peter wrote, "Like newborn babies, crave pure spiritual milk, so that by it you may grow up in your salvation...." He further wrote, "But grow in the grace and knowledge of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ."

Jesus grew in grace and wisdom. We are to grow in grace and wisdom. As we do, we will grow to look like Jesus.

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