

Worship@Home 29th December 2024 with Revd David Speirs First Sunday of Christmas

Opening Prayer:

God of growth and maturation,
we remember that in Jesus Christ
you modelled what it means to be fully human. Thank you for the
unwritten years of Jesus' life; the growth that happened in private, the
lessons learned in secret,
the burgeoning favour and hidden treasure.
Grant us your grace in this time of worship.
Help us welcome and receive the gift of slow growth, that we might be
formed in your likeness. **Amen.**

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STF 208 – Let earth and heaven combine

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=WyoSU3UT3IM>

Let earth and heaven combine, angels and all agree,
to praise in songs divine
the incarnate Deity,
our God contracted to a span,
incomprehensibly made man.

He laid his glory by, he wrapped him in our clay;
unmarked by human eye,
the latent Godhead lay;
infant of days he here became,
and bore the mild Immanuel's name.

Unsearchable the love that has the Saviour brought;
the grace is far above
both earth's and angels' thought:
suffice for us that God, we know,
our God, is manifest below.

He deigns in flesh to appear, widest extremes to join;
to bring our vileness near, and make us all divine:
and we the life of God shall know,
for God is manifest below.

Made perfect first in love, and sanctified by grace,
we shall from earth remove,
and see his glorious face:
his love shall then be fully showed,
and we shall all be lost in God.

Charles Wesley (1707-1788)

Please read:

Luke 2:41-52

<https://bible.oremus.org/?ql=218586863>

Time to Reflect

The reading that we have this morning is the only account that we have in the Gospels of Jesus childhood beyond his infancy. The story we have bridges the gap between Luke's birth narrative and the beginnings of Jesus' adult ministry which commences after his baptism. In some senses what Luke is writing is biographical in that it seeks to demonstrate how Jesus' childhood experience naturally progresses into his adult identity. There are some parallels here with the childhood story of Samuel and his own experience of God in the temple (1 Samuel 3:1-14).

The passage makes clear that Jesus grew up in a devout family who observed a pilgrimage to Jerusalem for the Passover festival every year (Luke 2:41). In the reading, Jesus is 12 years old which means that he is not far from the transition to adulthood as understood in the ancient world. His actions in the reading foreshadow his ministry and demonstrate the relationship that Jesus has with God, his heavenly father. By remaining in God's house, and conversing with the teachers of the law, Jesus is affirming who he is and his primary identity as God's beloved Son.

For anyone who is a parent, or who has been entrusted with the care or guardianship of a child for any length of time, the sudden panic that accompanies the realisation that you do not immediately know where your child might be, could be a familiar sensation. For Mary and Joseph, the realisation that Jesus was not amongst their friends or relatives and the subsequent three-day search for him in Jerusalem must have been a stressful experience. It is unsurprising that Mary's words to her son on finding him are "Child, why have you treated us like this? Look, your father and I have been searching for you in great anxiety." (Luke 2:48). Jesus' reply "Why were you searching for me?"

Did you not know that I must be in my Father's house?" (Luke 2:49) far from being an insolent response it is in fact a genuine question about his identity and location. Jesus possesses a natural authority and sense of being home in the temple which is reflected again later in Luke's narrative (Luke 19:45-46). Jesus is reminding his parents that he is bound to his heavenly father and that this loyalty goes beyond their expectations. This becomes an important aspect of Jesus' ministry as he makes it clear to his own community that he is not bound by their expectations in reaching out to unexpected people in unexpected places.

As we read this passage today there may be a number of points that we can take from it as contemporary disciples of Jesus. One of those points might be Jesus' confident understanding of his identity and his relationship with God and what that means for his life and purpose. As Christian disciples it is important for our lives not to be entirely beholden to the expectations of people around us but rather to be committed to the work and life of God's Kingdom. This involves showing a loving concern towards those who are on the margins of our society. It also involves a commitment to worship, learning, and growth with God that can appear strange or unfashionable to some.

As we focus on Holy Habits in this Christmas season and learning more about the practices of the early Church, we are reminded that one of the significant priorities that people have around identity and vocation, about who they are and their mission in life. This passage shows the young Jesus affirming his own identity and mission. It might also provide us with some encouragement in affirming our own identities as Christ's disciples and the calling and commitment that we have as followers of Jesus.

Prayer of Intercession

You are invited to pray silently for:

The needs of the world...

The Church and its calling...

Loved ones going through difficult times...

For peace, justice, and reconciliation...

In Jesus name. Amen.

The Lord's Prayer

Our Father, who art in heaven...

StF 222 – Who would think that what was needed

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=PvR6we1DmrM>

Who would think that what was needed to transform and save the earth
might not be a plan or army,
proud in purpose, proved in worth?
Who would think, despite derision,
that a child might lead the way?
God surprises earth with heaven,
coming here on Christmas Day.

Shepherds watch and wise men wonder, monarchs scorn and angels sing;
such a place as none would reckon
hosts a holy helpless thing.
Stable beasts and by-passed strangers
watch a baby laid in hay:
God surprises earth with heaven,
coming here on Christmas Day.

Centuries of skill and science span the past from which we move,
yet experience questions whether,
with such progress, we improve.
While the human lot we ponder,
lest our hopes and humour fray,
God surprises earth with heaven,
coming here on Christmas Day.

John L. Bell (b. 1949) and Graham Maule (b. 1958).

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Final Prayer

Radiant God, in Jesus Christ your light shines in our darkness, giving joy in our sorrow and revealing your presence in our loneliness. Fill our hearts with your light that in the darkness of this world our lives may shine with your eternal splendour, through Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen.

The Collect for the First Sunday of Christmas in the Methodist Worship Book © 1999 Methodist Publishing House. p. 527.