

First Sunday After Epiphany – 2010
Sermon – Christ Church Parish
Father Michael Erickson
The Gospel – Luke 2:41-52

“And Jesus increased in wisdom and stature,
and in favor with God and man.”

This solitary verse is the only account that we find in the Gospel of Luke for what we often call the missing years in the life of Christ Jesus. We learn about Him going about His Father’s business at the Temple when he is twelve years of age; then, the next moment, He is thirty and ready to embark upon His divinely ordained ministry. From a modern day literary point of view, this is altogether strange, as if setting out to write a biography of a great man and then hiding or ignoring most of his years. Certainly, the same sources, which had informed Saint Luke about Christ Jesus returning back to the Temple as a child, could have provided some biographical detail about His life as a teenager and then a young adult, prior to His ministry: What specifically was His work and education in those missing years? What friendships did He cultivate? Did He travel extensively, as some of the Gnostic Gospels would tell us, or did He remain close to His family home in Nazareth?

Now, the Gospel of Luke throughout the ages has been properly characterized as the most historical of the four, canonical Gospels. It is written like a respectable historian, living and researching in the first century AD, indeed would have done, including details that set the account in specific times and places and that recount the characters upon the stage in very distinctive, humanizing colors. Unlike many of the contemporary Gnostic Gospels, the Gospel of Luke is much more than simply a compilation of the “sayings of Jesus;” and while it acknowledges His divinity, it does not set out to do as such by downplaying, or ignoring altogether, His unique humanity. As we read about Christ Jesus in the Gospel of Luke, it is very clear that, if the historian had been alive during the Nicene Council in the fourth century AD, he would have concurred readily with their creedal description of Christ Jesus as indeed “Very God and Very Man.”

Nevertheless, while relatively abundant with biographical detail, the Gospel of Luke is not, strictly speaking, a biography. It is rather, like the three other Gospels within the canon of the New Testament, a proclaiming memory of the good news of the coming of the Kingdom of God unto men. It proclaims now, as it did when first read among the Christians huddled within their home churches in the later part of the first century AD. It calls out to each and every one of us, in that clarifying voice which the Holy Ghost indwells within us in virtue of our baptism into the Body of Christ; and in so doing, it demands here and now an affirming response. We have free will, but we do not have everlasting time to decide if and when to go about our Father’s business. The Gospel of Luke bypasses most biographical details of the life of Christ Jesus, because it is getting to the point, just as we too need to get to the point of our own lives. Have we been called aside by Our Father to do His work within the world? Yes, as we read today in the Epistle of Saint Paul to the Romans about what he calls our “reasonable service.” Are we able truly to understand that call? Yes, as Christ Jesus very clearly promises us that Holy Comforter, who makes heard what has been silent, for those who have ears to hear. Are we able truly to act upon that call? Yes, as God had promised Moses to provide the actual words that he would need to speak before Pharaoh, so God the Holy Comforter will do the same for us.

This is not an easy task, to be sure. As indeed the world rejected Him, so it will reject us, if and when we heed our call to shoulder the Cross. It will reject our words and actions as insubordinate, scandalous, or revolutionary, just as the child Christ Jesus would be seen at first as having been disobedient for leaving his parents to go back to the Temple. It will react in pain and sorrow, as even the blessed parents of Christ Jesus first spoke of their very real sorrow at learning of his departure from them. Indeed, if it is too easy for the world to hear, if we receive too much in adulation for the task that we do, then we may presume to be on the wrong path. Our delight is to carry that Cross, to go about our Father’s business in a world which rejects His Son. Let us pray then that we too get to the point in our lives.

