

OT: 1 Samuel 2.18-20,26

NT: Colossians 3.12-17

Gp: Luke 2.41-52

We find ourselves in that chronological no-man's-land between Christmas and New Year where, having recovered from the food coma and alcoholic haze of Christmas Day, we struggle to know what day it is, let alone what time. All the usual markers of our daily life have disappeared, so we have done well to remember that today is Sunday and we've made our way to church!

The Church's Lectionary is also in free fall, apparently jumping about in time without any logical consideration. On Wednesday, we celebrated the birth of Jesus, now today, he is 12 years old. Next Wednesday, he will be eight days old at his circumcision and no-one is quite sure how old he will be next Sunday when the Magi arrive. All very confusing but let's go with the flow.

In the reading from Luke's gospel, we see the God in the young boy emerging. We learn that the child Jesus has received a good and proper upbringing from his parents, faithfully keeping the feasts and customs of the Jewish tradition. They could be any upright family, working hard and worshipping God. But suddenly we have an account where Jesus appears to step outside the good child image.

He does what every parent fears, he appears to get lost. And he doesn't do it accidentally but by choice. Remaining in the temple after the party from Nazareth have left, remaining to acquire a better understanding of the scriptures, remaining to challenge the scholars of his day, remaining to set down a marker for what will be his public ministry.

Such a story is not unprecedented in the Bible. The Old Testament reading shows the beginning of Samuel's ministry as a young boy in the Temple. Just as Mary's song, the Magnificat, echoes the song of Hannah, Samuel's mother, at the realisation of her unexpected pregnancy, so this story of Jesus in the Temple echoes Samuel's vocation as God's prophet. And Mary must have known this, realised that this was not an errant child who didn't care if his parents were hurt by his behaviour, but that this was another sign of what was to be. Both the overwhelming joy but also the crushing pain that would be hers as she witnessed her son's earthly ministry and its apparent devastating conclusion.

Jumping back in time again to when the child Jesus was about six weeks old but to a reading we won't get to until 2nd February and Candlemas, the words of Simeon must have also been echoing in Mary's heart.

'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.'

When Mary said yes to the angel, when she bowed to the will of God and accepted the commission to be the mother of Jesus, she could have had no idea of what lay ahead. No parent-to-be knows what they are in for, but this child was, is exceptional. Such a role, such a calling as was given to Mary, could have broken anybody. Never sure what it would mean that he was the Son of God, watching her son become public property, afraid that he would overstep the mark with the religious authorities and pay the subsequent

price. And when her worst fears were realised, being powerless to save him and able only to accompany him on that terrible journey of the cross, first-hand witness to his suffering and death. But as always, God knows what he is about, he chose well.

The gifts outlined in Paul's letter to the Colossians were rich in Mary.

'As God's chosen ones, holy and beloved, clothe yourselves with compassion, kindness, humility, meekness, and patience.'

In Jesus Christ, these gifts are open to us too. In his sharing in our humanity, he brought our survival kit, our ability to contend with whatever life may present to us. He brought us the grace of God so that we will never be tested beyond our strength because our strength, like that of Mary's, lies not in our own human ability, frail as that is, but in the overwhelming love of God who would spare us nothing, not even his own Son.

And so we should heed Paul's closing words in this extract to the Colossians:

'And whatever you do, in word or deed, do everything in the name of the Lord Jesus, giving thanks to God the Father through him.'

Next Sunday, we will talk of other gifts but for today let us simply give thanks for the gift of Jesus Christ in our lives, no matter the time or date.

Revd Michelle Montrose