

Pastor Keith E. Wiens
2009

December 27,

Text: Colossians 3:12-17
Christmas I

ARE YOU GROWING?

Two stories. Two stories about children growing and becoming the people God intended them to be. The first story is about Samuel. The second is about Jesus.

Let me tell you about Samuel. About a thousand years before the birth of Jesus, there lived a couple by the name of Elkanah and Hannah. They wanted children, but had none. Every year, when they went to Shiloh to worship God, Hannah would pray and ask God for a child. One year she prayed that if God would give her a son, she would give the child back to the Lord. Eli, the priest, saw Hannah praying and assured her that God would answer her prayer. And God did. Hannah bore a son and they named him Samuel.

Samuel was very special to Hannah and Elkanah. He was an answer to their prayers and they loved him very much. Hannah, though, remembered her promise to the Lord, and so when Samuel was weaned, she took him to Shiloh. She told Eli, the priest, that she was giving Samuel back to the Lord and so Samuel stayed there with Eli and assisted him in his priestly duties.

Each year Hannah made a robe for Samuel, and when Elkanah and Hannah made the trip to Shiloh to offer their yearly sacrifice, Hannah gave the robe to Samuel. And each year Eli blessed Elkanah and Hannah and prayed that they would have many more children, and they did.

The story we heard today is about one such visit. And we are told that *“the boy Samuel continued to grow both in stature and in favor with the Lord and with the people.”* Samuel became a strong leader for the people of Israel.

The second story is about Jesus. Like Samuel, the birth of Jesus was long awaited. For centuries people had prayed for a Messiah, a leader who would rule over a new kingdom. The angels told Mary

and Joseph that their child was this long awaited Messiah. When Jesus was born, Mary and Joseph adored their son and loved him very much.

We know very little about the early life of Jesus. We have no stories about Jesus playing with friends in Nazareth or going to school or working with Joseph in the carpenter's shop. We have only one story about Jesus as a boy, the story we heard today. Each year Mary and Joseph traveled from Nazareth to Jerusalem for the festival of the Passover. When Jesus was twelve years old, they made the trip as usual. This time, however, Jesus stayed in the temple, listening to the teachers and asking them questions.

Today's story concludes, "*And Jesus increased in wisdom and in years, and in divine and human favor.*" When Jesus was 30 years old he was baptized and began his public ministry. After three years he was put to death. Then he rose from the dead and that resurrection transformed his followers and began the world wide ministry of the church.

Two stories. Both about children. Both about a treasured birth and then growth. Each child grew closer and closer to God which led to a life of service.

Two stories and now a third. The third story is your story. You, too, are a gift from God. Regardless of the circumstances of your birth, you are a special creation of God. But you are no longer an infant; you have grown.

Are you growing as Samuel and Jesus grew? Are you growing both physically and in favor with the Lord and with people? Are you increasing in wisdom as well as in years? Are you growing closer and closer to God and serving God with your life?

We just celebrated Christmas. Christmas, though, is not over when the last present is opened. A child is born, but the child doesn't stay an infant. The child is to grow in divine and human favor and serve the great and awesome God. So it was for Samuel. So it was for Jesus. And that is God's plan for you and me.

What does it mean to grow in divine and human favor? The reading today from Colossians tells us. Clothe yourself with compassion, kindness, humility, meekness, patience and love. These are the qualities God wants to form in us. Bear with one another and forgive each other. That, too, is what God wants. Let the peace of Christ rule in your hearts and be thankful. The closer we grow to God, the greater the peace in our hearts and more thankful we are. Let the word of Christ dwell in you richly. This is how we increase in wisdom. We cannot grow without the word of Christ dwelling in us. Sing psalms, hymns, and spiritual songs to God. And whatever you do, in word or deed, do everything in the name of the Lord Jesus. As we grow, we can't help but worship and serve God.

It is not easy to grow as God desires, but God has promised to help us. In fact, God gives to us the Holy Spirit to help us to grow and become all that God intends us to be. As we listen to the Lord and allow the Holy Spirit to work in our lives, we experience the growth God desires.

Christmas is not an end in itself. Christmas is intended to lead to a life of growth and service. So, where will where Christmas lead you this year? What will be the story of your life in 2010? Will you grow in divine and human favor and serve the Lord your God? I pray that I will, and that is my prayer for you as well.