

Growing Up

There are not many stories about Jesus growing up. We pretty much have to skip straight from his presentation at the temple as a baby to the one story we have about Jesus aged around 12 when his parents lose him in the temple. On this particular morning we explored the idea of why Jesus may have been at the temple – was this just an annual event or was it a bit more significant such as his Bar Mitzvah? We were able to borrow a prayer shawl, kippa and some other resources from our local primary school and Joel helped us out by dressing up and reading the Bible story for us, much as a boy or girl would do in a Bar or Bat Mitzvah ceremony. But it led us on to a discussion that it is important to mark the stages of growing up, and to recognise that we are all at different points of the process and can all learn from each other whatever our relative ages.

It seems like only yesterday
That we celebrated the birth
of the baby Jesus
with the down to earth shepherds
and the exotic magi from distant lands
with multitudes of angels singing
and prophets saying amazing things
at his presentation at the temple.

It seems like only yesterday
That we were children ourselves
Or at least younger children than we are now
The turning years marked
by birthday cakes and candles
smiling and weaning and crawling
followed by the first teetering steps
rapidly progressing to the first day at school.

And now here is Jesus
Well on the way to growing up
Arriving at the temple with his family
To mark an important milestone
The day Jesus takes on the adult duty
Of reading the books of the law for himself
And becoming responsible for his own actions
A day to celebrate and treasure.

So what markers do we celebrate
Through childhood and teenage years?
The transition to high school,
The first paper round
The journey through adolescence
And the first fumbled kiss?
Maybe here is our challenge
To mark our growing into faith?

The celebration is done
Time for Mary and Joseph to head home
But Jesus is nowhere to be found
His family must have been frantic
How ironic to celebrate the entry to adulthood
Only to lose Jesus in the bustle of the city

For that is the ambiguity of the teen years
To be sometimes an adult and yet still a child.

But isn't that how we often feel
Torn between wanting to grow up
Yet not wanting to leave childhood behind?
Being a child can be fun and care-free
Yet leave us with a sense, like Wendy
that there is more of life to discover
But the adult world can seem confusing and scary
And Peter Pan-like we may prefer not to grow up.

But in our story Jesus is found
Much to his parents' vexation and amazement
Talking and debating with the elders in the temple
For Jesus is thriving in the responsibilities
Of becoming Bar Mitzvah
And to the elders' credit
they admit Jesus as an equal among them
teaching and being taught by a twelve year old.

And so like Mary and Joseph
We who are grown up
Are challenged that a twelve year old
Can still behave as child
and not always think of the consequences
and yet like the elders we are challenged
to listen to, learn from and give responsibility
to our children as they grow in faith.

And so Jesus stands on the verge of adulthood
Not yet aware of where his life's journey will lead
Learning from the elders the stories and wisdom
That will gather a group of friends around him
And take unleavened bread from the Passover meal
And speak of his body broken for the world
And take blood-red wine from the Passover meal
And reinterpret it as God's promise for the world.

[share bread and wine]

And so we stand at different stages of life
Not yet aware of where our life's journey will lead
Learning the stories and wisdom
From our shared life together
Taking and breaking the bread of daily life
And recognising the pain of our own lives and of this world
Taking and sharing the wine of celebration
And risking stepping out into the future with hope.

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