

## Pastoral Message, 2 February 2019

My Dear Friends in Christ,

At the end of his gospel sequence describing Jesus' Presentation in the Temple (4:21-30), St. Luke writes: "The child grew and became strong, filled with wisdom; and the favor of God was upon him." Apart from a later episode where Jesus at twelve is lost in the Temple (Luke 2:41-52) "discovered by his parents conversing with the elders" we know nothing of his life prior to appearing (according to scripture) as a man in his thirties at the Jordan River, there to be baptized by John. Whole decades are unaccounted for, at least by the four canonical Gospels, a period sometimes termed Jesus' hidden years.

These apparent missing pages from Jesus' biography have both fascinated and frustrated generations of Christians. Who can blame them? It's only natural to want to know what our Lord may have done or thought about as a boy, what youthful adventures he might have experienced or, perhaps more critically, what preparations he might have made for the world-redeeming mission and ministry to which he had been called. What in his upbringing, we want to ask, during all those years in Nazareth, contributed to his adult vision and character?

Yet we have nothing specific to guide us (although the scene with the elders does suggest a certain intellectual precocity?). We imagine that he learned his father's trade of carpentry (and was probably expected to carry it on). We assume that he was a respectful, dutiful child, maybe even a popular friend and schoolmate. And at some point, we can envision him bidding his family good bye, and setting off "down Galilee's slow roadways" toward his meeting with John and the ultimate appointment with his divine destiny.

But we probably are thinking too hard about this. And we've probably watched too many religious movies where all the actors seem to have halos hovering around them and ethereal music is playing in the background! It's very likely Jesus lived, to all appearances, a perfectly ordinary, unremarkable life in his small, undistinguished hometown (although we do know that Nazareth during Jesus' time was adjacent to larger, more cosmopolitan centers). I'm sure there were times when (like all small-town youth) he must have been just plain bored! If anything unusual was going to happen, it would need to come from within.

With that in mind, I can see Jesus sitting with his family in the synagogue on the Sabbath, perhaps one day paying closer attention than usual to the words of scripture the lector was reading. Maybe suddenly his eyes lit up and his heart strangely warmed when he heard of the call of Isaiah. Perhaps Jesus too yearned to declare, with the prophet, "Here I am, Lord, send me!" As he grew, he no doubt became more attuned both to that inner desire and the outer world to which he ultimately would venture, but for reasons not yet revealed.

All of this was still in the future. For the present, it was enough for him as it should be for us to know that such stirrings were starting to take hold. And so it's possible that Luke said all he needed to say about those "hidden years": "The child grew and became

strong, filled with wisdom; and the favor of God was upon him.” The rest would be left to God’s own revealing when, in the epiphany at the Jordon, the Father would claim Jesus as “my Son, the Beloved, on whom my favor rests” (Luke 21:22).

At our Baptism, God also claimed each of us as the beloved, as children and heirs in Christ of the eternal Kingdom. Since, however, most of us were baptized as infants, we may have spent our lives up to now seeking to live out the meaning of such kinship and oneness with God somewhat the opposite journey that our Lord followed.

Yet in both circumstances (Jesus’ and our own) the key idea gleaned from Luke may be that of growth. Not unlike our young Savior in Nazareth, we continue to grow in understanding of our callings; we continue to listen for the voice of wisdom that will supply the courage and the will to accomplish the work God has given us to do. And we continue to yearn for those daily moments when we can say, as one day Jesus himself surely said, marching in the direction of the Jordon (the town of his youth fading behind him): “Here I am, Lord, send me.”

Blessings,  
Fr. Gordon +