

St M 30 12 2018 9.30am Luke 2 v 41

Luke's Gospel begins and ends in Jerusalem and it is in Jerusalem that his second volume the Acts of the Apostles also begins as the story of the spread of the Good news goes forth into the wider world. The Temple in Jerusalem is the focal point of Jewish worship. It was the place where the Ark of the Covenant was situated, in the Holy of Holies. He sets out to reveal the gospel story as the fulfilment of God's promises to Israel.

Over the centuries scholars have debated, and considered to what degree Jesus was aware of who he really was. Did He realise he

was God's son and if so at what moment did this momentous fact dawn on him?

The realisation may have been gradual but by the time of the visit to Jerusalem which Luke recounts in this morning's Gospel reading Jesus appears to have grasped the momentous truth.

In first Century Palestine it was part of the law that all Jewish males were to go to the Temple at least 3 times a year; the Feasts of Passover, Pentecost & Tabernacles. But of these three feasts the Passover was the most significant. As the Jewish people spread throughout the wider world it became tradition for Israelite men to go to the temple at least once a year on one of these feasts and

even today it is the strong desire of all devout Jews to travel to Jerusalem for Passover at least once in their lifetime.

In Luke's account we read of a particular occasion when Mary and Joseph and Jesus had made this journey. Jesus we are told was 12 years old at the time, and so on the threshold of manhood.

Scholars indicate that it is from the age of 13 that a Jewish boy takes on responsibility for himself to study and observe the Jewish Torah. In this are origins of the much later expression Bar Mitzvah meaning "son of the commandments" and the ceremony linked to it.

But the significance of Luke's account of this particular Temple visit, lies in the subsequent events when on their return we learn

Jesus had remained behind and so Mary and Joseph had to go back to find him.

What parent wouldn't rush back in anxious haste when they discovered their son was missing from the group in which they were travelling.

They searched for him, but what they discovered was not a frightened lost boy but a young man conversing with knowledge and wisdom in the house of God.

Luke paints us a picture as he tells this story, in doing so he shows us a genuinely human Jesus in a genuinely human context. It is this Jesus who quite simply and unpretentiously reveals his identity as the Son of God when to Mary's reproachful words

“Your Father and I have been searching for you” he replies “Did you not know that I was bound to be in my Father’s house”.

Jane Williams commenting on this passage says this “The passage... is about different kinds of sonship. Jesus parents are expecting one kind of behaviour, due to them as his parents, but he has chosen another road, that reflects his true parentage and he is amazed that Mary and Joseph have not noticed whose ‘son’ he is”¹

There is a difference between the earthly family into which we were born and the family to which as Christians belong by Grace.

¹ Lectionary Reflections year C Jane Williams ©SPCK 2003

Jesus was born of Mary but He is also the Son of God. He, as a lad growing to adulthood, is with her, but does not belong to her; in the Temple, Mary learns that He must be about his Father's business. A poignant reminder of the time when she and Joseph had brought the infant Jesus to the Temple some years before and Simeon had foretold that a spear would pierce her heart.

The symbolism is acted out as Jesus moves from Mary and Joseph's home in Nazareth to the Father's house in Jerusalem.

There was another occasion some years later when Mary - the God barer - looked for the one she brought to birth, with concern for his welfare because she loved him.

Jesus by this time had left home and gone about his ministry with vigour and enthusiasm. The crowds which he had drawn were so large, and the demands on his time so great he did not even have time to stop and eat.

Jesus response to her concerns on that occasion

“whoever does the will of my Father in heaven is my brother and sister and mother”

is not so different to his reaction in the temple “Did you not know that I must be in my Father’s house”

This story about the boy Jesus in the Temple is told for our understanding of who Jesus really is.

The wholly divine Son of God, being about his Father's business, but this meant for him also, being completely human with all that that involved, in facing temptation, being subject to his parents as he grew to manhood and being servant of all in humble obedience to His Father's will.

At the conclusion of the story Luke tells us that Mary treasured all these things in her heart.

This story is not a rejection of his earthly parents but a re-prioritizing of relationship.

And so we discover that true kinsmen are those who do the will of God and so reflect his image so wonderfully and sacrificially restored by Christ in obedience to his Father's will.

“It is what he would later ask of Simon and Andrew, James and John. “Follow me” would be the invitation for them to leave their homes, their nets, and their families and move to a different place, live a different life, see with different eyes.

It is today what he asks of you and me.” *Michael Marsh*

