

MINISTRY BY MAIL
Lutheran Conference of Confessional Fellowship
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Fifth Sunday after Epiphany, February 6, 2011

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(Hymns found in The Lutheran Hymnal, CPH, 1941)

Hymns: 133, 364:1-3, 114, 348, 47.

Lessons: Psalm 111, 1 Corinthians 1:17-2:7, Luke 2:39-52.

Sermon Text: Luke 2:39-40 and 52.

Sermon by Pastor Robert Mehlretter

In the name of Jesus Christ, Dear Fellow Redeemed,

When Jesus was an infant, we read in Luke 2:39-40: *"When Joseph and Mary had done everything required by the Law of the Lord, they returned to Galilee to their own town of Nazareth. And the child grew and became strong; he was filled with wisdom, and the grace of God was upon him."* Then twelve years later we read *"And Jesus grew in wisdom and stature, and in favor with God and men."*

If you were to compare the Scripture lessons which tell of the birth of Jesus, you will discover that Matthew and Luke do not both tell all the history of Jesus' birth and early years. Luke does not tell us about the Magi, the wise men. He does not tell us anything about the flight into Egypt to avoid being murdered by evil king Herod and staying in that country until God tells them to return. He simply reports that after doing everything required by the law of the Lord, they returned to Galilee to their own town of Nazareth. Here Jesus grew up, becoming stronger day by day, filled with wisdom and the grace of God.

Then Luke's history of Jesus as true man – also true God, remember – continues in our Gospel lesson, when his parents take him to Jerusalem when he is 12 years old to celebrate the Passover. Then Luke tells us again that Jesus grew in wisdom and stature and in favor with God and men. The facts we know suggest plainly that Jesus spent the next 18 years of his life in and around Nazareth working as a carpenter. We will next hear of Jesus when he is baptized by John in the River Jordan at about 30 years of age and that begins his public ministry. Today let's peek into Scripture and see how

JESUS GROWS UP

- 1. Nazareth is where he spent nine-tenths of his life.**
- 2. He grew in wisdom, and**
- 3. He grew in the grace of God.**

We learn very little of Jesus' growing up from the Holy Scriptures. We have his birth, circumcision, presentation in the temple, fleeing into Egypt to avoid being murdered by evil king Herod, and the incident in our Gospel lesson in the temple when he was twelve years old. Beyond those facts, Scripture gives no details. But Scripture does emphasize two very important facts, facts that all Christian parents wish and pray for their children. He was filled with wisdom and the grace of God was upon him.

Jesus, Mary, and Joseph went to live in Nazareth, the old home of Joseph and Mary, a mountain village in southern Galilee, now to be the home of Jesus until he was thirty years of age. Nazareth is where the childhood and youth of Jesus was spent. Here He grew up and developed in physical strength. But far more importantly, He grew in knowledge.

He no doubt learned as all humans do.

He was filled with wisdom and the grace of God was upon him. He was obedient to his parents, and he grew in wisdom and in favor with God and men.

When King Herod was dead, they were directed to go to their old home in Nazareth, from which they had been absent for perhaps several years. It is here called "*their own city*," because there Mary and Joseph, with their families, had lived for some time, and it is also possible that they had relatives there.

The poor reputation of Nazareth in Galilee is clear from John 1:45-46, where we read "*Philip found Nathanael and told him, 'We have found the one Moses wrote about in the Law, and about whom the prophets also wrote--Jesus of Nazareth, the son of Joseph.' 'Nazareth! Can anything good come from there?' Nathanael asked. 'Come and see,' said Philip.*" Notice that Jesus was ordered further from Jerusalem, the capital city of the Jews, because his kingdom and priesthood were to have nothing to do with the present government of the Jewish church or state. He is sent into a place of obscurity and no reputation, for in this, as in everything, Jesus must humble himself for he "*made himself of no reputation, and took upon him the form of a servant.*" Philippians 2:7, King James Version. He grew up in the despised spot of Nazareth which would give Him its name – Jesus of Nazareth – the name Pilate put on the cross. Nazareth was the place where the testimony of God had announced that the light should appear.

Jesus grew up among a people seldom named and only contemptuously named by secular historians, and subjected at the time to the yoke of a foreign oppressor; in a remote and conquered province of the Roman empire; in an insignificant district of Palestine; in a little country town of proverbial insignificance. He worked in the obscurity of a carpenter's shop; far away from universities, rabbinical schools, libraries, and literary or polished society; without any help, as far as we know, except the care of his parents, the daily wonders of nature, the Old Testament Scriptures, the weekly Sabbath service of the synagogue at Nazareth, and the annual festivities in the temple at Jerusalem. Here Jesus grew up in obscurity until he reached his thirtieth year. Here he spent about nine-tenths of his earthly life.

Scripture records that the growth of Jesus was normal, both mentally and physically. His state of humiliation was so complete that not only His body was subject to the general laws of nature and of growth, but also His mind. Jesus' mother and Joseph surely taught him the Word of God and things necessary for this life. Scripture tells us that he worked as a carpenter, like Joseph. "*Isn't this the carpenter? Isn't this Mary's son and the brother of James, Joseph, Judas and Simon? Aren't his sisters here with us?' And they took offense at him.*" Mark 6:3.

Out texts today make it clear that He continued His studies eagerly and gladly, He stored up a large fund of knowledge. There was no sowing of wild oats in the sinless Christ. But the best and most excellent growth was in spiritual matters. He grew in the grace, the favor, in the good will of both God and men. He lived His life in full accordance with the precepts which He learned. He put His full trust in His heavenly Father and gave evidence of this in a life of love, the most perfect example for young men and women of all times. He was the perfect child, sinless. In the same way that we notice good behavior as opposed to wicked behavior in children, people surely noticed Jesus' behavior. But with him it was more than just outward behavior. He lived a perfect life, a sinless life in deeds, words, and even thoughts, to make up for the sinful life every one of us leads. We see in these words the active obedience of Christ. He actively obeyed and was subject to his parents and to all authorities.

We read this of Jesus in Hebrews 2:17: "*he had to be made like his brothers in every way, in order that he might become a merciful and faithful high priest in service to God, and that he might make atonement for the sins of the people.*" And so he passed through infancy and childhood as other children did, yet without sin. Like other children, he grew in stature of body and the improvement of understanding in his human soul, yet there is no indication that he was especially handsome. Surely he grew in stature, size, age. But we are reminded of what God said through Isaiah that Jesus as a person was not someone extremely handsome or beautiful. "*He grew up before him like a tender shoot, and like a root out of dry ground. He had no beauty or majesty to attract us to him, nothing in his appearance that we should desire him.*" Isaiah 53:2.

The simple words "*And the child grew*" contains the history of nearly thirty years. It describes the growth of our Lord as a natural, human growth. Because, though Jesus was truly divine, he was also really human. To try to distinguish between the divine and human in Jesus is to waste time upon an impracticable mystery which is too subtle for our dull and finite minds.

You heard in our Old Testament lesson that ***“The fear of the LORD is the beginning of wisdom; all who follow his precepts have good understanding.”*** Psalm 111:10. In Proverbs 9:10 we read ***“The fear of the LORD is the beginning of wisdom, and knowledge of the Holy One is understanding.”*** Jesus had true wisdom because he was true God. Yet Scripture tells us he grew in wisdom. We may not be able to reconcile that the all-knowing, omniscient Son of God and son of Mary learned things, that is, he “grew in wisdom”. But that is exactly what Scripture says.

This was a cause for wonder in Jesus’ ministry. We read in Matthew 13:54: ***“Coming to his hometown, he began teaching the people in their synagogue, and they were amazed. “Where did this man get this wisdom and these miraculous powers?” they asked.”*** And in Mark 6:2: ***“When the Sabbath came, he began to teach in the synagogue, and many who heard him were amazed. “Where did this man get these things?” they asked. “What’s this wisdom that has been given him, that he even does miracles!”***

Jesus had a normal human childhood, and Scripture tells us in just a few words about his mental, physical, and spiritual growth. Jesus increased in wisdom – this is his mental growth. He increased in stature – this was his physical growth, and he grew in favor with God and man. In this way his spiritual growth is summarized.

At the end of the narrative about Jesus we read he was ***“sitting among the teachers, listening to them and asking them questions,”*** Luke 2:46-47. Then Scripture says ***“And He went down with [his parents] and came to Nazareth, and was subject unto them; but His mother kept all these sayings in her heart. And Jesus increased in wisdom and stature, and in favor with God and man.”*** (King James Version). A period of approximately eighteen years is covered in this simple statement of the evangelist. Although he was the Son of God, he went with them from the temple and from Jerusalem as an obedient son. He was subject to them. In His complete fulfillment of the Law for our sakes He willingly subjected Himself to every commandment, including the fourth commandment to honor his father and mother, and lived a life of perfect obedience, in order to atone, also in this respect, for the sins of all children. Even at the age of 12, we read that ***“Everyone who heard him was amazed at his understanding and his answers.”***

We read ***“the grace of God was upon him.”*** And he grew ***“in favor with God and men.”*** “Grace” and “favor” are the same Greek word, the one usually translated “grace”. Now in our teaching, we have always defined “grace” as God’s undeserved love and mercy. We have always understood and meant that as God’s undeserved love and mercy toward mankind, toward every single human being. When Scripture uses the same word and tells us that Jesus grew in the grace and favor of God, that would surely be that he grew in God’s love and mercy, which was surely deserved by the sinless Jesus Christ, God’s own and only-begotten Son. It is undeserved by sinful man; it was totally deserved by the sinless Son of God! It is the same love and mercy of God.

Jesus grew in wisdom and knowledge as man. He did not grow in knowledge of his essential wisdom as God, nor of those treasures of wisdom and knowledge which were hid in him as Redeemer and Mediator, to be given to his church, for that was always his wisdom. Neither his divine wisdom, nor the treasures of wisdom and knowledge in him, as God, could increase in any way.

He grew, as true man, in his natural wisdom as man; in which he increased gradually, as his body grew. As he grew in body, the faculties of his soul opened, and received gradually larger measures of wisdom and knowledge, in things natural and spiritual, under the power of the Holy Spirit of God. The grace of God, the love and favor of God was upon him.

And so we rejoice today in the humanity of Jesus Christ, that sinless humanness in which Jesus grew in wisdom and in the grace of God. He humbled himself for us, so that we might live forever with him in the glories of heaven. Amen.