

## THE FAVOR OF GOD

The annual March For Life in Washington DC last week drew hundreds of thousands of people of all ages in support of pro-life values. This has much in common with our Bible text for today, Luke 2:40-47, as the righteous people of Israel were drawn to their capital annually for national religious observances.

Speaking of Jesus Christ, verses 40-41 read, "*and the child grew and became strong, filled with wisdom. And the favor of God was upon Him. Now His parents went to Jerusalem every year at the feast of the Passover. And when He was 12 years old they went up, according to custom.*"

**1- The FAVOR OF GOD was upon Jesus** as He grew up in a devout family. Jesus was both perfectly divine and perfectly human. He "*grew and become strong*" refers to physical growth, and shows that Jesus was a normal human child. "*Filled with wisdom*" refers to His intellectual, emotional, and spiritual growth. Psalm 139 notes how every person is unique from day one of their conception, formed by God in the womb, made in the image of God with capabilities to know Him in relationship with Him.

"*The favor of God was upon Him*" refers to God's grace. The word *charis* means grace, kindness, gift, undeserved favor, and occurs 146 times in the New Testament. But the phrase "*favor of God*" occurs only in Malachi 1:9 and Luke 2:40. A similar phrase in Luke 4 quotes Isaiah 61 and refers to Jesus proclaiming "*the year of the Lord's favor*" in the coming of the Christ and the kingdom of God. And Isaiah 11:2 notes "*the Spirit of the Lord shall rest upon Him, the Spirit of wisdom and understanding, the Spirit of counsel and might, the Spirit of knowledge and the fear of the Lord.*" God's grace was upon Jesus.

**2- The UNIQUENESS OF JESUS** was in His nature as both human and divine. RC Sproul notes He also grew up without the handicap of original sin. In all other respects, He grew up like any other Jewish boy in a devout family. Not all parents went every year, as Passover lasted 10 days, plus at least a week roundtrip in travel, an expensive priority for peasant people. The Law required males to attend (Exodus 23:14-18, 34:23, Deuteronomy 16:16) but for Joseph and Mary and Jesus, it was their annual custom.

What a blessing for children to have parents who obey God's Word and worship regularly as a family. Recent research shows strong advantages to kids from stable homes and two parents, and especially church attendance, all which lead to stronger communities as a whole. You may not hear this on nightly news, but it is taught as the wisdom of God in the Bible. What you are doing to build your family stronger? Your community and your church? God's Word gives valuable guidance.

**3- The MANHOOD OF JESUS** would occur at age 13, when a Jewish boy celebrated "*barmitzvah*" when they were recognized as "*a son of commandment*" and declared a man. Going to Jerusalem beforehand got them acquainted with the temple, and procedures for understanding and living out God's laws in the Old Testament. All this was part of God's delegation of authority in human society, as men are responsible for representing God. When men realize their sober accountability for diligently obeying the commands of Scripture, not picking what pleases them, but doing what pleases Almighty God, they become more diligent in teaching kids by example. This builds stronger families and communities.

**4- The WISDOM OF GOD** was in Jesus, from the Scriptures. We see this in verse 43 when Jesus stayed behind in the temple after the Passover. His parents did not know it, and headed for home. In the large groups of travelers, often relatives and neighbors, men generally trekked with men, and women with women, and children would go from group to group. Joseph and Mary began to search for Jesus when they realized He was not with either of them. Luke says, "*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.*" Are you surprised?

At age 12-13 children have much greater intellectual capacity. This age coincides with Confirmation, as they are ready to grapple with deeper questions and answers. How did Jesus have such understanding that the teachers were amazed at Him? The Scriptures. Deuteronomy 6 commands parents: *you shall teach God's Words diligently to your children.* Jesus grew up learning the Bible as a daily priority, in a devout home that sought to obey God's written-down Words as part of every-day life.

**5- Is GOD'S WISDOM IN YOU?** Do you expect children to grow up properly without good nutrition or parental instruction and discipline? Of course not. The Bible provides practical wisdom and spiritual nourishment and guidance. Is Scripture the daily priority in your household? Worthwhile things come hard. But research indicates you can develop a new habit in 21 days. Make a commitment and do it regularly. Soon the advantages of doing right things overcomes your natural fleshly resistance.

RC Sproul notes that it became customary after Passover for rabbis to engage in theological discussion with a Q-&A learning process similar to that used by Socrates and Plato. In this context, 12-year-old Jesus astonished the onlookers with His insight and abilities in God's Word. Psalm 111:10 says "*the fear of the Lord is the beginning of wisdom; all those who practice it have a good understanding.*"

Just like Jesus, the only way to gain God's wisdom is by increasing your knowledge of God's Word. By reading, studying, Q-&A, and living it out. This can't happen apart from regular intake of Scripture! □