

Luke 2:41-52

Mary and Joseph accidentally leave Jesus behind in Jerusalem, and return to find him in the Temple in discussion with the religious teachers. Jesus is obedient and grows in wisdom and stature.

Now every year his parents went to Jerusalem for the festival of the Passover. And when he was twelve years old, they went up as usual for the festival. When the festival was ended and they started to return, the boy Jesus stayed behind in Jerusalem, but his parents did not know it. Assuming that he was in the group of travellers, they went a day's journey. Then they started to look for him among their relatives and friends. When they did not find him, they returned to Jerusalem to search for him. After three days they found him in the temple, sitting among the teachers, listening to them and asking them questions. And all who heard him were amazed at his understanding and his answers.

When his parents saw him they were astonished; and his mother said to him, "Child, why have you treated us like this? Look, your father and I have been searching for you in great anxiety."

He said to them, "Why were you searching for me? Did you not know that I must be in my Father's house?"

But they did not understand what he said to them.

Then he went down with them and came to Nazareth, and was obedient to them. His mother treasured all these things in her heart. And Jesus increased in wisdom and in years, and in divine and human favour.

COCU6C Readings

Having just celebrated the birth of Christ, we now fast forward to the one story in the Scriptures from Jesus' childhood – when his parents forgot him in the Temple. Then, with next week being Epiphany, we go back in time again, to the visit of the magi. The difference is that, while Christmas seeks to explore the event of the incarnation, Epiphany begins to tease out the meaning of the incarnation.

The reading from 1 Samuel forms a kind of parallel with the Gospel. Both Samuel and Jesus were at home in the temple from a very young age. Both had parents who valued and visited the Temple. Both became teachers and leaders of God's people. And both were completely human. As such, both had to learn and grow and be nurtured into their ministries. In a similar way, the Psalm speaks of God as the one who strengthens all of creation – which responds in praise. Finally, in Colossians, God's people are also called to learn and grow into the life of following Christ – a life of compassion, harmony and peace.

In many ways faith has been framed as a way to escape the struggles and injustices of the world. Social justice is still an uncomfortable, or forbidden, term in many segments of the Christian community. As we have focussed on the divinity of Christ and on the otherworldly heaven we believe he has won for us, we have become disconnected from our planet, from other people who believe and live differently from us, and even from our own flesh and blood – our own humanity. If we are to take incarnation seriously, though, we will find ourselves taking embodiment seriously, taking the earth and our humanity seriously. Once this truth has captured us, we will inevitably begin to care more about serving and caring for people just because they are valuable as human beings, and we will seek to bring them to wholeness in whatever way is best for them. And we will seek to serve with an attitude of learning, humility and seeking to grow into wholeness together. The incarnation really does change how we engage in the world, if we will let it. We can no longer devalue the daily realities we must face. If incarnation becomes the basis for our lives, we cannot help but heed the call to be always growing and learning. We cannot help but view this life as more than just a test for eternity, but as having value in and of itself. This means that we must become just as concerned for the physical, emotional and mental well-being of those around us as we are for their spiritual well-being. It means that we can no longer live with a dualistic view of ourselves, but must embrace the essential unity of spirit, mind and body, of God and creation.

In the light of this we will discover that following Jesus means that we get involved in play, companionship, advocacy, service and acts of generosity as much as we are engaged in worship and evangelism. Suddenly we discover that so-called “spiritual” pursuits are not separate from our normal “human” pursuits. And out of all of this we will find that following Jesus becomes something that engages every facet of our lives – our relationships, our learning, our work, our leisure, our money, our values, our ethics and, yes, our spirituality. The Christ who grew, who challenged, who debated, who ate and learned becomes a true model for how we choose to live our lives, and how we can best bring life to those around us.

Psalm 148

A psalm calling all of creation to praise the God who has strengthened God's people.

Praise the Lord!

Praise God from the heavens; praise God in the heights!

Praise God, all God's angels; praise God, all God's host!

Praise God, sun and moon;

praise God, all you shining stars!

Praise God, you highest heavens,

and you waters above the heavens!

Let them praise God's name, for God commanded and they were created.

God established them forever and ever; God fixed their bounds, which cannot be passed.

Praise God from the earth,

you sea monsters and all deeps,

fire and hail, snow and frost,

stormy wind fulfilling God's command!

Mountains and all hills, fruit trees and all cedars!

Wild animals and all cattle, creeping things and flying birds!

Kings of the earth and all peoples, princes and all rulers of the earth!

Young men and women alike, old and young together!

Let them praise God's name, for God's name alone is exalted;

God's glory is above earth and heaven.

God has raised up a horn for God's people,

praise for all God's faithful,

for the people of Israel who are close to God.

Praise the Lord!

1 Samuel 2:18-20,26

Samuel grows under the care of Eli the priest, and his parents visit him annually when they come to the Tabernacle for the sacrifice.

Samuel was ministering before the Lord, a boy wearing a linen ephod.

His mother used to make for him a little robe and take it to him each year, when she went up with her husband to offer the yearly sacrifice.

Then Eli would bless Elkanah and his wife, and say, “May the Lord

repay you with children by this woman for the gift that she made to the Lord”; and then they would return to their home. And the Lord

took note of Hannah; she conceived and bore three sons and two daughters. And the boy Samuel grew up in the presence of the Lord.

Now Eli was very old. He heard all that his sons were doing to all

Israel, and how they lay with the women who served at the entrance

to the tent of meeting. He said to them, “Why do you do such things? For I hear of your evil dealings from all these people. No, my sons; it is

not a good report that I hear the people of the Lord spreading abroad.

If one person sins against another, someone can intercede for the sinner with the Lord; but if someone sins against the Lord, who can

make intercession?” But they would not listen to the voice of their

father; for it was the will of the Lord to kill them. Now the boy Samuel

continued to grow both in stature and in favor with the Lord and with

the people.

Colossians 3:12-17

Instruction on how those who have been chosen and forgiven by God should live – in compassion, harmony and peace.

As God's chosen ones, holy and beloved, clothe yourselves with

compassion, kindness, humility, meekness, and patience. Bear with

one another and, if anyone has a complaint against another, forgive

each other; just as the Lord has forgiven you, so you also must

forgive. Above all, clothe yourselves with love, which binds everything

together in perfect harmony. And let the peace of Christ rule in your

hearts, to which indeed you were called in the one body. And be

thankful. Let the word of Christ dwell in you richly; teach and

admonish one another in all wisdom; and with gratitude in your hearts

sing psalms, hymns, and spiritual songs to God. And whatever you

do, in word or deed, do everything in the name of the Lord Jesus,

giving thanks to God the Father through him.