

Luke 2.41-52

Jesus grew

Amington

Sunday 30 December 2018

Christmas

Anyone get any good cracker jokes? I think our best one was this...

Why did the man get fired from the orange factory? He couldn't concentrate.

What sort of Christmas have you had? Are you all ready with your New Year Resolutions to eat healthily and exercise more?

I've been pondering these two passages all week – Luke draws a clear link between Hannah and Mary, and between Samuel and Jesus.

Those women are probably the two best examples of humble faith in the Bible. Both trust God, both give birth miraculously, and both sing a song of praise to God when they find out they are pregnant. They are all about giving God the glory.

Then there's that verse about how Hannah used to make Samuel a little robe and take it to him on their yearly visit to the temple – it breaks my heart a little every time I hear it or read it – I'm a big softie really. She had made a vow that if God gave her a child, she would dedicate him to God's service – and she followed through.

Samuel grew up to be a mighty judge and prophet, leading Israel faithfully all his life, anointing not one but two kings – one of whom was King David. And yet, even his legacy was mixed – his sons were wicked and abused their position.

We might not be surprised to read something like this:

The boy Samuel continued to grow in stature and in favour with the Lord and with people.

1 Samuel 2.26 (NIV)

Of course he *grew*, he was a little boy!

But then Luke quotes that verse, almost verbatim, and applies it to *Jesus*:

And Jesus grew in wisdom and stature, and in favour with God and man.

Luke 2.52 (NIV)

Jesus grew. Luke isn't simply talking physically here, but in every sense – **in wisdom** as well as **stature, in favour *with God and man.***

For some of us it will feel a little weird to say that **Jesus grew** like that – he was God's only Son, beloved from all eternity, begotten of the Father before all worlds – how could *he* grow in wisdom, how could *he* grow in favour *with God!*?

For others it will seem completely natural – *of course* **Jesus grew**, because we all do. We see Jesus being hungry, tired, angry, upset – we see our experience of what it means to be a human, mirrored in Jesus' life. Of course **Jesus grew!**

We respond differently that verse, because it's so hard to get our heads around what it means for the Son God to become a man. 'Veiled in flesh the Godhead see; hail the incarnate deity!'

We read in Hebrews that Jesus learned obedience (Hebrews 5.8), and in Mark that Jesus walked on water (Mark 6.48). We see him raising Lazarus from the dead (John 11.44), and then weeks later dying himself, on a Roman cross (Matthew 27.50).

It's so hard to keep those two things together, that people usually emphasise one or the other – we either focus more on Jesus as God, or on Jesus as Man.

But the truth is, Jesus was and is *both* God *and* Man. He truly took on our human nature. It wasn't a parlour trick, it was *real*.

It's hard to understand – the technical term is 'hypostatic union' – and frankly we'll never be able to understand *how*. But we don't need to, because the Bible *does* tell us *why*, and *what it means*.

And the answer to that is simple: God is with us.

Jesus, God made Man, is God, and Jesus, God made Man, is Man – so he is God with us. And he is truly with us. I imagine that most of us have either had, or we have been ourselves, visitors in the last few days. Visitors are lovely – and to be honest one reason they are lovely is because they are *temporary*... they arrive, and then they leave (!).

But Jesus is not a visitor. Jesus *is one of us*. He doesn't visit us, he *dwells with us*. Jesus doesn't come and go, he came to *stay*. Jesus doesn't expect us to find him – he came to find *us*, who are like lost sheep, and bring us home.

Jesus' birth tells us who God really is – and it's not who we might expect. I'd like to read you a poem about that, by someone called Glen Scrivener. It's called *Santa vs Jesus*.

Santa vs Jesus

Written by Glen Scrivener

They say there's a big man who lives far away,
Supposedly jolly but it's hard to say.
I've never seen him, and neither have you.
But the children believe, whether or not it's true.
He's known as a loner, with many a quirk
No time for a chat, he's embroiled in his work
He keeps to himself, for most of the year,
I reckon we're grateful he doesn't appear.
We send him requests, for particular needs,
But we never hear back, who knows if he heeds?
We try to be good, give his arm a twist,
To merit our place on his blessed little list.
And maybe one day if we do what we should,
He'll give us our things, so long as we're good.
I've had it to here, I'm calling his bluff:
He's a weird moralistic dispenser of stuff!

Granted, this rant is a strange one to pick
But listen I'm not really after St Nick.
As strange as he is, and Santa is odd,
I'm really addressing most folks' view of God.
It's God who we see as a distant Big Guy –
An ancient, invisible, St Nick in the Sky.
“He sees you asleep, He knows when you wake
He's watching and waiting to spot your mistake.”
And just like with Santa, requests we hand in,
We want all his things but we don't want him.
That's our connection with old Father Christmas.
We might dress it up, it's essentially business.
Throughout the year, good behaviour's our onus
When Christmas rolls round we're expecting our bonus.
“Just leave us the gifts Nick, we've been good enough!
And then please push on, now we've got all your stuff!”
I mean Santa is interesting, curious, quirky
But no-one wants him to share their turkey!
I'm sure his “ho, ho, hos” are sublime,
But I fear what he'll say once he's drunk our mulled wine.

That's old St Nick, but the picture rings true,
It's how we imagine what God is like too.
But Christmas resounds with a stunning "Not so!"
The One from on high was born down below.
To a world in need He did not send another.
God the Son became God our Brother.
He drew alongside, forever to dwell,
Our God in the flesh, Immanuel.
This God in the Manger uproots all our notions:
A heavenly stooping, divine demotion.
Born in a stable, wriggling on straw,
Fully committed to life in the raw.
Santa gives things and then goes away.
Jesus shows up, to befriend and to stay.
Santa rewards those with good behaviour.
Jesus comes near to the broken as Saviour.
If you don't like God, I think I know why...
You probably think He's St Nick in the Sky.
You're right to reject that far-away stranger!
This Christmas look down to the God in the manger.