

### *A Glimpse in the Temple*

<sup>40</sup> And the child grew and became strong, filled with wisdom. And the favour of God was upon him. <sup>41</sup> Now his parents went to Jerusalem every year at the Feast of the Passover. <sup>42</sup> And when he was twelve years old, they went up according to custom. <sup>43</sup> And when the feast was ended, as they were returning, the boy Jesus stayed behind in Jerusalem. His parents did not know it, <sup>44</sup> but supposing him to be in the group they went a day's journey, but then they began to search for him among their relatives and acquaintances, <sup>45</sup> and when they did not find him, they returned to Jerusalem, searching for him. <sup>46</sup> After three days they found him in the temple, sitting among the teachers, listening to them and asking them questions. <sup>47</sup> And all who heard him were amazed at his understanding and his answers. <sup>48</sup> And when his parents saw him, they were astonished. And his mother said to him, "Son, why have you treated us so? Behold, your father and I have been searching for you in great distress." <sup>49</sup> And he said to them, "Why were you looking for me? Did you not know that I must be in my Father's house?" <sup>50</sup> And they did not understand the saying that he spoke to them. <sup>51</sup> And he went down with them and came to Nazareth and was submissive to them. And his mother treasured up all these things in her heart. <sup>52</sup> And Jesus increased in wisdom and in stature and in favour with God and man. (Luke 2:40-52 ESV)

While the world has moved on from Christmas and spent the past few days celebrating the end of one year and the beginning of the next one; while Christmas trees and lights on houses are coming down; while queues are in shops to either return or repair or replace Christmas gifts or buy the Christmas sales; the Church is again out of step – isn't that the case?! – because it continues with Christmas.

The Gospel according to Luke sets the stage prior to Jesus' public ministry in the first 3 chapters. 3 chapters to cover about 30 years – chapter 1 tells us about John the Baptist and Mary and Gabriel's encounter and the announcing of Jesus' conception. Chapter 2 is actually a series of scenes concerning Jesus – his birth, his naming and circumcision, his presentation in the temple (last week's sermon by Pastor Steve), a scene when he's 12 at the temple in Jerusalem – just before he's officially a man (this week's sermon). But allow me to finish Luke's 3 chapter introduction. In chapter 3 we meet again John the Baptist preparing the way of the Lord. We see Jesus baptised. And then Luke concludes with a genealogy of Jesus going back in time from his parents to his ancestors and finishing with 'the son of Enos, the son of Seth, the son of Adam, the son of God' (Luke 3:38).

Luke is not so much arguing the case for Jesus' divinity to a sceptical Theophilus but presenting it as an accepted truth – to help Theophilus be certain of the things he's learnt. Luke is not presenting each scene like a magician waving a magic wand over his hat and concluding each 'trick' (scene) with 'Tada! See Jesus is the Son of God!'. Rather we have scene after scene written by a Christian for a Christian – in-house so to speak – through which it is Jesus who presents himself to us and like the disciples on the road to Emmaus, we can also identify how our hearts burn as the Scriptures are opened to us – the Good News – that Jesus is God here on earth for us.

And that's what we see today when Jesus is 12. Not yet legally a man, Jesus is nevertheless in the temple at Passover listening and asking questions of the teachers. The scene is remarkable enough as it is for these teachers are amazed at both Jesus' understanding and his answers – we assume the amazement was at his depth of understanding rather than his ignorance – but we don't know any details – topics discussed, the exegetical questions of Scripture debated, or the examination of rabbinical opinions. I think there is a hint to the fact that these teachers are most impressed in that Jesus is sitting *among* them when found – for sitting is a mark of authority – and Jesus later often sat to teach as it was the traditional pose but then so also did the students – though maybe not among the teachers.

The scene in itself is impressive but it's the context that makes it noteworthy for Luke. The 12 year old boy is by himself, his parents having accidentally committed that most worrying of parental 'sins' – losing a child. And not just any child! I wonder whether they thought 'Oh dear, we've lost God's anointed!' or irrationally wondered if God knew and whether they blamed each other. So for 3 days Jesus seems to have enjoyed the hospitality of the temple – we know no details – except that he

impresses his teachers and his parents are in anguish, pain, torment until they find him. Then we can easily imagine Mary's response as one of both sheer relief and then wanting to 'kill him' so to speak. "Son, why have you treated us so? Behold, your father and I have been searching for you in great distress."

It is this context that gives us the smallest insight into this boy-soon-to-be-a-man. "Why were you looking for me? Did you not know that I must be in my Father's house?" We can easily imagine his incredulity that they were searching Jerusalem for him when it should have been obvious to go straight to the one place to find him. And Jesus – who amazed his teachers and astonished his parents – creates his own history with two little words "my Father". Scholars will tell you that no one back then said such words of God – and they may be right – for what they mean is that all references we have today about how people spoke about God as Father acknowledged a relationship which had some distance by saying 'Our Father' or 'Father in heaven' whereas Jesus' clearly has less distance with God by simply saying 'my Father'.

The scene concludes with Jesus going home – being obedient – submissive to his parents – and growing in wisdom and strength and finding favour with people and with God.

At this point preachers, it seems to me, can wonder what to say next and they turn Jesus into an example that we should follow. And so this sort of preacher might go on and say: 1. growing takes time; 2. sometimes we might have to put God above our human responsibilities; 3. seek to grow in God's grace and your neighbours' 'good books'. It is so easy to turn anything – Scripture – Jesus – God – into being all about us.

Other preachers are more 20<sup>th</sup> century and who want to unpick and unpack psychologically what is going on with Jesus – his self understanding – Mary and Joseph's reactions – and so on. The danger here is that the preacher says too much and we read ourselves into the text and, worse case scenario, turn Jesus into our own image of him.

It's the same with Christmas for its relevance in the public square – its so-called moral significance – its utility for government and business who have to lose profitable days to it – are found in people helping people – good deeds and kindness abounding – and time and time again, God is pushed off stage. And that's easy to do when you don't see God. I mean if God walked up to people in all his glory I think it most unlikely that people would push him away – run away maybe – but to ignore him and focus on themselves – no. People push God off stage because they don't recognise him – the prophets talked about people seeing but not seeing. The baby in a manger and the man on a cross are the beginning and end points usually brought out for people to see God – and that is good to do – but today we get a glimpse that God isn't a superman – fast forwarding to the dramatic rescue points or dropping down from heaven ready to die on a cross. Instead the baby is growing up – in the mystery that is Jesus – true man and true God – God is growing up – no short cuts – learning and growing in his relationship with God. Those two little words 'my Father' will be expanded to many words during his public ministry and Jesus will often be attacked because of them – literally, people will pick up stones to get him.

The Christmas message beyond the manger is still one of looking at what lengths God has gone to rescue you. Look at the boy Jesus for a moment and contemplate his growing up and see in him at 12 Immanuel – God with us – talking the long road of 30 plus years to live as one of us – to grow in body and soul – and because of his later deeds we discover that this boy in the temple and God, his Father, are one – in plan, purpose, objective, and goal. We still don't see God today but we hear words and we see water and bread and wine and that plan, purpose, objective and goal continues – that you know him and his love and grow each day.