

Christmas is over! There are those who wait until the 12th day (6th January) to put away the tree and trimmings. I grew up with a different tradition: before we went out partying on 31st night, the tree, decorations and trimmings had to be packed and cleared before the start of the new year! We had to have a clean house on New Year's day!

There are many traditions; whatever our traditions, strange isn't it, by mid-January, Christmas and the new year are distant memories!

We left the Christmas story hanging, with the return to Nazareth of Joseph, Mary and Jesus, in fulfilment of prophecy, "*He shall be called a Nazarene*"¹, a resident, a native of Nazareth.

In the Christian calendar, we jump from Christmas to Easter, condensing Jesus life to 111 days. Although very little is known about Jesus' life, from the time he returned to Nazareth from Egypt, and the start of His ministry, the Gospels offer clues about Jesus' upbringing. How Jesus was brought up is more important than conjecture and unsubstantiated stories about things He **supposedly** did.

Luke tells us, *When they had performed everything according to the Law of God, they returned to Galilee, to the town of Nazareth, **And the child grew and became strong, filled with wisdom. And the favour of God was upon Him.***²

Over Christmas, I was in conversation with a young man who is in his early walk in faith. He asked, *Is it true, in His youth, Jesus threw a stone which became a dove* (there are variations of this story: He there a stone which became a dove, He there a stone at a dove which died and Jesus brought it back to life...), *that He travelled as far as Kashmir and Mongolia in the east and England in the west, and did other things we don't know about?*

¹ Matthew 2:23

² Luke 2:39-40

There are as many of these kind of stories compiled over thousands of years, as there are documents which unravel and prove these stories to be the product of over-active imagination, stories which can seriously mislead us in our understanding of God, which might well be the intention of some of these stories.

One line of stories tell us that Jesus learned to do miracles from the magicians in Egypt. Rightfully, several people have discredited this line of thinking. Jewish and Roman historical records, and the Bible's own narrative, they say, show Herod died within months or at most a year of Jesus' birth; Jesus, therefore, would have been too young to learn magic from Egypt's finest, they add.

Even this valiant effort to invalidate the link between Egypt's magicians and Jesus' ability to perform miracles, seem to ignore the fundamental principle of our faith: Jesus is the Son of God, who declared, *The Father and I are one!*³ It would be foolish, therefore, to say, Jesus needed to learn "magic" from Egypt's finest to perform miracles, when every creative power of God was at His disposal to use!

We need to stick to the text to learn what God would have us learn, and sift out narratives which are spurious at best. John tells us that Jesus' first miracle was turning water into wine at a wedding in the village of Cana, which puts and end to any thought of miracles by Jesus, before that.

Having told us that Jesus grew and became strong, filled with wisdom and the favour of God was upon Him, Luke describes an incident which speaks volumes about Jesus' youth and his family background.

Joseph and Mary went to Jerusalem **every year** at the Feast of the Passover, the opening day feast of the 7-day Celebration of Unleavened

³ John 10:30

Bread.⁴ Like Zechariah and Elisabeth, Joseph and Mary were part of a pious and faithful remnant. The Christmas story we read and hear every year tells us, these two couples lived by the Law of God, building a relationship of trust with Him, even when social customs and society's norms pointed the other way. They were among a minority at that time, who, in and through their daily worship, learned to trust God and take Him at His word.

So, when Jesus was 12, the year most Jewish boys would have had their *bar-mitzvah*, Joseph and Mary took him to Jerusalem for the feast of the passover, as was required by every Jewish adult.

We learn, Jesus was brought up a devout Jew, observing God's every law. What followed is strikingly important. On completing the feast, the group of pilgrims set off for home, a five-day journey. As they settled in for the night after the first day's journey out from Jerusalem (about 20 miles), they noticed the boy Jesus was missing. Having searched and inquired with every one in the pilgrim group and not found Him, Joseph and Mary hurried back to Jerusalem. No blaming each other, *I thought YOU were looking after Him*, just a loving couple, now concerned and anxious, tracing their steps back, in search of their son, who very clearly, was entrusted to them! After three panic-stricken days of searching, they found him in the Temple. We can imagine them telling each other in mixed emotions of anxiety, consternation and fear, *Let's go to the Temple to pray and ask God's forgiveness for we have failed His trust*. They enter the Temple area and there sitting with the learned, the scholarly, the wise, the great and the good, was their son, teaching, questioning and amazing everyone with His

⁴ Leviticus 23:5-6

understanding of God's Word! If only, **all** of them understood, Jesus was with God when God spoke through the prophets, concerning Him!⁵

So often, in the midst of "doing religion", trying to obey all the man-made rules and regulations which we are told, we must do to please God, we miss moments when Jesus reveals Himself to us; when He is trying to get our attention, to use His wisdom, we are busy looking elsewhere, or we are so enamoured by "doing religion", that we walk by the person of Jesus who is standing there, waiting for us to pause and recognise Him!

This incident inform us, Jesus was indeed, *filled with wisdom and the favour of God was upon Him*, and it **also** tells us, Jesus was brought up by two caring, loving and doting parents, who understood and took very seriously, the responsibility given to them by God, who panicked when they realised, they might have fallen short of the trust vested in them.

Then, we have no information about Jesus until Matthew tells us, *Jesus travelled throughout all Galilee, teaching in their synagogues, proclaiming the gospel of the Kingdom, and healing **every** disease and **every** affliction among the people.*⁶

In other words, Jesus taught in synagogues to those who were familiar with Holy texts pointing to Him and His message, teaching them the correct interpretation of these valuable portions of text; Jesus also proclaimed, declared, made public to those who could not access the Holy texts, God's good news of the imminence of His kingdom being restored, through the sacrifice of life; and to demonstrate to those needing visual aid, a glimpse of God's perfect kingdom, through healing of **every (~note word)** physical, emotional and spiritual infirmity.

⁵ Hebrews 1:1-2

⁶ Matthew 4:23

So we have a question before us: Why did God send His Saviour of humankind, as an infant and not as an adult? If the Saviour would have come as an adult, He would have jumped into his mission of teaching, preaching and healing and dealt with sin, in a very short time. Israel was crumbling, and dying, first by the onslaught of Greek philosophy and military might, and then by the might and power of the Roman Empire. The spiritual legacy of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob was being eroded, day-by-day.

If the need to save the people of Israel was so important, why did Jesus have to come as a newborn infant?

The Saviour needed to experience first-hand, the power of sin over us, in order to deal it a fatal blow. Sin is everything that satan uses to distance us from God, and Jesus had to experience that power of being distanced from God; the power of lies over truth, the power of injustice over justice, the power of hate over love, the power of pride over humility, the power of unfaithfulness over faithfulness, the power of **everything** that causes us to break the **ONE** most important God-given law: *to love your God with all your heart, soul and mind, and to love your neighbour as yourself.*

Jesus had to know first-hand, every emotion known to men, women and children, and the first emotional experience he had, was to be humbled. From the majesty, the greatness, completeness and perfection of Heaven, Jesus experienced the cold comfort of a cattle feeding trough; from the majestic robes befitting the Son of God, Jesus was humbled when wrapped in strips of plain swaddling cloth; from the continual worship of hosts of angels in Heaven, Jesus was humbled when welcomed by an excited band of noisy and smelly shepherds who were unaware that the child in the manger before them, whose birth they were celebrating, would one day work them out of their jobs as suppliers of sheep to the

Temple, because He would be the final sacrifice; Jesus was humbled by magi, wise men from the east, who spoke from their ignorance, but by an act of obedience, *We have come to worship the King of the Jews.*

Jesus would have also seen love beaming from the faces of his doting parents, turn to panic, when Herod's pride and hate came together in an outburst of rage, leading to the killing of all infants in Bethlehem.

Jesus would have also experienced his earthly father, acting in obedience to God, rushing mother and child to safety in Egypt, and His mother's love as she shielded and hid him from passers by, and later on their way home. All three people in God's Act One, Scene 1 of the Salvation story, lived and demonstrated their relationship with God. Their faith in God matures, as their confidence grows and they learn to trust Him more. Twice Luke tells us, *"Mary pondered (treasured) all these things in her heart"*⁷. Indeed, both Joseph and Mary had much to ponder concerning their Son and His special gifts.

During his childhood years, Jesus humbled Himself to accept conditions under we live, which are vastly different to what He was used to, and He also **practiced** (not learn) obedience in this hostile environment.

Not that his parents were in any way hostile toward him, but Luke tells us, after the incident of getting lost and subsequently found in the Temple, *"Jesus went down with his parents to Nazareth and was submissive to them, He lived in obedience to His parents.*

During the years after His return to Nazareth and before the start of His ministry, a period we presume we know nothing about Him, we have just discovered, during this period, Jesus grew in stature having humbled

⁷ Luke 2:29; 2:51b

Himself, grew in Wisdom, practiced obedience, and found favour with God and with men, women and children.

Each one of these character traits stood Him in good stead, to accomplish God's plan of Salvation. What is the plan?

Jesus said, "I have come down from heaven to do the will of God who sent me, not to do my own will. And this is the will of God, that I should not lose even one of all those he has given me, but that I should raise them up at the last day."⁸

This is the Christ whose birthday we have celebrated, who invites you into a relationship with Him, *"Come to me, all of you who are weary and carry heavy burdens, and I will give you rest. Take my yoke upon you. Let me teach you, because I am humble and gentle at heart, and you will find rest for your souls. For my yoke is easy to bear, and the burden I give you, is light."*

AMEN.

⁸ Matthew 11:28-30