The Youth of the Lord

The Young Lord Jesus

From the time of Christ's birth until when he was about thirty years of age, we are told little about the life of Christ. One might think that more information would be given in order to learn more about Jesus as a boy, and a young man, but God did not see fit to reveal more than is contained at the end of Luke's second chapter. From the time of the conception of Christ, Joseph and Mary knew that their boy would not have the life of an average typical Jewish male. However, that did not mean that they had a complete understanding of their son's mission. Listen to what Simeon said about Jesus when Mary and Joseph presented him at the temple.

Nazareth

Lord, now you are letting your servant depart in peace, according to your word; for my eyes have seen your salvation that you have prepared in the presence of all peoples, a light for revelation to the Gentiles, and for glory to your people Israel.
Luke 2:29-32

It is not normal for a stranger to know more about an infant than the infant's parents. Although Simeon was a stranger to Joseph and Mary, he was not to God. Have you ever been told something that seems so amazing that you are left in shock? Luke tells us that Joseph and Mary "marveled" at the words of Simeon. That does not mean that they thought Simeon was just saying some very nice things. They literally wondered at what Simeon was saying. The way that the Greek is constructed indicates that they were wondering while Simeon was speaking. The content of Simeon's blessing shows why Jesus' parents reacted in the way they did. Read the above verses again. From what they had already been told, they knew that Jesus had come as a blessing to Israel, and even to fulfill the promise to Abraham. Go back and read Mary's "Magnificat" in Luke 1:46-55. Simeon said that Christ would be a "light for revelation to the Gentiles." (Luke 2:32). It was at this point, that Joseph and Mary realized that Jesus did not come just for Israel, but for the whole world.

Beyond this we are only given a general statement about Jesus' youth, and one example illustrating that statement. The only thing we know about Jesus' youth is what we are told.

And the child grew and became strong, filled with wisdom. And the favor of God was upon him.
Luke 2:40

Jesus grew up like a normal boy, going about his work, and becoming strong. But Jesus did not grow up like a normal boy in that he was wise and had God's full blessing on him. It is not the natural sequence in human development for children to be wise. In fact, Proverbs 22:15 says that foolishness is bound up in a child's heart.

This basically means that children are fools. This may be offensive to you, but there is no need to be offended. Children do not know enough about life to make good decisions. Not long ago I taught some third graders, and asked them if they thought ten-year-olds should be allowed to vote. I was not sure how they would respond, but all of them answered by saying that ten-year-olds do not know enough to vote. Children generally know that they are ignorant about the world around them. It is even more true that children are ignorant of the fear of God which is what wisdom is. This was not so with the Lord Jesus. Jesus was without sin and walked in the favor of God. Some artists of the past have portrayed Jesus as a boy with adult-like features to convey this. But, it is not necessary to think of Christ's early years as being purely adult-like. Luke offers two reasons for this. First we are told that Jesus grew (2:40) and that he did what his parents told him to do (2:51). In the minds of some, it might be thought that God incarnate would order around his earthly parents. After all, the Son of God did create Mary and Joseph. But Jesus did not do this for at least two reasons. First, it was not consistent with his purpose. He came in humility as the New Testament states: "[He] did not count equality with God a thing to be grasped" (Philippians 2:6). Second, God is pleased when children submit to their parents (Exodus 20:12; Ephesians 6:1-3). Jesus would not be found doing anything that is out of order with what pleases God. We also ought to understand how Jesus grew into maturity. Certainly he grew physically, and grew to be a strong man. Jesus is often thought of as a carpenter (Mark 6:33). However, the word for carpenter in the Greek is better translated as "craftsman," which included building and working with other things like stone. Consider also that the earthly vocation of Christ was lowly as well. You might think of a physically rigorous job as cool. I do too. But in the ancient world, such "common" work was not highly respected. There was nothing about it that required specialized education and training, and any man with enough muscle could do it. This is why many were offended at Jesus' teachings in Mark 6. They thought things like, "Who does he think he is? This is a craftsman!" We also ought to consider how Jesus grew spiritually. This raises the question, "How can God spiritually grow?" But we must remember that though Jesus is fully God, he is also fully man. This includes spiritual growth, but not exactly like ours. Spiritual growth normally involves repenting of sin. But Jesus had no sin of which to repent. The best answer that I am aware of comes from Sinclair Ferguson:

> When we say that Jesus grew spiritually…what do we mean? We mean that, just as we find there are obstacles in our way, things were not different for Jesus. Just as there are pressures on us to give way and live lives of less than wholehearted obedience to God, he too felt these pressures. He lived in 'the likeness of sinful flesh' (Romans 8:3 RSV); he experienced weakness, hunger, thirst, fear, opposition of all kinds just as we do. Jesus lived his life in *our* world. The Gospel writers underline the fact that Jesus did not come to the Garden of Eden, but to a broken and fallen world to be a Saviour and Example for his disciples…
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> Picture an army captain hacking his way through a jungle during a battle with guerilla forces. He leads his men from danger to safety by first facing the dangers, impediments, and tests himself… He has tasted all of our experiences of temptation. He has gone further. He has experienced them to their full strength, when they have unleashed their powers against him.
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> *Grow in Grace*, Sinclair Ferguson (Navpress, 1984), 11-13.

There is one more observation that needs to be considered from Luke's description of Jesus' youth. We are told that the favor of God was upon Jesus (2:40, 52). What do you think your life would be like if all the blessings of God were given to you? Would you have more things? Would you eat better food? Would you always have fun? No one was blessed more than Jesus, and he had none of these things. As we have discussed, Jesus had a humble birth and a humble job. There was absolutely nothing remarkable about his social status. Though he did not have a high education, he was full of wisdom. Though he had a tedious and tiring job, he was strong in spirit. Though he was the king of Israel, he was born in Bethlehem and grew up in Nazareth. And though no blessing was withheld from him, he did not grow up to have a life of riches and fame, but was murdered on a cross.

The Family of Jesus

The previous lesson ended with a question: how could Mary have remained a virgin if Jesus had brothers and sisters? In Mark 6:3, we are told that Jesus had brothers named James, Joses, Judas and Simon. We are also told that he had sisters. Matthew 13:55 says the same thing, except instead of Joses, we read "Joseph." You can also see Mark 3:31-35; 1 Corinthians 9:5; Galatians 1:19. As was discussed in a previous lesson, the Roman Catholic Church teaches that Mary perpetually remained a virgin. If that is true, then how could she have had other children? The Roman Catholic Church answers that question in the following:

> Against this doctrine the objection is sometimes raised that the Bible mentions brothers and sisters of Jesus. The Church has always understood these passages as not referring to other children of the Virgin Mary. In fact James and Joseph, "brothers of Jesus," are the sons of another Mary, a disciple of Christ, whom St. Matthew significantly calls "the other Mary." They are close relations of Jesus, according to an Old Testament expression. (*Catechism of the Catholic Church*, 500).

There are a number of problems with this. First, why would Mark and Matthew mention four names of Jesus' brothers, but two of them were really not his brothers? Second, why would they mention four brothers and sisters in the context of the parents of Jesus? It does not make any sense to discuss someone's family, and insert two "non-brothers." Third, there is no reason to believe that another Mary was the mother of James and Joseph. The following references are provided to support the Roman Catholic view, but the texts do not lead to this conclusion: Matthew 13:55; 28:1; 27:56. Fourth, that Joseph had children with another Mary is highly problematic. It would have to imply that he was divorced, since the "other Mary" was still living. Not only is there no record of this, it is inconsistent with Joseph's exceptional character. There are other occasions when these brothers and sister of Jesus are explained as merely cousins. First, this would still not make sense in the context of a discussion on Jesus' immediate family. Additionally, the word used for brothers in Mark 3:31 is ἀδελφοὶ (adelphoi) which can only ever mean "brothers." It can never mean cousin. Those who heard Jesus teach in the synagogue (Mark 6) did not think anything was remarkable about his family. But as you will see, the firstborn of Mary became the firstborn from the dead, and calls all who have faith in him "his brothers" (Hebrews 1:6; 2:11).

As with the presentation of Jesus at the temple, his greatness was to be gradually realized by Jesus' parents. As such, when he was found with the teachers in the temple, Mary treasured these things in her heart (Luke 2:51). Parents have fond memories of their children as they grow up. Of the sweetest memories that can be had, Mary's were the most precious. As Jesus grew, she more

Nazareth

completely cherished her son, realizing that this boy who always obeyed was the consolation of Israel (Luke 2:25), and the savior of the world.

As you consider this, take some time to think back to the lessons covering the intertestamental period. Even think back to the Old Testament. Think about Israel's long and painful history, especially all that it had undergone in the Babylonian Exile, and the invasions of the Seleucids, and Romans. Under the Maccabees, the Jews gave all they had for their freedom. However, the answer to their longings was a poor young man from Nazareth. Consider the fact that they had been looking for the wrong thing. When God came and pitched his tent among his own people, he was not made the king and high priest like the Hasmoeans were. In fact, the only political ruler that was aware of his birth tried to kill him. When Jesus came, he was recognized by shepherds, Gentiles (the magi), old man Simeon, and an old widow.

Extra-biblical records

You may have heard of documents that speak of Jesus' youth in areas where the Bible is silent on this subject. They are mentioned here to make you aware of them, not to tell you about what Jesus really did as a boy. One of these is called the Infancy Gospel of Thomas. This is not the same as the Gospel of Thomas, which is a collection of miscellaneous alleged sayings of Jesus found in Egypt. Perhaps the most odd story from the Infancy Gospel of Thomas is when Jesus made 12 clay birds on the Sabbath. When he clapped they flew away. This is not only highly uncharacteristic of Christ, but the Gospel of John tells us that his first miracle took place at the wedding at Cana (John 2:1-12). Another attempt to discern what Jesus did in his teen and early adult life has been done in Muslim teachings. It is said that Jesus traveled to India and studied with the mystics from the ages of 12-30. This is also developed from of pure conjecture. It is most likely that whoever wrote those accounts either had little or no knowledge of the Gospels or was intentionally making things up. Things like the Infancy Gospel of Thomas are obviously sensational. It is not necessary to speculate about Jesus' youth. He submitted to his parents, learned the builder's craft, and was faithful to God. Think about what it means to have a great life. Many of us Americans would think of something like high recognition, becoming wealthy, or perhaps just living a happy and comfortable life. This was not what Jesus' life was like. Certainly his life was not filled with misery. But Jesus had the best life that anyone can have because he was always obedient to God. He did this in his quiet life of faithful devotion to his responsibilities.

Following the Birth and Youth of the Lord

Using Map 2, you will follow events leading up to the time when Jesus was 12. Do not use a ruler when you are drawing the routes, because they will be too straight.

Beginning in Nazareth, use **green** to travel south. Make sure you stay on the dotted line that stretches from north to south. After the dotted line, approach **Shechem** from the west. Remember that Shechem is in between Mt. Ebal and Mt. Gerezim, which is why it needs to be passed through. Travel south through **Lebonah** and then to **Jerusalem** and **Bethlehem**. It is about 70 miles from Nazareth to Bethlehem. Off the right of the Dead Sea, label the following inside a box with a line towards Bethlehem:

THE LIFE OF CHRIST: LESSON 8

THE BIRTH OF THE LORD
Glory to God in the highest,
and on earth peace among
those with whom he is pleased!
Luke 2:14

Continue to travel south and sweep to the west just over Hebron and to **Gaza**. From here draw your line along the coast with an arrowhead at the edge of the map. Just below the arrowhead, label: **To Egypt**. From this point, you will travel back to Nazareth, but not the same way. From the arrowhead you drew, make a parallel route (with **red**) back to **Gaza**. To the left of Gaza label the following in the Mediterranean Sea inside a box:

Out of Egypt I have called my son.
Hosea 11:1
Matthew 2:15

After this, you will move inland as you travel north. Head to **Antipatris**, but do not go through Ashkelon or Joppa. From Antipatris, continue to move north in the direction of the Coastal Plain until you are straight east of Caesarea. From this point, cross the Carmel Ridge at a 45° angle. On the northeastern side of the Carmel Ridge, cross the river, and move to the south of the hilly region where Nazareth is (45° angle). You should be positioned so that you will enter the foothills and into **Nazareth** from the south. Label the following in between Caesarea and Nazareth inside a box with a line towards Nazareth:

And the child grew and became strong,
filled with wisdom. And the favor of
God was upon him.
Luke 2:40

From Nazareth you will travel to **Jerusalem** making the same exact route as you previously did. Use **blue**. To the right of Jerusalem, label the following in a box, with a line towards Jerusalem:

And all who heard him were
amazed at his understanding
and his answers.
Luke 2:47

In the upper right hand corner of the map, make the following key inside a box:

KEY
Christ's Family to Bethlehem
and flight to Egypt
Return from Egypt to Nazareth
Jesus' second Passover.

Reading Assignment:
Matthew 17-28; Luke 21-24
Review Mark

Greek	Pronunciation	English	Part of Speech
tektwn	*tek-tone*	**craftsman, carpenter**	*noun*
onoma	*on-aa-ma*	**a name**	*noun*
h	*a (aye)*	**or**	*conjunction*
teknon	*tek-non*	**child, descendant**	*noun*
pa~, pasa, pan	*poss, pasa, pann*	**each, every, all**	*adjective*