



THE MISSION OF SAINT MARY MAGDALENE

Father Alan's Blog

For the First Sunday After the Epiphany - January 9, 2022

"And Jesus grew in wisdom and stature, and in favour with God and men."

St. Luke 2:52 (NIV)

There is an old legend told about a king in India who loved to play chess. Consequently, he made it his custom to challenge all visitors to his realm to a game, with the result that he usually won. One day, a travelling sage visited the kingdom and was subsequently challenged by the king to a game. To entice the sage to play, the king offered to grant him whatever reward he asked for if he should win. The sage accepted the king's challenge and went on to defeat him. So, being a man of his word, the king asked the sage what reward he would like. The sage asked for:



one grain of rice to be placed on the first square of the chessboard and that it be doubled on each successive square.

The sage's request seemed to be quite modest to the king; hence, he ordered that a bag of rice be brought at once. One grain of rice was

placed on the first square, two on the second, four on the third, eight on the fourth, and so on. However, it quickly became apparent that the terms of the sage's request **were impossible to meet** because:

1	2	4	8	16	32	64	128
256	512	1024	2048	4096	8192	16384	32768
66k	131k	262k	524k	1m	2.1m	4.2m	8.4m
16m	34m	67m	134m	268m	537m	1.1b	2.1b

by the 21st square, more than *one million* grains of rice would be required; and

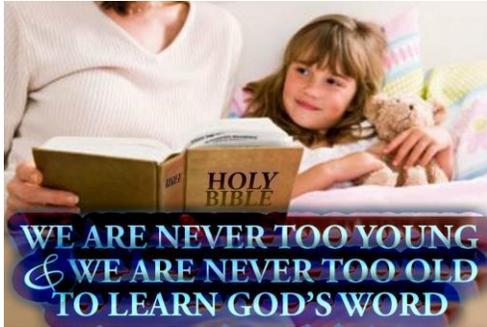
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by the 31st square, the total would go over *one billion* – with more than half of the chessboard still left to go!

Indeed, seemingly small things will have a huge impact when, with wisdom, they are added together.



In the same way, it is crucial that we, as Christians, seek God's wisdom for every decision we make – regardless of how small that decision may seem to us at the time. For when we add to our wisdom and understanding in this way, our stature will correspondingly grow stronger and stronger throughout our earthly lives.



**And we're never too old
(or too young) to start.**

For example, here's some divinely inspired words of wisdom from the mouths of babes.



Benjamin, a 21-month-old boy, toddled into his Father-the Priest's home office, picked up a palm cross, and matter-of-factly said:

"Jesus."



Or how about Daniel, a 3-year-old boy who, while watching the cartoon video "How the Grinch Stole Christmas," was asked by his Dad whether the Grinch - who, in the final scene, was carving and serving the "roast beast" - was now "a good guy", simply replied:

"No, 'cause he didn't say any 'God words' before eating."

(Meaning that the Grinch hadn't said 'Grace' first.)

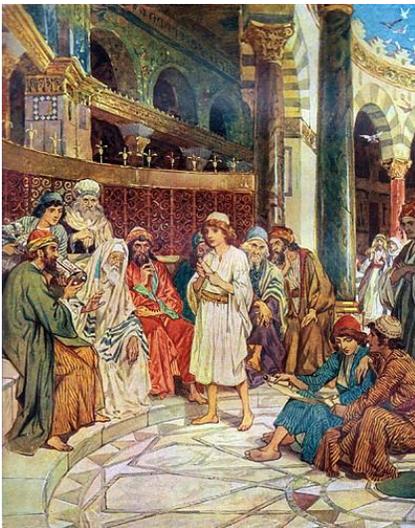


Or, what about this, from a boy named Billy, age 4:

“When someone loves you, the way they say your name is different. You know that your name is safe in their mouth.”



And, finally, there’s 12-year-old Jesus in today’s Gospel Lesson from St. Luke 2:41-52. His parents Joseph and Mary had just spent **three frantic days** – that is, one day travelling away from, and then back to, Jerusalem, plus one more day looking all over the city for Jesus – only to find Him, according to verses 46-47:



“...in the temple courts, sitting among the teachers, listening to them and asking them questions. (and that) Everyone who heard (Jesus) speak was amazed at his understanding and his answers.”

Mary, much relieved but completely beside herself – after three days what parent wouldn’t be? – “astonishedly” says to Jesus (in verse 48):

“Son, why have you treated us like this? Your father and I have been anxiously searching for you.”

And in reply, Jesus, age 12, calmly asks His mother (in verse 49):

“Why were you searching for me?...Didn't you know I had to be in my Father's house?”



Words spoken by those who are wise beyond their years.



Benjamin, a mere 21 months of age, whose entire vocabulary at the time consisted of, maybe, fifty words – but one of the words he already knew was the Name of *“The Source of Life”*;



Daniel, at age 3, already realized the importance of speaking regularly with *“The Source of Life”*;



Billy, by 4 years of age, understood the security that emanates from those who choose to be imitators of *“The Source of Life”* (for as the ‘Beloved Disciple’ asserts in 1 St. John 4:8b, *“God IS love”*); and



Jesus, as a mere 12-year-old boy, understood that He had a most unique relationship with (and, even, as) *“The Source of Life”*.

Here, on the “First Sunday After the Epiphany” (commonly called “Wisdom Sunday”) – in the only picture of the boyhood of Jesus to be found in any of the four Gospel narratives – we find Jesus’ Divinity first shining forth as “Divine Wisdom”. Because here we see Jesus, the 12-year-old human boy (and yet, also, the ageless “God-boy”), **in HIS Temple**, teaching not only adults but EXPERTS in interpreting the Hebrew Scriptures:

LAW

Genesis

Exodus

Leviticus

Numbers

Deuteronomy

The Law;

PROPHETS

Former Prophets { Joshua
Judges
1-2 Samuel
1-2 Kings

Latter Prophets { Isaiah
Jeremiah
Ezekiel
The Twelve

The Prophets; and

WRITINGS

Psalms

Pre-Exilic Writings { Job
Proverbs
Ruth
Song of Songs
Ecclesiastes

Post-Exilic Writings { Lamentations
Esther
Daniel
Ezra-Nehemiah
1-2 Chronicles

The Writings.

All of them highly respected teachers themselves. And Jesus has come there with the specific mission to make known to the Jews the “Wisdom of God”.

In other words:



**God the Father sent His only Son,
“His Incarnate Word”, to explain
“His written word” to His people.**



Did you know that throughout Holy Scripture there are more than 100 names for Jesus? It’s true. And yet, the name, “The Word of God” is, perhaps, the most revealing. For Jesus, as the ‘perfect’ (that is, sinless) human being, embodied everything that Almighty God wanted to reveal to (that is to say, to show and tell) His people about Himself.



**(In short, what God the Father yearned
for His children on Earth to understand
about what He was really like.)**

And in His perfect humanity (we are told in verse 52 of today’s Gospel Lesson from St. Luke, chapter 2):

“...Jesus increased in wisdom and stature, and in favour with God and men.”

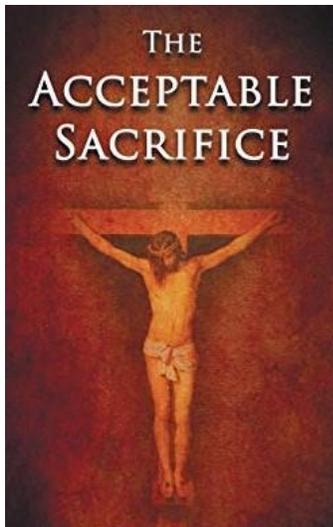
However, one fateful day, about 18 years later (when Jesus had completed that process of growing in wisdom and stature), He came to the realization that He had come to Earth for a greater Divine purpose – not just **to encourage** and **to teach** God’s people to become, what St. Paul describes in today’s Epistle Lesson from Romans 12:1 as:

“... living sacrifices holy and acceptable unto God”,

But, in reality, to become, in Himself:



THE HOLIEST SACRIFICE; and



THE MOST ACCEPTABLE SACRIFICE,

unto Almighty God His Heavenly Father.

And, furthermore, to die stapled to Calvary’s cruel wooden cross (described in the “Prayer of Consecration” on page 82 of the 1962 Canadian Book of Common Prayer, BCP) as:

“...a full, perfect, and sufficient sacrifice, oblation, and satisfaction, for the sins...”



of EVERY person,



in EVERY place,



in EVERY age.



You know, I sometimes ponder what that particular day was like – the day when 30-year-old Jesus of Nazareth, full of “wisdom and stature”, came to completely understand His Divine purpose. Perhaps, as Christian author Max Lucado imagines, in Chapter 8 of his 1987 book, “God Came Near”, that day went something like this:

“The heavy door creaked on its hinges as He pushed it open. With a few strides He crossed the silent shop and opened the wooden shutters to a square shaft of sunshine that pierced the darkness, painting a box of daylight on the dirt floor.

“Jesus looked around the carpentry shop. Jesus stood for a moment in the refuge of the little room that housed so many sweet memories. Jesus had come to say goodbye.

“It was time for Jesus to leave. He had heard something that made Him know it was time to go. So He came one last time to smell the sawdust and the lumber.

“Life was peaceful here. Life was so... safe.

“Here Jesus had spent countless hours of contentment. On this dirt floor He had played as a toddler while His father worked. Here Joseph had taught Jesus how to grip a hammer. And on this workbench Jesus had built His first chair.

“I wonder what Jesus thought as He took one last look around the room... I wonder if Jesus hesitated. I wonder if His heart was torn. I wonder if He rolled a nail between His thumb and fingers, anticipating the pain.

“It was here in that His human hands shaped the wood His Divine hands had created. And it was here that His body matured while His Spirit waited for the right moment, the right day.

“And now that day had arrived.

“It must have been difficult for Jesus to leave... In Nazareth He was known only as Jesus, the son of Joseph. You can be sure He was respected in the community. Jesus was good with His hands. He had many friends. He was a favourite among the children. Jesus could tell a good joke and had a habit of filling the air with contagious laughter.

"I wonder if Jesus wanted to stay..."

"I wonder because I know Jesus had already read the last chapter. He knew that the feet that would step out of the safe shadow of the carpentry shop would not rest until they'd been pierced and placed on a Roman cross.

"You see, Jesus didn't have to go. He had a choice. He could have stayed. He could have kept His mouth shut. Jesus could have ignored the call or at least postponed it. And had He chosen to stay, who would've known? Who would have blamed him?"

"Jesus could have come back as a man in another era when society wasn't so volatile, when religion wasn't so stale, when people would listen better.

"Jesus could have come back when crosses were out of style.

"But His heart wouldn't let Him. If there was hesitation on the part of His humanity, it was overcome by the compassion of His Divinity. His Divinity heard the voices. His Divinity heard the hopeless cries of the poor, the bitter accusations of the abandoned, the dangling despair of those who are trying to save themselves.

"And His Divinity saw the faces. Some wrinkled. Some weeping. Some hidden behind veils. Some obscured by fear. Some earnest with searching. Some blank with boredom. From the face of Adam to the face of the infant born somewhere in the world as you read these words, Jesus saw them all.

"And we can be sure of one thing. Among the faces and the voices that Jesus saw and heard in that carpentry shop in Nazareth were ours. Our silent prayers uttered on tearstained pillows were heard before they were said. Our deepest questions about death and eternity were answered before they were asked. And our direst need, our need for a Savior, was met before we ever sinned.

“And not only did Jesus hear us, He saw us. Jesus saw our faces aglow the hour we first knew Him. Jesus saw our faces in shame the moment we first fell. The same faces that looked back at us from this morning’s mirror, looked at Jesus. And it was enough to kill Him.

“Jesus left the carpentry shop because of you, because of me.

“Jesus (‘The Word of God’) laid His security down with His hammer. Jesus (‘The Wisdom of God’) hung tranquility on the peg with His nail apron. Jesus (‘The Source of Life’) closed the window shutters on the sunshine of His youth. And Jesus (‘Love Incarnate’) locked the door on the comfort and ease of anonymity.

“Since He could bear our sins more easily than He could bear the thought of our hopelessness, Jesus (full of WISDOM and STATUE) CHOSE to leave.”



And He did it for us.

ALL of us.

Young and old alike.



Dearest Reader in Christ:

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