

January 13, 2019 – Luke 3:15-22

What was Jesus like as a child? Among the unanswered questions of the Bible, that usually ranks as one of the most common among Christians. How does the Son of God act as toddler? What is a teenage God-man like? It's silly, but we wonder about these sorts of things.

The Bible doesn't tell us. We hear about Jesus' birth and circumcision. We hear about the coming of the wise men and the escape to Egypt. We hear about one single, solitary event when he's 12 years old. But, for the most part, 30 years of Jesus' life are summarized by one sentence in Luke: *“And Jesus increased in wisdom and in stature and in favor with God and man.”*

All those years glossed over. All those cute baby stories and fascinating family anecdotes. Brushed aside as unimportant. And the tiny bits about his birth that we do hear are only in Matthew and Luke. His birth doesn't even get mentioned in Mark or John.

No, we don't hear about Jesus' childhood in the Bible. What we do hear about is His baptism. All four Gospel's begin, in some form, with an account of Jesus' baptism. Some give a little more introduction. Some a little less.

But it's clear that four different authors... writing at four different times... in four very different styles all feel that if you're going to tell the Gospel of Jesus Christ, you begin with his baptism. And of course, they're all guided and inspired by the Holy Spirit in doing so.

But that just means that God himself feels that our best introduction to Jesus' ministry isn't His childhood. It isn't that time spent with Mary and Joseph. It isn't any of those things. It's His baptism.

Why? Well, simply put, it's important for us for the same reason that it was important to the Jews of Jesus' day. Take a look at our Gospel lesson: *“The people were waiting expectantly and were all wondering in their hearts if John might possibly be the Christ.”*

The people are looking for the Christ. Waiting expectantly for him. They think he might be John the Baptist. They're wrong. And being who John is, he tells them that. But that means they're still looking. They're still waiting. Waiting for the Christ to be revealed.

You see, we're in the season of Epiphany. And the whole season of Epiphany is about how God reveals himself to the world in Jesus Christ. The word epiphany itself literally means in Greek, “to put on display.” Epiphany is about Jesus being “put on display” for the whole world.

He's already been put on display once. With the magi. The wise men that we heard about last week. There, he's put on display with a bright star. And with that star he's given the title of king. King of the Jews. King of all God's people. King of all creation. King of heaven and earth.

In Jesus' baptism, he's on display again. With heaven opened. And a voice booming down from above. And, maybe most importantly, with the Spirit descending like a dove upon him. And at that moment, he is given the title of Christ.

No, “Christ” is not Jesus' last name. It's a title. We call him “Jesus Christ.” But it would be far more accurate to call him, “Jesus, the Christ.” “Jesus, the anointed one.” Because that's what Christ means. Have you ever heard of “christening” a ship by breaking a bottle of wine over the hull? Or christening a baby with oil? Same thing.

Except that Jesus isn't christened with wine or with oil. He's christened with water and he's christened with the Holy Spirit. And this was hugely important for the people who saw it. Because it meant that this was a man you could follow.

This man had the Spirit of God resting upon him. This man was God incarnate. This man had the approval of God the Father. An approval of such magnitude that he announced him as his very own beloved Son and told the world that everything Jesus did was pleasing to him.

The people were waiting, wondering, hoping for someone to follow. For God to open up heaven and point to a man and say, "This one! Follow him!" And that's exactly what God did. I don't think there could ever be a clearer answer to prayer than what happened at Jesus' baptism.

And from that point on, Jesus began a whole new life. We don't know what his life was like before his baptism. Was he a normal, playful child? Did he work with his father? Did he have friends? Who knows?

And frankly... who cares? Because it was Jesus' baptism that began his ministry. At that moment, God the Father hit the reset button on Jesus' life. Whatever he was doing before would end. From this point forward, he was the Christ. The anointed one. The one with God's seal of approval. He was the one everyone should follow.

And follow, they did. For a while. Jesus' baptism jumpstarts his ministry. In a matter of days, he's surrounded by disciples. In a matter of weeks, he's preaching before thousands. In a matter of months, he has the religious authorities turned upside down and scurrying under rocks for fear of his influence.

But it doesn't last. In just three years, those same people searching for the Christ are hurling insults at Jesus. Spitting on him. Mocking him. Crying, "Crucify him! Crucify him!" God had answered their prayer and they didn't care. God had opened heaven, pointed to Jesus, and said, "This one! Follow him!" And they rebelliously refused.

You see, that's what it means to be a sinner. You, me, the people of Jesus' day... we all have good intentions. We all want God to show up and intervene. We all want him to tell us exactly what we're supposed to do. We all want the Christ to lead us.

But it's a different story when the Christ actually shows up. When he actually intervenes. When he actually tells us what we're supposed to do. Then, sin kicks in. And we become just like Adam and Eve once more. Rejecting God's Word. Trying to be like God. Trying to follow our own sinful hearts. Trying to be our own Christ. And in the process becoming our own antichrist.

What we don't realize is that just as it took an act of God to declare Jesus the Christ, it also takes an act of God to declare you a disciple of the Christ. An act of God not much different than the one that happened to Jesus. An anointing of water and the Spirit. A declaration that you are God's beloved child. And that no matter what sin you commit, he will still be pleased with you.

In his baptism, God chose Jesus as his Christ. And in your baptism, God chooses you as his Christian. And everything that came before doesn't matter. Because that is the beginning of your ministry.

Whether it's squirming in your mother's arms as an infant. Or playing as a child. Or praying as an adult. From that point forward, God hits the reset button on your life. From that point forward, you have God's seal of approval. From that point forward, you are a disciple of the Christ.

A disciple who will follow the Christ everywhere. Whether you want to or not. Follow him through a life of sharing the Gospel and helping those in need. Follow him through persecution, insults, and mockery. Follow him into death itself. And follow him into a new life. A resurrection from the dead. And a kingdom that has no end.

You are God's chosen one. You are God's anointed. Chosen and anointed not to lead. But to follow. Through water and through fire. From the north, south, east, and west. Follow him into the grave. And back out of the grave. For he has summoned you by name. You are his. Amen.