

JESUS' EARLY LIFE  
A Sermon for the First Sunday after Epiphany, 2012  
On the Text: Propers for the Day  
By the Reverend Doctor Randolph Constantine

Our Gospel lesson for this morning gives us the story of Jesus' going to the temple with His parents when he was 12 years old and then staying behind alone in Jerusalem in a sort of reverse "Home Alone" situation to question and possibly even to preach to the priests. When Joseph and Mary came back and found Him, He was a slightly rebellious in His reply to Mary's questions; but in the end, he submitted to their parental authority and went back to Nazareth with them.

This is an old and familiar story to most all of us. Even though many of the events on the Church calendar move around, there is always a First Sunday after Epiphany; so we tend to hear this story at least once every year; and dutiful priests get out their theological picks and shovels and try to mine whatever gold can be found in this story to apply to our lives. After a while the veins of ore run out.

Some time this past week, it occurred to me to look at this story, not in isolation as a story that stands alone, but as an episode that is part of a larger story, the story of Jesus' early life; an episode that turns out to be the last episode of that story. The idea is to ask, and hopefully, to answer the questions: What is the significance of the early life of Jesus; and why do we know so little of it? Maybe that last part should be, Why were we given so little of it?

Now there is one thing we have to take note of in looking at this story, and that is that when I say the Name, Jesus, I mean the human person. We know from John 1:1, that the Son of God, the Eternal Word, has existed with God, as part of God, forever, from before the creation of the universe when time began. That is not true of Jesus. Jesus did not come into being until the Holy Spirit formed Him in Mary's womb. What we want to look at is the story of the early life of this person, Jesus, to see what it means for us.

This larger story begins with the Annunciation, when the angel Gabriel, comes to Mary and tells her that she has been chosen by God to be the mother of Jesus. That story was told to us in one of the lessons of our service of Lessons and Carols on Christmas Eve, but does not appear as a Gospel lesson for Holy Communion until the Feast of the Annunciation on the 25<sup>th</sup> of March. To see our larger story, we have to piece it together from scattered parts of the Bible.

The parts of the story are these:

- 1) The Annunciation, in Luke 1: 26-38;
- 2) The meeting with Elizabeth in Luke 1:39-56, a meeting in which Mary is now pregnant, but in which Elizabeth has been pregnant with John about 6 months more than Mary is with Jesus;
- 3) The trip to Bethlehem and the Birth of Jesus with the announcement and adoration of the shepherds, which is given only in detail in Luke 2: 1-20;
- 4) The Circumcision and Naming of Jesus, in Luke 2: 21;
- 5) The presentation of Jesus at the Temple as a first-born on the day of Mary's Purification, 40 days after His birth in Luke 2: 22-40.
- 6) The visit of the Magi, the flight to Egypt, and the Slaughter of the Innocents, all considered as one episode in Matthew 2: 1-23; and lastly
- 7) Our story today of the visit to the temple, probably at Passover, when Jesus was 12.

That's it. This is all the information we have about Jesus from the time of Gabriel's announcement to Mary until He is 12 years old in Jerusalem. After that we know nothing until Jesus at the age of 30 is baptized by John. We may wonder what happened during those 18 years between 12 and 30, but all we can do is wonder unless some more manuscripts are discovered. What we do know in these seven chapters on Jesus' early life can tell us some things we need to know about Jesus and pose us some interesting problems.

Why this lack, this paucity of information? I can only guess, but I think it is because the Gospel writers were more concerned with putting forth Jesus' teachings & Gospel of Salvation than in describing what they (and He) considered to be nonessential details of His early life.

The problems come somewhat from this lack of information. St. Mark says nothing about Mary, Joseph, angels, or Jesus Birth. St. John mentions Jesus' Birth only in passing in John 1:14 [14 And the Word was made flesh, and dwelt among us, \(and we beheld his glory, the glory as of the only begotten of the Father,\) full of grace and truth.](#) Again, no mention of Mary or Joseph or the angels. We get our information only from the Gospels of St. Matthew and St. Luke, and it is almost as if they were not speaking to one another. Even in places where they do cover the same events, each of them mentions something that the other omits.

The worst of the problems is that there is no hard chronological information anywhere, so that means we can't reconcile the story of the flight to Egypt in the Gospel of St. Matthew with what we are told in Luke 2:39, that after Joseph and Mary had done everything required by the Law on the 40<sup>th</sup> day after Jesus' birth, they went back to Galilee. [39 And when they had](#)

performed all things according to the law of the Lord, they returned into Galilee, to their own city Nazareth. These two stories don't really contradict one another. There just isn't enough information for us to decide what the actual sequence of events was.

What can we say we can learn from these 7 events or chapters in Jesus' life? One thing, that He was, and is, human! Each of these seven chapters tells us this in one way or another

At the annunciation, Gabriel says to Mary in Luke 1:30-33 **Fear not, Mary: for thou hast found favour with God. 31 And, behold, thou shalt conceive in thy womb, and bring forth a son, and shalt call his name JESUS. 32 He shall be great, and shall be called the Son of the Highest: and the Lord God shall give unto him the throne of his father David: 33 And he shall reign over the house of Jacob for ever; and of his kingdom there shall be no end.** "Thou shalt conceive in thy womb and bring forth a **son**." A son, conceived and born of a woman. has to be human.

At the meeting with Elizabeth we have confirmation that Mary is pregnant. The story of the Birth of Jesus tells us nothing unusual; it just tells us of a woman giving birth to a human baby in a stable. The chapter about the Circumcision also does not remark on anything out of the ordinary. A human male child was circumcised.

When after 40 days Jesus is presented at the temple, the main thing being done in that ceremony was the ritual cleansing of Mary as required in Leviticus 12:1&2 for a woman who has born a male child. However, Jesus being her firstborn fell under the Law God gave Moses in Exodus 13:2 **2 Sanctify unto me all the firstborn, whatsoever openeth the womb among the children of Israel, both of man and of beast: it is mine.** This did not point to the divinity of our Lord; it just says all firstborn, male or female, belong to God. So here, in this visit, Jesus is seen again to be a normal baby by the priests whom God had given the power and duty to examine people for diseases and deformities.

In the visit of the Magi and the flight to Egypt, Jesus is seen to be an ordinary child by the wise men, a child who has to flee to Egypt to keep from being killed. Lastly, in our Gospel for today, Jesus is seen as a child who is something of a prodigy, who by staying behind did the equivalent of running off, not with the circus or floating down the Mississippi on a raft, but of going and doing something he wanted to do for several days without telling anybody.

I well remember that in the days long before cell phones, when I was 12, I got the last whipping I ever got because I stayed down at the river, fishing, missed lunch, and did not come home until a little after 3:00 in the afternoon. Nobody knew where I was, and I received more

than a “talking to”. I know I am no Jesus, but there is some similarity in the two situations – namely, typical 12-year-old kid behavior.

OK, Jesus was human. Still is. Why is this important? For several reasons, the major one being that the only way the sins of mankind could be paid for, (that is what redeemed means – paid for) would be to have the sacrifice of a sinless person to take all those sins upon Himself; and the only way for such a sinless person to come into being would be for Him to be conceived by Holy Ghost in a Virgin so that this person would be fully human and fully divine, and that could happen only with someone such as Jesus, the God-man.

Another reason of some importance was that in the very early days of Christianity, a heresy arose called *Docetism*. This odd name comes from the Greek verb, **δοκέω**, which means to *seem*, to *look like*. Docetism is the heresy that says that Jesus was not a man, but was merely God putting forth the illusion of a man. Aside from all that happened to Jesus during His ministry and on the Cross, His early life gives us much evidence that He was indeed human.

Modern man is prone to ask all sorts of questions, many of them impertinent. One such impertinence is: When did the spirit of the Son of God enter the Body of Jesus? Sometimes we have to answer that some things are mysteries such as how the conception of Jesus occurred. However that blessed event occurred, I think we can say that the Son of God was there, present in Mary's womb from the time that Jesus was only a single cell. C. S. Lewis is supposed to have said, “There is no space so small that God cannot enter it, and there is no space so large that God cannot fill it. The Christ, the Messiah, then is the mystical union of a Son of Man named Jesus and the Son of God, whom we call Jesus Christ, who is the Lamb of God that takes away the sins of the world, our Passover Lamb who saves us by His Blood.

The first sentence to be said at a graveside in our Burial service is from Job 14: 1&2: **Man that is born of woman hath but a short time to live and is full of misery. He cometh up, and is cut down, like a flower; he fleeth as it were a shadow, and never continueth in one stay.**

Jesus was a man, born of woman, and was destined to die. He knew it and He knew why he would die. In John 18:37 **37 Pilate therefore said to him: Art thou a king then? Jesus answered: Thou sayest that I am a king. For this was I born, and for this came I into the world; that I should give testimony to the truth. Every one that is of the truth, heareth my voice.** For this he was born. He was born to speak the truth, and He was born to die on the Cross for our sins. What no one else alive at the time could believe, even though He had told them so, was that on

the third day he would rise from the dead. Jesus was a man born of woman, destined to die on a Cross; his early life testifies to His manhood, to His humanity. Jesus *is* still a man, but now He sits on the throne at the right hand of the God the Father in a glorified body. He is our Advocate and Mediator, and He will be our Judge. When we think of Jesus let us think not only of His Godhood, but also of His humanity. However, we must never think of Jesus as someone who was only human; we must never forget that Jesus Christ is God, the One who created all things and in whom all things hold together (Colossians 1: 16-17).

If we remember that Jesus is God, that He is our friend, but that is He is *not* our buddy Who will condone anything we do no matter how outrageous, we shall walk carefully in service to Him, and we shall not tarry and dilly-dally when He calls us to Him. Instead we shall make that sacrifice of praise and thanksgiving that St. Paul asks of us in the Epistle lesson, of our souls and bodies, to be a reasonable holy, and living sacrifice unto Him. After what he did for us, that is the least we can do for Him, ... and for ourselves.

AMEN!