

The First Sunday After Christmas

Favor with God and Man

Luke 2:39-52

Rev. Freddy Fritz

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Favor with God and Man

Scripture

Today is the *First Sunday After Christmas*. Each Sunday during Advent and Christmas we looked at one of the readings read during this season. Today, I would like to examine Luke 2:39-52.

Luke the historian has given us a marvelous account leading up to our text today regarding the advent and birth of Jesus. One Bible commentator puts it this way: “Mission accomplished, census enrollment completed, miraculous baby birthed, circumcision performed, name given, purification carried out, firstborn presented and dedicated, [and] blessings and prophecies heard and stored away in amazement.”¹

Now, Luke tells us about how Jesus grew in favor with God and man. Let’s read Luke 2:39-52:

³⁹ And when they had performed everything according to the Law of the Lord, they returned into Galilee, to their own town of Nazareth. ⁴⁰ And the child grew and became strong, filled with wisdom. And the favor of God was upon him.

⁴¹ Now his parents went to Jerusalem every year at the Feast of the Passover. ⁴² And when he was twelve years old, they went up according to custom. ⁴³ And when the feast was ended, as they were returning, the boy Jesus stayed behind in Jerusalem. His parents did not know it, ⁴⁴ but supposing him to be in the group they went a day’s journey, but then they began to search for him among their relatives and acquaintances, ⁴⁵ and when they did not find him, they returned to Jerusalem, searching for him. ⁴⁶ After three days they found him in the temple, sitting among the teachers, listening to them and asking them questions. ⁴⁷ And all who heard him were amazed at his understanding and his answers. ⁴⁸ And when his parents saw him, they were astonished. And his mother said to him,

¹ Trent C. Butler, vol. 3, *Luke*, Holman New Testament Commentary; Holman Reference (Nashville, TN: Broadman & Holman Publishers, 2000), 33.

“Son, why have you treated us so? Behold, your father and I have been searching for you in great distress.”⁴⁹ And he said to them, “Why were you looking for me? Did you not know that I must be in my Father’s house?”⁵⁰ And they did not understand the saying that he spoke to them.⁵¹ And he went down with them and came to Nazareth and was submissive to them. And his mother treasured up all these things in her heart.

⁵² And Jesus increased in wisdom and in stature and in favor with God and man. (Luke 2:39-52)

Introduction

All parents are really proud of their children. We love to see our children grow. And we are especially proud of them when they excel in a certain area. In fact, if children excel in school, some parents proudly display stickers on the bumpers of their cars that say, “My child is an honor student at Such-and-Such School”! And it seems that each year more of these bumper stickers appear.

Sometimes, however, we overestimate the abilities of our precious children, especially when compared with true child geniuses. Let me mention a few true child geniuses.

First, there was Sean Louis Cardiak. He was born in France in the 18th century. He was known as “The wonder child.” At three months old Sean could recite the alphabet. At four years old he not only read Latin but translated it into English and French. By six he read Greek and Hebrew, and was proficient in arithmetic, history, geography and genealogies. He died in Paris when he was seven.

And then there was Christian Friedrich Heinecken. He was known throughout Europe as “The Infant of Lebec,” after his birthplace in Germany. In addition to an astounding faculty for numbers, little Christian reportedly knew all the principle events in the Bible by the time he was one year old. At three he was conversant with world history, geography, Latin and French. The king of Denmark sent for him in 1724 to confirm these stories of the child’s extraordinary abilities. Shortly after his stay in Copenha-

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gen, however, little Christian became ill and died at age four.

And then there was the very famous Wolfgang Amadeus Mozart, maybe the most prodigious of all child prodigies. Mozart was born in Salzburg, Austria. At four he began music lessons with his violinist father. At five he composed minuets. At six he was a virtuoso on the violin and harpsichord, and toured with his older sister, creating a sensation in European courts with this phenomenal ability to sight-read music and improvise. He wrote his first symphony at eight. At eleven he was forced to compose in solitary confinement for the suspicious Archbishop of Salzburg. He passed the test and was offered the salaried job of City Concert Master. At twelve he wrote two operas and a mass. His reputation grew over the years. His operas, concertos and symphonies were of the highest order. Today he is still regarded as one of the world's supreme geniuses.

And then there was in the 19th century the famous John Stewart Mill. He was often called a manufactured genius. He was the product of an educational experiment that reads like a record of medieval torture. His irritable father was a historian and philosopher named James Mill. He forced his son to learn Greek at three, history at four, Latin, geometry and algebra by eight. By twelve he had read Virgil, Horace, Ovid, Terrance, Cicero, Homer, Sophocles, Euripides, Aristophanes, Thucydides and Demosthenes—all in Greek. His father required him to write English verse and educate his younger siblings. John Stewart Mill eventually became a world-renowned philosopher.

And then there was also living on into the beginning of the 20th century, Truman Henry Safford, son of a Vermont farmer. He showed his precocity at age three when his parents amused themselves with his calculating powers. At seven he studied algebra and geometry. At nine he constructed and published an almanac. At ten he originated a new rule for obtaining moon risings and settings in one quarter of the time of previous methods. At aged ten he was asked to square the number, that is, to multiply it by itself, the number 365,365,365,365,365. He gave the correct answer in

less than a minute. I'm not going to read you the 40 numbers that make up the answer. Obviously he was smart. He graduated from Harvard at the age of 18.

By the way, are you thinking of removing the bumper sticker from your car?

Further into the 20th century there is William James Sidis, son of a Harvard psychology professor who used to use his child to prove that children could master very complex subjects at a young age. At six months he knew his ABC's. At two years he read adult books. He was in to advanced mathematics at three, and mastered French by four. At eight he graduated from high school. After independent study in Greek, Latin, German, Russian, French, Turkish and Armenian, he entered Harvard at 11 where he lectured the Harvard mathematical society on fourth-dimensional bodies.

And then there was Joel Kupperman, born in 1936. He was the most famous of the famous radio quiz kids of the 1940's. At five he sent the show an application in which he mentioned his ability to do 98 or 99 times any number in his head immediately. Asked during an audition to multiply 24 by 98, he answered, "That would be 2,352." When asked how he got the number so fast, he replied in his soon-to-be-famous lisp, "Dat is a sequet twick." The *twick*, which involved working to the nearest zero, he had discovered himself. His IQ was in excess of 200; it was not measurable. At five he had the highest general mental development of any child ever tested by the Chicago Public Schools. He eventually received his Ph.D. at Cambridge. He's now on the faculty at the University of Connecticut and publishes scholarly books and articles.

Michael Gross born in 1954, and was the son of a credit union manager in Lansing, Michigan. He astounded his mother by reading aloud to her without any previous instruction. His IQ is so high it can't be measured. He was obviously under-challenged at school. At age four, on his first day in Kindergarten, he saw a class mate coloring an apple blue. He remarked with interest, "That's the kind of approach Picasso would use." At ten he moved directly from fifth grade to Michigan State University. He became the

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youngest college freshman in nearly a century, graduated with a Ph.D. finally from Yale before he was 20.

And then many believe the most brilliant child prodigy alive today is Kim Ung-yong, born in 1962 in Korea. He was talking at five months, writing at seven months. His IQ is estimated higher than any other. When he was four years old he was fluent in Korean, English, Japanese and German, and he was solving intricate calculus problems on Japanese television before his fifth birthday.²

And finally, with all humility, I would like to add my name to the list. After all, I often hear people acknowledge that I have a prodigious knowledge of all things when they say to me, “Oh Freddy! You’re such a Know-It-All!”

Seriously, the children I have just mentioned are amazing children. But all of these children’s amazing abilities fade into the distant background in comparison to the abilities of a child named Jesus. In just a few verses Luke records for us the only account we have of Jesus’ entire childhood. No human prodigy, no measurable IQ could even come close to the mind and ability of Jesus.

Lesson

Today, I would like to show you that the human Jesus grew in the ways that all children do, each step of growth preparing him to fulfill his Father’s eternal mission.

I. Jesus Grew as a Child (2:39-40)

First, Jesus grew as a child.

Luke notes that after the birth of Jesus in Bethlehem **when Joseph and Mary had performed everything according to the Law of the Lord, they returned into Galilee, to their own town of Nazareth (2:39).**

I want you to notice that Joseph and Mary were utterly ob-

² From John F. MacArthur at <http://www.gty.org/Resources/Sermons/42-32>.

edient in their devotion to God. Luke simply says that they had **“performed everything according to the Law of the Lord.”** In other words, Jesus grew up in a godly home. His parents loved God and sought to be obedient to all his commands. And it was in that context that they raised Jesus.

I also want you to notice that Luke implies that Jesus’ family returned to **Nazareth** shortly after his birth. They had enrolled in the census in Bethlehem. Jesus had been circumcised and given the name “Jesus” on the eighth day after his birth. His mother’s purification had been carried out. As the firstborn, Jesus had been presented and dedicated at the Temple, where he had been blessed. It is entirely possible that the family travelled to Nazareth only a few weeks after Jesus’ birth.

Luke makes no mention of incidents that are recorded in Matthew’s Gospel, such as the family’s return to Bethlehem where the Magi visited them (2:1-12); of their flight into Egypt (2:13-15); of King Herod’s slaughter of the children under the age of two years old (2:16-18); and of the threat of Archaleus (2:19-22).

All Luke tells us is that **the child grew and became strong, filled with wisdom. And the favor of God was upon him** (2:40).

The point that Luke makes is that Jesus grew in the ways that all children do, each step of growth preparing him to fulfill his Father’s eternal mission.

The idea is that Jesus grew as a normal child, but it is important to keep in mind that Jesus grew perfectly at every stage of life. I have no doubt that Jesus superseded all the child prodigies I mentioned earlier. Undoubtedly, Jesus had to study all the various subjects that children studied at that time. But Jesus never forgot anything he read or saw or learned. As a child Jesus’ knowledge and understanding grew. He did not know everything as a child, but what he did study, he knew perfectly.

The Scriptures do not tell us at what point Jesus became conscious of his deity. However, as a boy growing up in Nazareth studying the Word of God, he must have had a growing awareness that he was the fulfillment of Old Testament prophecy. He was the

Messiah. He was the Second Person of the Trinity.

And so, Jesus grew as a child.

II. Jesus Grew as a Boy (2:41-50)

Second, Jesus grew as a boy.

Luke tells us that Joseph and Mary **went to Jerusalem every year at the Feast of the Passover** (2:41). Once again, I want you to notice that Joseph and Mary were completely obedient in their devotion to God. They **went to Jerusalem every year at the Feast of the Passover**.

During **the Feast of the Passover** Jerusalem swelled by several hundred thousand people. People came from all over the world to worship. And, of course, people had to bring a sacrifice as well. It is estimated that during **the Feast of the Passover** approximately 500,000 animals were sacrificed on behalf of Jewish worshipers.

All Jewish males were required by Old Testament Law to attend the Temple three times a year: at the Feast of the Passover, Pentecost, and the Feast of Tabernacles (Exodus 23:14-17). Women were not required to attend, but they could if they wished.

And when Jesus was twelve years old, Joseph, Mary and Jesus **went up according to custom** (2:42). This was a special year for Jesus. He had just turned twelve years old. This was most likely his twelfth visit to Jerusalem for the Feast of the Passover. But this trip was significant because the following year, the year that he turned thirteen, he would become a man. Every Jewish boy became a man at age thirteen. He became a Son of the Law at age thirteen. Today, Jewish boys celebrate that with a *bar mitzvah*, although they did not have that celebration in Jesus' day.

In Jesus' day, parents were encouraged to bring their twelve year old boys to the Temple so that they could become familiar with the Temple and the Feasts. These boys were usually given a lot of attention, much like a lot of attention is given to a child who is about to mark a major transition in life, such as graduating from High School.

So, Jesus was now a boy. But he was on the brink of Jewish manhood. In a year he was about to assume responsibilities for himself with respect to the Law of God.

And when the feast was ended, as Joseph and Mary were returning, the boy Jesus stayed behind in Jerusalem. His parents did not know it, but supposing him to be in the group they went a day's journey (2:43-44a). Nazareth was about a 3-day journey to Jerusalem. People would travel in large groups, both for safety and also for company. In order to ensure that the men did not outpace the women, they usually had the younger children walk in front, then the women, followed by the men. It is likely that Mary thought Jesus was with Joseph, and Joseph thought that Jesus was ahead of Mary. And so they both thought **him to be in the group, and they went a day's journey.**

When the group stopped for the night, Jesus did not come to Joseph and Mary. So, **they began to search for him among their relatives and acquaintances, and when they did not find him, they returned to Jerusalem the next day, searching for him there (2:44b-45).**

Luke says that they found Jesus **after three days (2:46a).** Some have said that they spent three days looking for Jesus in Jerusalem. But, more likely, they spent one day walking to Nazareth, another day walking back to Jerusalem, and then found Jesus on the third day.

So, **after three days they found him in the temple, sitting among the teachers, listening to them and asking them questions (2:46).** You may remember a famous painting by Heinrich Hofmann (1824-1911) depicting Jesus in the temple. Jesus is dressed in white and surrounded scholars. The painting is called "Christ in the Temple Among the Doctors." It suggests that Jesus is lecturing the teachers. But that is not the case. Jesus is **listening to them and asking them questions.** Now, because his knowledge is perfect (though not complete), his questions were undoubtedly profound. He probably wanted to understand what they knew about the coming Messiah. And Luke goes on to say that **all who heard**

him were amazed at his understanding and his answers (2:47).

But then, Joseph and Mary found Jesus, **and when his parents saw him, they were astonished. And his mother said to him, “Son, why have you treated us so? Behold, your father and I have been searching for you in great distress.” (2:48).**

Mary is understandably distressed. But she forgot who Jesus was. She forgot that he was on a mission. She forgot that he was fulfilling his heavenly Father’s eternal mission, which was to rescue sinners from their sin.

And so he said to them, “Why were you looking for me? Did you not know that I must be in my Father’s house?” (2:50). This is an extremely profound statement. This is the first time in his life that Jesus claims to be the Son of God. He had come to the full realization that he was indeed the fulfillment of all the prophecies of the Old Testament. He was the hope of the people of God. He was the Messiah. He was God!

That is why he was about his heavenly Father’s business. Luke points out that Joseph and Mary **did not understand the saying that he spoke to them (2:50).** Not now. Not yet. But later, they would understand.

And so Jesus grew as a boy.

III. Jesus Grew as a Man (2:51-52)

And finally, Jesus grew as a man.

Luke says that Jesus **went down with Joseph and Mary and came to Nazareth and was submissive to them. And his mother treasured up all these things in her heart (2:51).**

A year later Jesus became a Son of the Law. He became a man as far as the Jewish Law was concerned. He continued to obey his parents. Since Joseph is not mentioned again, most Bible scholars believe that Joseph died quite young. Jesus took over Joseph’s carpentry business, and took care of his mother.

Unlike most other young men who got married in their teenage years, Jesus stayed single. He never did marry. He began his

public ministry when he was about thirty years old. And so he stayed in Nazareth for another eighteen years before he embarked on the public part of his mission. And throughout all those years he **was submissive to his parents.**

And Jesus increased in wisdom and in stature and in favor with God and man (2:52).

Jesus was really far superior to any other child prodigy. He was perfect in every way. He knew everything perfectly. He **increased in favor with God and man.**

Conclusion

The question might be asked, “Why did Jesus come into the world as a child and not as a full grown man?” The first man, Adam, stood at the head of the human race as the federal representative of all mankind, and he had been created as a full-grown man. Why not Jesus, the second Adam? He, too, was sent into the world to stand as the federal representative of the elect. Why did God send Jesus into the world as baby, so that he would grow as a child, then a boy, and, finally, as a man?

First, Jesus needed to be the representative of people of all ages. He did not only come to represent adults. He came to represent infants, babies, children, boys and girls, and adults. From birth as an infant to death as an adult, Jesus fully represents all people.

And second, Jesus needed to experience life at every stage so that he could be the perfect sympathizer and Savior. If Jesus had come as an adult, all children could say, “You don’t understand me because you were never a child.” But Jesus went through all the stages of life so that he could perfectly sympathize and save all who look to him for salvation. Amen.

Mission Statement

The Mission Statement of the Tampa Bay Presbyterian Church is:

*To bring people to Jesus Christ
and **membership** in his church family,
develop them to Christlike **maturity**,
equip them for their **ministry** in the church
and life **mission** in the world,
in order to **magnify** God's name.*

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Tampa Bay Presbyterian Church (PCA)

Answers for Life!

Address: 19911 Bruce B. Downs Blvd., Tampa, FL 33647

Telephone: (813) 973-2484

Fax: (813) 973-4673

Email: Office@TampaBayPresbyterian.org

Web site: www.TampaBayPresbyterian.org

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PRAAYER:

Our Father in heaven, we thank you for Luke's account of Jesus growing in favor with God and man.

Jesus is far more than a prodigy. He is the unique Son of God, Second Person of the Trinity. He grew as a child, and as a boy, and, finally, as a man.

Jesus is thus able to represent and sympathize with people of all ages. Help each one of us to look to Jesus as our representative and as our sympathizer.

And for all of this we pray in Jesus' name. Amen.

CHARGE:

Go and glorify God in all that you think, do, and say! And as you do, may the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, the love of God, and the fellowship of the Holy Spirit be with you all, now and always. Amen.