

Growing Up with Jesus

Luke 2:22-40

One of the most interesting things about what we know of the life of Jesus is what we don't know. As we've just spent the last few weeks celebrating, we know the angel Gabriel appears to Mary to announce to her that she will be the mother of the Son of God. We know the story of his birth, with shepherds and angels in the little town of Bethlehem. We get a few stories of him as a young child, as we hear this morning. We hear how his family flees to Egypt to escape the wrath of an angry king, and then return to Nazareth. We know his parents take him to the temple repeatedly, even if we only hear about the one time he gets lost, deep in discussion with the temple leaders. Yet we really don't know much about the rest of his life. We know the beginning of his life. We know the end of his life, his active ministry that lasts about 3 years. But there's so much we don't know.

Nature abhors a vacuum, and so stories have been made up about Jesus' childhood. Some fanciful stories tell of Jesus traveling to India to meet with Buddha and other spiritual leaders there, gaining spiritual insights there. Others involve stories of Jesus making clay birds come to life after being scolded for making things on the Sabbath, or raising a friend from the dead after he fell off of a roof. Others just speculate that Jesus was an apprentice to his father Joseph, working as a tekton, a carpenter or other skilled laborer, on the great Roman building project of Sepphoris near Nazareth.

What we do know about Jesus life, though, points us not to a life of great deeds and regular miraculous occurrences, but instead point to a more ordinary life. We learn his parents are devout, following the traditions and

commandments. They take him to the temple to fulfill God's commands. They teach him about God, and teach him what he's supposed to do.

That's what we just sang about. "For He is our childhood's pattern, Day by day like us He grew; He was little, weak, and helpless, Tears and smiles like us He knew; And He feels for all our sadness, And He shares in all our gladness." That's the 3rd verse of *Once in Royal David's City*, a mid-19th Century Irish Christmas hymn from 1848, written by "Fanny" Alexander an Anglican minister's wife and mother from Dublin in the nineteenth century. Just like with our children, Anglicans in Dublin had to learn their Bible and their catechism, and Ms. Alexander's godchildren would complain about how boring that was, so she started writing poems to retell the twelve articles of the Apostles' Creed in a more memorable, maybe even fun, way.

She wrote *All Things Bright and Beautiful*, to illustrate the first article: "I believe in God the Father Almighty, Maker of heaven and earth." And to teach her young students about the beginning of the second article—"I believe in Jesus Christ, God's only son our Lord, who was conceived by the Holy Ghost, born of the Virgin Mary"—she wrote "*Once in Royal David's City*." That's what this Christmas carol is: complicated theology distilled to its simple essence for young minds.

"Jesus is our childhood's pattern," she wrote. What does that mean? Maybe we should think of Carpenter Apprentice Jesus, with his calloused carpenter hands, and his dusty, sandaled feet, with wood shavings dusting his raven hair, and a carpenter's pencil perched

above his ear, and a hammer and awl jammed into his tool belt, showing us what divinity looks like and what humanity is supposed to look like.

I love Ms. Alexander's central metaphor: Jesus is our childhood's pattern. Because patterns help the end product turn out like it's supposed to turn out. With a clothing pattern, you have the see-through paper with the right dimensions you lay over your cloth before you cut and sew. From our childhood, Jesus is our pattern, the architect's blueprint, the mariner's sextant, the surgeon's MRI.

Jesus has in fact been our childhood's pattern from his earliest moments in this life because day by day like us He grew; because He was little, weak, and helpless as we have all been, because He knew tears and smiles like us; and, because he experienced a human life as we have, Jesus then does in fact feel all our sadness, And He truly shares in all our gladness.

What did Simeon say? He said that this Jesus would be a light for revelation to the Gentiles for the whole world, and for glory to God's people Israel.

So this Jesus would grow and He, although He was both God and Man, would live His life in obedience to His mother Mary and to Joseph her husband His adoptive father, perfectly fulfilling the fourth commandment by honoring them, serving and obeying them, loving and cherishing them, never angering or despising them or any authority. He is our childhood's pattern.

As just one child amongst many in those days Jesus even then fulfilled every aspect of the

Law of God without failure in your place. We however do not follow the pattern perfectly as Jesus did. There are times in our life where we have not honored our parents as he honored his, there are times when we have sinned and caused our parents to become angry, and there are times when we have despised our mother or father or sometimes both our mother and father. There are times we as parents have failed to follow God's command, as well, failed to see Jesus as the pattern to follow with our children.

Jesus is our pattern. We follow Him. God has chosen you to walk as a child of the Light, to follow Jesus. When you sin and break the pattern prepared for you by God, we can be relieved that Christ Jesus has kept the pattern without breaking it. He is the new Adam; He is Israel the Children of Israel reduced to one, fulfilling what they were unable to fulfill. He did what we could not.

Jesus didn't start being our Savior in the waters of the Jordan River at His baptism and public Anointing by John the Baptizer. No, Jesus was our Savior from before the foundations of Creation, from before His incarnation, His conception by the Holy Spirit in the womb of the Virgin Mary, from before his birth which we celebrated at Christmas and continue to celebrate today.

Now here is an important thing for you today. You know who Jesus is. It is easy to think that everyone in the world knows who Jesus is and what He has done, especially after we just celebrated Christmas, a holiday celebrated all over the world. With that, you might think everyone would be able to pick out this baby in the arms of the Virgin Mary and Joseph and Simeon and Anna from this Biblical account as the fulfilment of the promise of salvation. This

however is not the case. The Holy Spirit tipped off Simeon whose words, which we sing in the song of Simeon the Nunc Dimittis, have in turn proclaimed this Jesus for centuries. And in addition to this the Holy Spirit has employed people in your life, mothers and fathers, family and friends, pastors and church workers to share with you who this Jesus is so that you would know Him, so that you can strive to steadfastly follow in His footsteps and trust in Him for the forgiveness that you need in this life.

Is the Holy Spirit at work using you to point out Jesus to others? This is not for us alone, this Christ Child; this Jesus is for everyone not only for those as near to us as family and friends but also for those peoples from afar.

We may not know everything about Jesus' childhood. We will not be perfect parents or perfect children, following in on that pattern Jesus gave us. But thanks be to God that Jesus did all that we could not throughout His earthly life, so that we could grow up to be like Him.

Pastor David Beagley
Memorial Lutheran Church, Ames, Iowa
December 29, 2024