

When I was growing up, I loved to go down to the corner store and buy a couple of packs of baseball cards. One of my favourite brands of cards was Topps. The good folks at Topps baseball cards had a way of being creative with their product.

In looking back, one of the most unique baseball cards was their 1972 series called “Boyhood Photos of the Stars”. On the front of each card was a black and white photo of an all star when he was a young boy. In the corner of the card was a colour photo of him as a major leaguer for comparison. It was amazing to look at these Boyhood Photos of the Stars cards, seeing how these all-star players were once were little boys growing up in ordinary homes like you and me.

We love to look back at photos of people we know and see what they looked like when they were little and growing up. We notice their similarities and differences – how they’ve grown, changed, developed. We like the portraits and the reminders that people have a background, a history, and a story. It piques a curiosity in us.

Of all the gospels, Luke gives us the only portrait of Jesus as a boy growing up. After announcing the birth and showing us the baby in the manger, Luke fast forwards to an incident where Jesus visited the temple in Jerusalem, teaching us who Jesus is like and packing in so much information in a few short verses. But why this one story from his childhood? Why does Luke take us back to this snapshot? What does Luke want us to see about Jesus?

See the Christ Who Grows

Luke moves from Bethlehem and Jerusalem to Nazareth. He simply says that Jesus was part of a devout Jewish family who obeyed the law (v. 39), bringing us to this fitting verse: “And the child grew and became strong, filled with wisdom. And the favour of God was upon him” (v. 40). At the end of the chapter there is a similar verse: “And Jesus increased in wisdom and stature and in favour with God and man” (v. 52). In every way, Jesus grew. We understand how he grew physically – he went from being a baby who cried and was held to a toddler running and playing to a youth who was curious and exploring the world. He would have had measurable physical growth – maybe he had to put his back against the wall each birthday where Joseph or Mary could mark off how much height he had added each year.

Not only did Jesus grow physically in stature, but Luke tells us that he grew intellectually as well. The almighty God who ruled the universe also was a child who had to obey his parents, learn to speak and reason and study the Jewish Law. While he was fully God with all of the attributes of God, he was also a human who experienced all the limitations of human flesh, battling the temptations and weaknesses that you and I battle.

What this means is that Jesus was a real human being with a human mind, a human body. So many Christians think that Jesus had a physical human body but had the mind of God inside of him. But the Church of the 4th century said that Christ was not only God but also fully human. He had a human nature and a divine nature in the one person of Jesus. His humanity was fully human – body, mind, and emotions. And so his human mind had to develop and learn just as you and I have to learn. We often forget that Jesus had to really study hard to learn woodworking in his father’s carpentry shop. He would have studied angles and the quality of various types of woods for building. He would have had to learn

how to piece things together to produce good quality materials like Joseph. He went through the ordinary processes of intellectual development.

But the difference is that Jesus developed without sin. He had to apply himself to study. He had to spend long hours working hard. He had to grow in physical strength to accomplish the tasks that Joseph would teach him. The human Jesus had to grow to learn how to solve a math equation to fit pieces of wood together. As human Jesus he had to learn the various rules of the law and how they were to be applied. As divine, he always knew these things. Apart from God revealing things to him, the human Jesus had to grow in wisdom as well as stature. Most certainly there were things that the Father God revealed to Jesus – his identity, his mission, his purpose. He knew because he learned these things and because they were revealed to him. Luke wants us to see and adore the God who grows – because if Jesus has to grow, then you and I need to make every effort to grow as well.

See the Christ Who Learns

Luke tells us the account where Jesus went up to the temple in Jerusalem for the annual pilgrimage for Passover. Luke tells us that at first his parents didn't understand what Jesus had said to them (v. 50), but years afterward, with all of her pondering, Mary would have grasped by faith what had happened, and how this brought clarity to his future.

As a godly family, they all made the pilgrimage to Jerusalem to celebrate the Passover – this festival that recalled the night in Egypt where God judged Pharaoh for his mistreatment of God's firstborn son Israel. As a twelve year old boy, Jesus would have been filled with the wonder of the story of Israel's escape from Egypt, the mighty deliverance brought by God for his people who had been enslaved. Luke tells us that this occurred when Jesus was 12 – and soon he would become a man in the eyes of the Jewish tradition, having his bar mitzvah – becoming a son of the law. This is why Jesus is going to Jerusalem – he should go to learn what it meant to be a Jewish man, experiencing his people's history.

While they were returning from Jerusalem, Luke tells us that there was a mix up (vv. 43-45). We might think Joseph and Mary were irresponsible parents, but the reality is that there were probably two groups who travelled – the men in one group and the women and children in the other. Maybe you've had this mix up yourself as a parent – both of you take a vehicle somewhere and think that the other has the children, only to discover that one of the kids was left behind. But when the end of the first day's journey came, they discovered that Jesus was no where to be found.

What Luke wants to emphasize is found in v. 43 – Jesus stayed behind, remaining in Jerusalem. But it had taken Mary & Joseph until the third day to find Jesus. There he was, with the PhDs of his day – the scholars, the theologians, the religious leaders – listening, asking questions, learning. But what was unusual was his incredible ability. For many of us, we assume that because he was divine, he was surprising these teachers with his great skills. But that isn't what Luke is emphasizing. He is emphasizing his humanity – how Jesus in his humanity had to learn as we had to learn. He was not omniscient in his humanity. He had a hunger and drive to know his Father – and Luke makes it plain that people were astonished – including his parents – because of how he was trusting and relying upon the very Scriptures that he had spoken into existence.

Like a true mother, however, Mary asks her son why Jesus treated Joseph and her in the way that he did, leaving them in great distress. The shock, the fear, the worry of this mother for her son are very

evident. But the earliest words we have recorded from Jesus's mouth come here: "Why were you looking for me? Did you not know that I must be in my Father's house?" (v. 49). And here, Jesus revealed to his parents his true nature – that he already understood that he was the Son of God, and he had to be in communion with his heavenly Father.

These words – "my Father" – are astonishing coming from Jesus's mouth. Israel had referred collectively to God as Father. But this was the first time that someone would refer to God as "my Father" – in an individual sense. He knew who he was. He knew his identity as God. He knew that he had to grow in understanding of the Law and be in perfect submission. He knew he had to be in relationship with his Father in order to learn and grow.

So if Jesus the boy had to grow in his understanding of his relationship to his Father, how much more do you and I need to grow in our love for God's Word, for who God is, and for how we are to relate to him?

See the Obedience of Christ

In this perfect relationship as Son to Father, Jesus was seeking to be perfectly obedient to his Father. He would say that he had come to do the will of his Father (Jn 6:38), only doing that which pleased his Father (Jn 8:29). He would live his life in complete obedience to the Father so that he could end his life by saying, "Yet not my will, but yours be done."

But the perfect obedience of Christ is not only to his heavenly Father, but also to his early parents. Luke tells us that he returned to Nazareth and was submissive to them. With all humility, Jesus followed their authority.

Submission to authority is something we struggle with in our day. We are so autonomous that we think we can decide when we should obey and disobey orders. We chafe at obedience. We think we can decide when we should obey and when we shouldn't because we have an over-confidence in ourselves. Submission is seen not when things are easy, but when things are hard. Submission requires patience, endurance, and steadfastness. It requires doing the honourable thing even when it is hard.

Christ submitted fully – perfectly obedient and fulfilling everything that he was ever called to do. As a human, Hebrews 5:8 tells us that Christ learned obedience by the things he suffered. Patient suffering produces obedience when we let it do its work. And this is what Christ does.

So if Christ had to learn obedience through suffering, shouldn't we expect that hardships are going to come along that teach us what obedience looks like? Aren't we going to have to endure when there is bad leadership, bad direction and bad decisions that require us to obey?

And all of these things help us to...

Worship the Glorious Christ (vv. 22-23)

For Luke's readers, he would have had to help them see that God could become human. This concept would have been mind blowing. Jesus had to grow. He had to be formed as a person. He had to learn obedience.

The Story of Everything: Growth – Luke 2:39-52
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And in a similar way, we have to wrestle with what the Church has come to understand about Jesus Christ throughout the ages. We confess that he is fully God and fully man. Yet in our understanding of Christ, most of us have less of a struggle thinking about Jesus being God. We assume he had the mind of God. We assume that he was all powerful because he did the miracles. But what we forget is that he was both God and man, fully, without confusion.

What this means is that Jesus had to learn obedience as a human being. He had to learn how to study the Bible. He had to learn what it meant to follow God.

But what we forget is that he was still fully God. He was still in his divine nature upholding the universe by the word of his power. Even as he was learning to relate to God as a human being, he was in perfect communion as the divine. Even as he was studying theology in the temple, he was revealing himself to the world. And even as he was being found in the temple, he was still omni-present.

The Church through the ages has understood that Christ was fully God and fully man. We easily think of him as fully human, but forget that being fully God meant that he did not cease to be omnipotent, omniscient, and omnipresent in his divine nature. He was limited in the flesh but infinite as God.

Just listen to Athanasius, who defended Christ as fully God and man at the council of Nicea in 325 AD:

“The Word was not hedged in by His body, nor did His presence in the body prevent his being present elsewhere as well...At one and the same time – this is the wonder – as Man He was living a human life, and as Word He was sustaining the life of the Universe, and as Son He was in constant union with his Father.” (Athanasius, *On the Incarnation* 3.17).

This is the wonder of Christ. This is the God that we worship. Fully God and fully man. His growth as a human reminds us that we need to look at the Gospels carefully and study and see the glory of the One and Only. The Boyhood All-Star is the One who sustained the Universe and learned obedience. So let’s see the glorious Christ and be amazed at the One who came for you and me.