

A Sermon by the Very Reverend Roger Wm. Smith on the First Sunday after the Epiphany, January 8, 2012 at the Chapel of St. Mark in Port Royal, South Carolina.

### **The hidden years in the Life of Jesus**

In those days Jesus came from Nazareth of Galilee and was baptized by John in the Jordan. And just as he was coming up out of the water, he saw the heavens torn apart and the Spirit descending like a dove on him. And a voice came from heaven, 'You are my Son, the Beloved; with you I am well pleased.'

— Mark 1:9-11

Last Sunday we considered the story from St. Luke about the naming of Jesus. Following the custom of their people, when Mary & Joseph had him circumcised, they gave him the name JEHOSHUA (or Joshua). That is a Hebrew name meaning God saves. The Latin version of the holy name is JESUS.

Luke records that Jesus was 30 when he was baptized by John in the River Jordan. Today we heard St. Mark's account of that amazing event. He tells us that the heavens were torn apart and the Spirit descended on him like a dove. And a voice came from heaven saying, "You are my Son, the Beloved; with you I am well pleased."

So on the day Jesus was given his name we learn that he is the one who has come to save us.

On the day he was baptized we learn that he is God's beloved Son.

Thanks to the efforts of the Apostle Paul, the Christian community no longer requires circumcision. We receive our names when we are baptized. As was true of the baptism of Jesus, we also learn who we are. We are adopted as God's children and made members of Christ's Body, the Church, and inheritors of the kingdom of God. (BCP, pg. 858)

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After the service last Sunday David Irwin said, "Someday I wish you would tell us what happened to Jesus during the 30 years between the day he was given his Name and the day he was Baptized."

Thank you, David. You've given me today's sermon topic. I've been thinking about your request all this past week. As I told you, the Bible tells us virtually nothing about the Lord's life during those years. But it might be interesting for us to consider what it does tell us about those hidden years.

Most of what we do know comes from the second chapter of the Gospel of St. Luke. He records that about a month after Jesus was given his name it was time for the child to be presented in the temple. In those days it was the custom for a Jewish mother to bring her first born male child to the temple for a rite of purification.

Picture this: When they walked into the temple, they were greeted by an old man whose name was Simeon....

Now there was a man in Jerusalem whose name was Simeon; this man was righteous and devout, looking forward to the consolation of Israel, and the Holy Spirit rested on him. It had been revealed to him by the Holy Spirit that he would not see death before he had seen the Lord's Messiah. Guided by the Spirit, Simeon came into the temple; and when the parents brought in the child Jesus, to do for him what was customary under the law, Simeon took him in his arms and praised God, saying, 'Master, now you are dismissing your servant in peace, according to your word; for my eyes have seen your salvation, which you have prepared in the presence of all peoples, a light for revelation to the Gentiles and for glory to your people Israel.'

And the child's father and mother were amazed at what was being said about him. Then Simeon blessed them and said to his mother Mary, 'This child is destined for the falling and the rising of many in Israel, and to be a sign that will be opposed so that the inner thoughts of many will be revealed—and a sword will pierce your own soul too.' —Luke 2:25-35

Turning to Mary, Simeon said, "This child marks both the failure and the recovery of many in Israel. A figure misunderstood and contradicted—the pain of a sword through you—but the rejection will force honesty as God reveals who they really are."

Later they were met by an 84 year old prophetess named Anna. When she saw Jesus, she "began to praise God and to speak about the child to all who were looking for the redemption of Israel."

There was also a prophet, Anna the daughter of Phanuel, of the tribe of Asher. She was of a great age, having lived with her husband for seven years after her marriage, then as a widow to the age of eighty-four. She never left the temple but worshipped there with fasting and prayer night and day. At that moment she came, and began to praise God and to speak about the child to all who were looking for the redemption of Jerusalem.

When they had finished everything required by the law of the Lord, they returned to Galilee, to their own town of Nazareth. The child grew and became strong, filled with wisdom; and the favour of God was upon him. —Luke 2:36-40

The next event recorded by Luke takes place when Jesus was 12 years old....

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 travelers, 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. —Luke 2:41-51

At the conclusion of these stories, Luke says that Jesus went home with his parents and “increased in wisdom and in years, and divine and human favor.” (2:52)

The only other stories about the early life of Jesus are recorded in the Second Chapter of Matthew. The first was the visit of the wise men, the very event that the Church celebrates at this season. We call it the Epiphany.

That word “Epiphany” means showing forth or manifestation. It is the festival when we remember the manifestation of Jesus’ divine nature to the Gentiles. The wise men were not Jewish; they were gentiles... goyim. Jesus brings light to all of the nations in the world.

In the time of King Herod, after Jesus was born in Bethlehem of Judea, wise men from the East came to Jerusalem, asking, ‘Where is the child who has been born king of the Jews? For we observed his star at its rising, and have come to pay him homage.’ When King Herod heard this, he was frightened, and all Jerusalem with him; and calling together all the chief priests and scribes of the people, he inquired of them where the Messiah was to be born. They told him, ‘In Bethlehem of Judea; for so it has been written by the prophet: “And you, Bethlehem, in the land of Judah, are by no means least among the rulers of Judah; or from you shall come a ruler who is to shepherd my people Israel.”’

Then Herod secretly called for the wise men and learned from them the exact time when the star had appeared. Then he sent them to Bethlehem, saying, ‘Go and search diligently for the child; and when you have found him, bring me word so that I may also go and pay him homage.’ When they had heard the king, they set out; and there, ahead of them, went the star that they had seen at its rising, until it stopped over the place where the child was. When they saw that the star had stopped, they were overwhelmed with joy. On entering the house, they saw the child with Mary his mother; and they knelt down and paid him homage. Then, opening their treasure-chests, they offered him gifts of gold, frankincense, and myrrh. And having been warned in a dream not to return to Herod, they left for their own country by another road. —Matthew 2:1-12

Now when the wise men left, an angel appeared to Joseph in a dream, telling him to take the young child and his mother and get out of town. So they packed up and headed out for Egypt... When King Herod learned that he had been tricked by the wise men he got pretty upset...

When Herod saw that he had been tricked by the wise men, he was infuriated, and he sent and killed all the children in and around Bethlehem who were two years old or under, according to the time that he had learned from the wise men. Then was fulfilled what had been spoken through the prophet Jeremiah: ‘A voice was heard in Ramah, wailing and loud lamentation, Rachel weeping for her children; she refused to be consoled, because they are no more.’

When Herod died, an angel of the Lord suddenly appeared in a dream to Joseph in Egypt and said, ‘Get up, take the child and his mother, and go to the land of Israel, for those who were seeking the child’s life are dead.’ Then Joseph got up, took the child and his mother, and went to the land of Israel. But when he heard that Archelaus was ruling over

Judea in place of his father Herod, he was afraid to go there. And after being warned in a dream, he went away to the district of Galilee. There he made his home in a town called Nazareth, so that what had been spoken through the prophets might be fulfilled, 'He will be called a Nazorean.' —Matthew 2:16-23

Matthew's account of Jesus' childhood ends with Joseph taking his family to Galilee. There he made his home in a town called Nazareth, so that what had been spoken through the prophets might be fulfilled, "He will be called a Nazorean".

That's all there is. Nothing more about the life of Jesus is recorded in the Gospels until he comes down to the river to be baptized.

Of course, there has been much speculation about what happened during the hidden years. There were stories written describing his childhood—many of them so strange and incredible that they were never considered authentic enough to be included in the scriptures.

Stories like the one about the visit of the wise men have been embellished with all kinds of traditions. Matthew tells us simply that there came wise men from the east. It does not say how many of them there were. We have just assumed there were three of them because they brought Jesus 3 gifts. And what strange gifts to bring a new born child. Gold?

Well, maybe someday that would be useful. Frankincense? What ever would a little kid do with that? Myrrh? That is a perfumed ointment used to anoint a corpse. These gifts are symbols indicating that Jesus was born to be a king (that's the purpose of the gold), a priest (the incense), and to die for his people (the myrrh).

Tradition has it that these wise men were kings, but Matthew doesn't tell us that. But never mind, calling them three kings offers wonderful and imaginative opportunities for dressing up kids for the annual Christmas pageant. They also offer artists a picture for creating beautiful Christmas cards. And by the way, the story of the visit of the wise is not a Christmas story; it is an Epiphany story. And the song about "We Three Kings of Orient Are" is not a Christmas carol, but we love to sing it at Christmas time anyway.

Lots of imaginative tales and traditions have formed up around the early life of Jesus, but you know what? The stories preserved in the gospels of Matthew and Luke tell us everything we need to know. They tell us that Jesus is the Savior. He is the beloved Son of God. He is Christ the King, our Great High Priest, and the One who died for us. And if there is any truth about that story of the Epiphany star, it is clear evidence that Jesus is the Light of the World.

When you and I were baptized we were made members of his body and therefore, in his Name, called to serve the world as citizens of his kingdom and bearers of this Good News.

Amen