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## CONTENTS

### General Articles

Jesus Washing the Disciples' Feet ..... 5

The Life and Impact of Dr. John Hogg as a Missionary in Egypt ..... 11

### Book Reviews

Department of Biblical Theology ..... 27

Department of Systematic Theology ..... 37

Department of Historical Theology ..... 39

Department of Applied Theology ..... 55

**Book Briefs** ..... 69

### Academic Articles

A Boy Called Jesus ..... 77

Evangelistic Dialogue: Reflections on a Personal Encounter ..... 89

Worship: Then and Now ..... 115

Two or Three Office: A Slash at the Gordian Knot ..... 137

Theological Institutions and the Church ..... 151

**Index of Books Reviewed** ..... 173

## CONTRIBUTORS

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## A Boy Called Jesus

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### I.

During a conference in 2010 in Bengaluru /Bangalore, India entitled “The Global Alliance for Advancing Academic Programs in Holistic Child Development”, Dr. Brewster mentioned as a footnote to his paper that the childhood of Jesus was of enormous significance in Jesus’ later ministry. That brief reference to the childhood of Jesus challenged me to work on this topic. What can we learn from the boy Jesus? What are the parallels for our children and teens? (What is fundamental to our 4/14 Movement? The modest result of my research is this paper, as a “thank you” gift to the incredible servant of the Lord named Dan Brewster. May he enjoy the Lord’s blessing for many years to come. *Soli Deo Gloria!*

### II.

Let me begin with some personal remarks. I was born during the Second World War – a most terrible time in Europe. Many images from this early period of my childhood are permanently etched in my memory. Our family was very poor, having lost almost everything in the war. Our carpentry workshop, however, unlike our home, was not completely bombed out.

Naturally, during my childhood, the workshop was the place to play, to observe, to learn, and to wonder. The spiral wood shavings, the different kinds and shapes of the little pieces of wood, and tools like hammers, screw drivers, and chisels were my toys. Indeed, a wonderful world – in spite of the

specks of sawdust that often found their way into my eyes and the little wood splinters into my fingers.

Following the war, my family's furniture-making business, which had been in existence for centuries, had to be expanded beyond making only fine furniture. We had to take on larger construction projects, since so many houses had been totally destroyed. I was fascinated, and I learned the significance of a solid foundation for a large cabinet, or even a whole building. I learned why the capstone was the key to an archway and how a flat roof needed a different support structure than a slanted roof with thatch or tiles.

My family seldom attended church, except at Christmas, but when I was eight years old someone invited me to attend Wednesday Evening Church School for boys my age. The pastor of our church did not believe in Sunday School. He expected the entire family to attend the Sunday worship service together, emphasizing that Jesus never separated his audience according to age or gender. It was at the first Wednesday Evening Church School that I heard of Jesus, and I learned that he grew up in a carpenter's family – just like me! My curiosity was piqued and I wanted to know more about that little boy, only to be told that very little is known about Jesus as a boy. I was saddened, because I was sure that that boy Jesus would have experienced the same kind of life as I was experiencing. My imagination and fantasy went wild.

At the age of eight I already was expected to do several simple but important jobs in the reconstruction of our home. Every evening from I helped to retrieve and clean bricks from the piles of rubble so that the masons could reuse them the next day in rebuilding our house. By the light of kerosene lamps the entire family had to work until late in the night. However, the leader of Wednesday Evening Church School came faithfully every Wednesday evening to our home and convinced my parents that I should go with him to learn more about God. He never missed a Wednesday, always waiting while I got ready to go with him. The faithfulness of that young man played a most vital part in the development of my spiritual life. Many other children in our group can also testify that this young man's love, concern and persistence made a huge difference in their lives for years to come. I heard and learned more about Jesus. For me the differences between the eastern Mediterranean lifestyle of nearly two millennia earlier, in Jesus' time – differences of language, culture, and even of religion – and those of the Black Forest in Germany, where I lived, were not important.

For me the boy Jesus was just a boy like me – a boy who grew up in a carpenter's workshop.

## III

Very little is recorded about the “child” Jesus.<sup>1</sup> Only Matthew and Luke record some of the birth and infancy narratives. Many scholars today see the first two chapters of Luke as having been added at a later date, since the style, structure, and language are somewhat different from the rest of Luke’s gospel. Some critics say the same about Matthew’s gospel. There is also the question as to how Luke would have acquired the information about Jesus’ birth and childhood. That information would have been available only from Mary, the mother of Jesus. Even more questionable are the mid-second century documents on Jesus’ life prior to his baptism. The most important apocryphal documents are the so-called *Infancy Gospel of Thomas*,<sup>2</sup> the *Protoevangelium of James*,<sup>3</sup> the *Latin Infancy Gospel*,<sup>4</sup> the *Arabic Gospel of Jesus’ Childhood*, and other infancy gospels.<sup>5</sup> All these documents are commonly seen as satisfying the curiosity of the early Christians about the hidden years of Jesus or emphasizing that the miracles that the boy Jesus performed support Christological dogmas and prove his divine nature.

This paper does not deal with these numerous critical accounts that have been produced on the narratives of the first two chapters of Matthew and Luke. Most are speculative at best. Nor will this paper deal with the purpose or the dates of the gospels of Luke or Matthew or with the understanding of

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<sup>1</sup> The best summary, with more than fifty pages of bibliographical references, is given by Cornelia B. Horn and John W. Martens, “Let the little children come to me”: *Childhood and Children in Early Christianity* (Washington: The Catholic University of America Press, 2009). Other works include Marcia J. Bunge, Terence E. Fretheim, and Beverly Roberts Gaventa (eds.), *The Child in the Bible* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2008); Keith J. White, *Introducing Child Theology: Theological Foundations for Holistic Child Development* (Penang, Malaysia: Compassion, 2010); A. Shier-Jones, *Children of God: Towards a Theology of Childhood* (Peterborough, England: Epworth, 2007); Hans-Ruedi Weber, *Jesus and the Children: Biblical Resources for Study and Preaching* (Geneva: WCC, 1979); and a host of publications on the theme “The Gospel of the Infancy.”

<sup>2</sup> Reidar Aasgaard, *The Childhood of Jesus: Decoding the Apocryphal Infancy Gospel of Thomas* (Eugene, OR: Cascade Books, 2009).

<sup>3</sup> *Protoevangelium of James* 19:3-5 (David L. Dungan and David R. Cartlidge, *Sourcebook of Texts for the Comparative Study of the Gospels*, 3<sup>rd</sup> ed. [Missoula, MT: Society of Biblical Literature, 1971], 23).

<sup>4</sup> *Latin Infancy Gospel* 74 (David L. Dungan and David R. Cartlidge, *Sourcebook of Texts for the Comparative Study of the Gospels*, 3<sup>rd</sup> ed. [Missoula, MT: Society of Biblical Literature, 1971], 29).

<sup>5</sup> The best summaries are given by Roy B. Zuck, *Precious in His Sight: Childhood & Children in the Bible* (Grand Rapids: Baker Books, 1996); Oscar Cullman, “Infancy Gospels,” in *New Testament Apocrypha*, ed. Wilhelm Schneemelcher, trans. and ed. R. McL. Wilson, rev. ed., 2 vols. (Louisville: Westminster/John Know Press, 1991).

the education or the social/cultural place of children in the Jewish and Roman traditions of that time.<sup>6</sup>

Over the centuries the question of Jesus' siblings has been debated ad nauseum, and it surfaced again with the recent publication of Pope Benedict XVI's series on Jesus of Nazareth.<sup>7</sup> The explanation of the passages in the gospels<sup>8</sup> referring to Jesus' younger siblings born of Mary, and the suggestion that his siblings came from a former marriage of Joseph, may be provided in eternity. Also, the debate that Jesus was brought up as a child or youth in a religious community like Qumran together with his cousin John the Baptist, or that he was part of a similar group of youngsters gathered by a rabbi for childhood/youth training, are not within the scope of this paper. Rather, the focus is foremost on what is recorded directly in Scripture and what is intimated by the references in Jesus' ministry, speaking, and preaching.

#### IV

After the refugee family returned from Egypt, God's angel told Joseph to go to Galilee. Archelaus, who became ruler of Judea after the death of his father Herod, was an even greater tyrant. The family finally settled in Nazareth in Galilee, where Joseph established (or re-established) a carpenter's workshop.<sup>9</sup> Jesus grew up there, and he learned the business from his father.<sup>10</sup> According to rabbinic law, at the age of approximately six years each boy had to attend the "school" at the local synagogue to be instructed in the

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<sup>6</sup> A good summary is given by Marcia J. Bunge (ed.), *The Child in Christian Thought* (Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans, 2001) and Don S. Browning and Marcia J. Bunge (eds.), *Children and Childhood in World Religions: Primary Sources and Texts* (New Brunswick, NJ: 2009); Emil Schürer, *The History of the Jewish People in the Age of Jesus Christ*, 3 vols., Geza Vermes, Fergus Millar, and Martin Goodman (eds.) (Edinburgh: T and T Clark Ltd., 1979); George Foot Moore, *Judaism in the First Centuries of the Christian Era*, 4 vols. (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1966); Alfred Edersheim, *Sketches of Jewish Social Life in the Days of Christ* (NY: Hodder and Stoughton, n.d.) and *The Life and Times of Jesus the Messiah* (NY: Longmans Green and Company, 1899).

<sup>7</sup> Joseph Ratzinger Pope Benedict XVI, *Jesus of Nazareth: The Infancy Narratives* (New York: Image Books, a division of Random House, 2012). See also Ratzinger's *Jesus of Nazareth: From the Baptism in the Jordan to the Transfiguration* (New York: Doubleday, 2007) and *Jesus of Nazareth: Holy Week: From the Entrance into Jerusalem to the Resurrection* (San Francisco: Ignatius Press, 2011). All three of these books were originally published in German.

<sup>8</sup> Mt 13:55, 56; Lk 8:19; Jn 2:12, etc.

<sup>9</sup> The term *carpenter* at that time included not only woodworking but also work with stones or other construction materials.

<sup>10</sup> There is speculation that Joseph and Jesus worked in nearby Sepporis, well known as an artisan's paradise, the provincial capital of Galilee, and the city where villagers took care of their official business. See Bargil Pixner, *With Jesus Through Galilee According to the Fifth Gospel* (Collegeville, MN: Liturgical Pr, 1996) and the writings of Jerome Murphy O'Connor.

writings of the Torah. Jesus learned these writings well, as he did other Jewish Scriptures that became the “Old Testament” of our Christian Bible, as clearly demonstrated throughout his later ministry.<sup>11</sup> He was also instructed within his family. A Jewish family normally read and repeated passages of Scripture and prayed and worshipped together. One can assume, also, that as a family they attended the weekly worship services at the synagogue and participated in the various Jewish celebrations. Luke has recorded one such event when as a family they traveled to Jerusalem. The boy Jesus was part of a typical Jewish family.

Luke states simply, “The child grew and became strong” – the normal development of every human being. But then he adds, “filled with wisdom and the favor of God was upon him.”<sup>12</sup> Wisdom is much more than knowledge – wisdom is part of God’s grace. Every human being is created in the image of God and, as Creator, God cares for every child. The child Jesus is an example of this loving care, and in his ministry as an adult he demonstrated the same divine attitude of loving children as he blessed them, a bestowal of his father’s grace. The Scripture is full of examples of God’s care for children, bestowing upon them grace and blessing. Eternal punishment awaits one who harms or misguides a child.<sup>13</sup> Although some scholars see this brief passage on the development of Jesus as a child<sup>14</sup> simply as a bridge between the narrative of his birth and the narratives of his baptism and public ministry, others see it also as a separate and most significant statement about God’s care for children.

One specific event recorded by Luke about Jesus as a boy has received much attention.<sup>15</sup> Every year Mary and Joseph went with friends and relatives to Jerusalem for the Passover Feast. Scripture tells us that at the age of twelve the boy Jesus went along. It is not stated that this was his first visit. At the age of twelve Jesus ceremonially became a man and a “son of the law,” and from then on he had to take the obligations of the law upon himself. He had already learned all this during his time at home and in the local synagogue training program. We don’t know at what stage in his childhood he realized that his relationship to God was unique. He might have already known that he was the Son of God, although he demonstrated obedience to his earthly parents. He knew that he had two fathers, Joseph and God. Jesus spoke with conviction of his relationship with his heavenly Father. Jesus – and I, and millions of other children at or under the age of twelve – can know

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<sup>11</sup> The Gospel of Luke records at least 39 times when Jesus quoted from the Old Testament.

<sup>12</sup> Lk 2:40.

<sup>13</sup> Mt 18:5-6; Mk 9:42.

<sup>14</sup> Lk 2:40.

<sup>15</sup> Lk 2:41-51. The commentaries and theological treatises on this passage could easily fill an entire library.

that a relationship with the heavenly Father is real and enables “children” to speak with conviction of belonging to God’s family.

On their way home, Mary and Joseph did not find their boy Jesus among the people in the caravan and they began to search for him. Finally they found him in the temple among the teachers. The boy Jesus did not teach in the temple, as many artists have portrayed him;<sup>16</sup> rather, he was listening, learning, and engaged in dialogue. Luke writes, “Everyone who heard him was amazed at his understanding and his answers.”<sup>17</sup> He was just a boy of twelve years with many questions of a spiritual nature for which he was searching for answers. Children of twelve have many questions, and one should take time to seriously discuss these questions and formulate answers with them. Then one would also be amazed at the level of understanding and wisdom of young people, as was the case in a hall of the outer courts of the temple where Mary and Joseph found their son.<sup>18</sup>

Mary and Joseph were astonished, not only to find Jesus among the teachers but even more to hear his reply, “Did you not know that I must be in my Father’s house?”<sup>19</sup> Jesus did not transfer the title “father” from Joseph to God. He had learned to take seriously the Scripture that speaks of the temple being the heavenly Father’s dwelling place. The many laws, descriptive statements, and psalms that he had learned focused on God the Creator and Father of everything, manifested in the temple. The boy Jesus wanted more; the simple celebration of the Passover Feast was not enough. Like David and a host of other individuals, Jesus needed more of God. Children and teens need more of, and from, God than just ritual or history; they want more than to be entertained. They are not satisfied with the superficial; they seek deeper meaning in life. They would like to meet their heavenly Father. Many parents, like Mary and Joseph, do not fully understand what is going on. Luke records that Mary, the mother of the boy Jesus, “treasured all these things in her heart.” She probably treasured them for five or six decades until she shared them with Luke or someone from whom Luke received the information.

After this encounter at the temple, the boy Jesus went with his parents back to Nazareth “and was obedient to them.”<sup>20</sup> This is also the last mention of Joseph. It is somewhat unfortunate that Joseph, the “adopted” father of Jesus, receives so little attention in today’s preaching and biblical studies. Matthew describes him as a “righteous” man<sup>21</sup> who was in tune with the Lord. Following the angel’s appearance to Mary, the Lord sent an angel to

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<sup>16</sup> As, for example, in Hofmann’s famous painting of the twelve-year old boy Jesus standing in the midst of teachers authoritatively expounding the truth to them.

<sup>17</sup> Lk 2:47.

<sup>18</sup> In the temple there were several halls for meetings and discussion with the various teachers of the law. These halls were open to the public.

<sup>19</sup> Lk 2:49.

<sup>20</sup> Lk 2:51.

<sup>21</sup> Mt 1:18.

speak to Joseph in a dream,<sup>22</sup> and Joseph followed the angel's instructions exactly. Twice more we read that "an angel of the Lord appeared to Joseph in a dream."<sup>23</sup> Joseph was a man of God and an exemplary father figure for Jesus. Undoubtedly the boy Jesus learned much from him.

Jesus learned to read and write<sup>24</sup> and to speak Hebrew, Aramaic, and quite possibly Greek – the languages of his time – like all the children around him.<sup>25</sup> The boy Jesus spent his childhood and youth in Nazareth, a simple, obscure village. Nazareth was never mentioned in the Old Testament, nor is it recorded in the writings of Josephus. Even Nathaniel expressed amazement: "Nazareth! Can anything good come from there?"<sup>26</sup> Surrounded by hills, secluded in a valley, formed like a large natural amphitheater, this little, unimportant village provided a perfect training environment for the boy Jesus. God's grace is bestowed on children not only in important cities like Jerusalem and Tiberius, with their special training institutions, but also in forgotten, unimportant places. There Jesus learned to become a carpenter/craftsman,<sup>27</sup> a profession that he practiced to support himself and the family in which he grew up. He knew how to make furniture and doorframes, construct and repair houses, build yokes and plows. It seems that he was known as the town's carpenter,<sup>28</sup> a craftsman who no doubt knew how to conduct business, deal with finances, pay taxes, and satisfy customers. All this he learned as a boy.

## V.

The boy Jesus learned much from the Torah at the synagogue school, but he also learned from his parents – first from his father and much from his mother – as well as from nature and his surroundings. We don't have written texts of what he actually learned, or when, or who influenced him. We do know, however, from many statements he made later in his life that, like every boy, the countless things he saw, heard, and experienced shaped his life.<sup>29</sup>

<sup>22</sup> Mt 1:20-23.

<sup>23</sup> Mt 2:13, 19.

<sup>24</sup> Lk 4:16-20, Jn 8:6 and 8.

<sup>25</sup> Unfortunately, girls were not formally educated in reading and writing.

<sup>26</sup> Jn 1:46.

<sup>27</sup> Mt 13:55. Ken M. Campbell, "What Was Jesus' Occupation?," *Journal of the Evangelical Theological Society* 48/3 (September 2005), pp. 501-19. This article deals in detail with the use of the term *carpenter/craftsman* in the writings of the church fathers and other ancient manuscripts. Campbell also has excellent biographical references.

<sup>28</sup> Mk 6:3.

<sup>29</sup> Many books have been written on this subject, including Dan Brewster, *Children & Childhood in the Bible: A Workbook* (n.p.: Compassion, 2009). The best texts on the subject are the two works by Roy B. Zuck: *Precious in His Sight: Childhood and Children in the Bible* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1996) and *Teaching as Jesus Taught* (Eugene, OR: Wipf and Stock, 2002).

Roy B. Zuck gives an excellent, extensive summary. It is worth repeating here:

His upbringing in a small Galilean town and his skill at carpentry acquainted him with many aspects of village and country life, which were later utilized in his teaching ministry.

He knew about the problem of getting a speck of sawdust in one's eye (Matt. 7:3-5), the wisdom of building a house on a rock rather than on sand (7:24-27), the corroding effect of moth and rust (6:19-20), the sewing of patches of cloth and the pouring of wine into wineskins (9:16-17), the use of storerooms in a house (13:52), the need for oil in oil lamps (5:15; 25:3-4, 8-10), the value of coins (20:2, 9-10, 13; 22:19-21), the value of a capstone (21:42, 44), the payment of taxes (20:15-21), and the use of flat roofs on houses (24:17).

Jesus refers to kitchen items, including salt (5:13), yeast (13:33; 16:6, 11), flour (13:33), bread (15:26), spices (23:23), and the washing of dishes (23:25-26). His acquaintance with outdoor life shows itself in references to birds (6:26; 13:4) and vultures (24:28), and numerous animals including dogs (7:6; 15:26), pigs (7:6), wolves (7:15, 10:16), sheep (9:36; 10:16; 12:12; 15:24; 18:12-13; 25:33; 26:31), snakes (10:16; 12:34; 23:33), doves (10:16), fish (7:10; 13:47-50; 17:27), gnats (23:24), camels (23:24), hens (23:37), chicks (23:37), and goats (25:33).

He was also familiar with horticultural items, as noted in the Gospel of Matthew, including lilies (6:28), grass (6:30), trees with good and bad fruit (7:17-20; 12:33), thornbushes and thistles (7:16; 13:7, 22), figs and fig trees (7:16; 21:18-22; 24:32-33), reeds (11:7), seeds (13:3-9, 18-23; 25:24, 26), weeds (13:24, 30), wheat (13:25-26, 29-30), mustard seed (13:31-32), harvesting (9:37-38; 21:34, 41; 25:24, 26), and grapes and vineyards (7:16; 20:1-16; 21:28, 33, 39-41; 26:29). He also spoke of farming and farmers (13:3; 21:33; 24:40), sackcloth and ashes (11:21), yokes (11:29-30), pearls (7:6; 13:45-46), millstones (18:6; 24:41), a watchtower (21:33), and tombs (23:27, 29). Surely his childhood home training, schooling, play, and observations of life around him contributed strongly to his colorful teaching – with its numerous references to home life, flora, fauna, and horticulture.<sup>30</sup>

About a century ago, a host of books were published on the “silent” years or the “hidden” years of the boy Jesus’ life. This was a leading theme of the theology of that era.<sup>31</sup>

<sup>30</sup> Zuck, *Precious in His Sight*, pp. 197-198.

<sup>31</sup> W. M. Ramsay, *The Education of Christ* (New York: G. P. Putnam’s Sons, 1902); P. Whitwell Wilson, *The Christ We Forget: A Life of our Lord for Men of To-day*

Over the centuries Catholic theology has always emphasized the role of Mary as foundational in the life of Jesus. We Protestant theologians should give more significance to Mary. She is the mother of Jesus, chosen by God the Father. She was indeed an exceptional person, exceptionally blessed, and as a mother she had an enormous influence on the upbringing of her son, the boy Jesus. Her prayer, her meditations, her care and love for her family and for the people around her should be an example to all mothers.<sup>32</sup>

## VI.

There is one more statement recorded in Scripture about the youth Jesus: “and Jesus grew in wisdom and stature, and in favor with God and man.”<sup>33</sup> This résumé statement is almost identical to the statement about the boy Samuel in the Old Testament.<sup>34</sup> It is the only statement we have about the boy/youth Jesus covering his spiritual, intellectual, physical, and relational development.<sup>35</sup> This holistic statement can be placed between Jesus’ age of 12 and 30, although it probably covers his teen years. It is significant that the emphasis is on “wisdom,” not just knowledge – wisdom includes knowledge but is not limited to knowledge. The previous statement in Luke says “Jesus was filled with wisdom” as a gift of God’s grace; then in verse 52 the emphasis is on “Jesus grew in wisdom.” His spiritual development included moral and intellectual growth.<sup>36</sup> All this happened while he was living in Nazareth with his family. Jesus was a normal youth. This focus on growth in wisdom should be a top priority for all young people and should be supported and treasured by the entire family, especially by the parents.

Jesus also “grew in favor with God and man,” a kind of loving-kindness towards God the Father and all other human beings, an attitude that he manifested in relationships during his three years of public ministry.

As one reflects on the boy/youth Jesus, one realizes that there was something “mystical” about him. From his birth to his death, Christ’s life was a mystery. Paul writes in Colossians: “My purpose is that they may be encour-

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(New York, Chicago, Toronto: Fleming H. Revell, 1917), 57-80; I. Paterson-Smyth, *A People’s Life of Christ* (New York, Chicago, London, Edinburg: Fleming H. Revell, 1920), 39-84; David Smith, *The Days of His Flesh: The Earthly Life of Our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ* (London: Hodder and Stoughton, 1909), 14-24.

<sup>32</sup> Valdir Steuernagel, “I Sing of Hope” (Monrovia, CA: MARC, 1993) and “Doing Theology with an Eye on Mary,” *Evangelical Review of Theology* 27:2 (April 2003).

<sup>33</sup> Lk 2:52.

<sup>34</sup> I Sa 2:26.

<sup>35</sup> The French theologian L. C. Fillion pointed out that this résumé statement occupied the early Church Fathers for centuries. L. C. Fillion, *The Life of Christ: A Historical, Critical, and Apologetic Exposition* (St. Louis, MO and London: Herder, 1943), Vol. 1.

<sup>36</sup> The Council of Constantinople (381 A.D.) debated this passage endlessly and finally rejected Apollinarius’ strange beliefs that in Jesus the divine logos was a substitute for his human soul.

aged in heart and united in love, so that that they may have the full riches of complete understanding, in order that they may know the mystery of God, namely, Christ, in whom are hidden all the treasures of wisdom and knowledge.”<sup>37</sup> The boy Jesus was not only of human nature but also of divine nature. Within him was the divine; he was the Messiah ordained by God the Father.<sup>38</sup> Later in life – during his three years of public ministry – Jesus claimed to be divine and manifested that claim, that he was the Messiah sent by God the Father to establish complete reconciliation between the Creator and the fallen creation. He was the Son of God who came to die on the cross for man’s sinfulness, and through his resurrection he overcame death and now sits on the right hand of God the Father, from where he will come to establish his Father’s ultimate divine kingdom. But he was also human, like all people; that is the way God the Father ordained it, which remains a miracle. All this greatness, God’s salvation, was already embedded in the boy Jesus. Jesus Christ was human as an adult, although at the same time the Son of God. He was also human as a boy, like all children. And just as we are asked to learn from his adult life and to become like him as adults, so can we also learn from his boyhood.

## VII.

This paper looks at the boy Jesus and attempts to extract from what we know specifically from Scripture – and what we can infer – about his boyhood lessons for raising our own children. Let me summarize in seven points:

1) Like the boy Jesus, God’s grace is on every child. In Jesus’ blessing of children and in his making them an example of faith he endorses his Father’s fundamental emphasis on the importance of every child created by him and for him.

2) Like the boy Jesus, children should attend, every week, the “synagogue” – the church service – with their family, to learn from and to memorize Scripture, to participate in worship and prayer, and they should learn to have times of quietness and reflection.

3) Like the boy Jesus, children and teens need more than tradition or the celebration of feasts or great events. They have a yearning for a richer life and for spiritual fulfillment. They simply seek to meet God themselves for satisfaction.

4) Like the boy Jesus, children can learn to be obedient to their parents, to learn from them, to observe the world around them, and to give their heavenly Father thanks for life and everything about it.

5) Like the boy Jesus, children who are refugees (strangers in a land not their own), have both good and bad experiences and they need to learn early to love outsiders and strangers.

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<sup>37</sup> Col 2:2, 3.

<sup>38</sup> Every one of the early Church Fathers, the Reformers, and theologians throughout history have attempted to explain this mystery. The key seemed to be in the resumé statement “Jesus grew in wisdom and stature and in favor with God and man.”

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6) Like the boy Jesus, children and teens have many spiritual questions that must be taken seriously and the answers worked out together. Only answers/solutions they personally own will have a lasting effect.

7) Like the boy Jesus, whose “résumé” (or “interim report card”) read “grew in wisdom and stature and in favor with God and man,” all boys and girls should be encouraged and helped to make this their résumé as well. The focus of development is fourfold: spiritual, intellectual, physical, and relational.

For my own part, I thank God that I was a boy in a carpenter shop, just like the boy Jesus, that I could learn as he did and receive, like him, grace and blessing from God the Father so that I could also become a part of God’s great family.

***Soli Deo Gloria!***