

Jesus, Word, and Sacraments

Luke 2:40-52 ⁴⁰ And the Child grew and became strong in spirit, filled with wisdom; and the grace of God was upon Him. ⁴¹ His parents went to Jerusalem every year at the Feast of the Passover. ⁴² And when He was twelve years old, they went up to Jerusalem according to the custom of the feast. ⁴³ When they had finished the days, as they returned, the Boy Jesus lingered behind in Jerusalem. And Joseph and His mother did not know *it*; ⁴⁴ but supposing Him to have been in the company, they went a day's journey, and sought Him among *their* relatives and acquaintances. ⁴⁵ So when they did not find Him, they returned to Jerusalem, seeking Him. ⁴⁶ Now so it was *that* after three days they found Him in the temple, sitting in the midst of the teachers, both listening to them and asking them questions. ⁴⁷ And all who heard Him were astonished at His understanding and answers. ⁴⁸ So when they saw Him, they were amazed; and His mother said to Him, "Son, why have You done this to us? Look, Your father and I have sought You anxiously." ⁴⁹ And He said to them, "Why did you seek Me? Did you not know that I must be about My Father's business?" ⁵⁰ But they did not understand the statement which He spoke to them. ⁵¹ Then He went down with them and came to Nazareth, and was subject to them, but His mother kept all these things in her heart. ⁵² And Jesus increased in wisdom and stature, and in favor with God and men.

How do we begin a new year? The answer is always with Jesus. He is our Immanuel. The God who is with us and because He is with us we can be confident of another year filled with His blessings and forgiveness.

How do we grow in spirit and in strength in the year to come? Through word, sacrament, and prayer. Jesus comes to us in word and sacrament and through these we grow in His grace and in strength of faith.

If you ask your doctor, what can I do to have a healthier year, to feel better and grow stronger? No doubt he will tell you to eat more vegetables, exercise more and avoid sugary drinks. But these are things that must be done day after day. Little by little. One day of healthy eating, or one day of running isn't going to change much. Yet if you stick to it day after day slowly gradually you will grow in strength and in health, bodily.

Yet our text is not talking about Jesus being strengthened in the body, but about Jesus being strengthened in the Spirit. Vegetables and exercise are for the body, but word, sacrament and prayer is for the spirit.

Paul reminded the young pastor Timothy:

1 Timothy 4:8 ⁸ For bodily exercise profits a little, but godliness is profitable for all things, having promise of the life that now is and of that which is to come.

Luke 2:40 ⁴⁰ And the Child grew and became strong in spirit, filled with wisdom; and the grace of God was upon Him.

When the scriptures say that Jesus “become strong in the spirit” this is an imperfect verb. That means that it is not a simple sudden thing but a gradual drawn out action. He grew stronger day after day little by little in the Spirit.

We sometimes get the mistaken idea that being filled with the Spirit is a sudden life changing event. One day the Spirit comes upon you and suddenly you’re a new man.

There are indeed times in scripture when the Spirit fills men in a sudden and powerful way. For example, at Pentecost, when the Spirit filled the apostles and they started speaking “the wonderful works of God” in languages they have never learned. Another example is when Moses anoints the 70 elders and the Holy Spirit comes upon them and they begin to prophesying. But such events are momentary. In all such events the Spirit comes upon men for a very limited time for a very limited purpose. There is an important need and to meet that immediate need the Holy Spirit does something miraculous, but it does not last.

On the other hand, there are those whom the Scripture describe as being filled with the Holy Spirit in their daily lives. This is a very different thing.

In Acts 6:4 Stephen is called “a man full of faith and the Holy Spirit.” In this case we do not have a momentary miraculous outpouring of the Holy Spirit, rather we have a man who has dedicated himself to daily making use of the word, the sacraments and prayer. And through this daily exercise has become strong in the Spirit. So also, Barnabas in Acts 11:24 is called a man “full of the Holy Spirit and of faith.”

Even Solomon from out Old Testament reading was given a gift of wisdom from the Lord. But he grew in that gift when he walked daily in word, sacrament and prayer. When he did not he failed in his wisdom as he himself confesses.

“the fear of the Lord is the beginning of wisdom.”

Receiving a miraculous outpouring of the Holy Spirit is certainly a wonderful gift, but better to grow strong in those gifts the Lord has given to us by daily use of word, sacrament, and prayer.

Our text in Luke speaks of Jesus as a human and according to His human nature. What was done here was not done with miraculous powers. He did not use His omniscience to astound the teachers. But because He dedicated himself to word, sacrament and prayer He grow strong in the Spirit and in wisdom of the scriptures.

Luke emphasizes that Jesus made use of the “sacraments” gladly. Every year His parents went up for the Passover, and as soon as Jesus was old enough He gladly went to Jerusalem as well. The Passover was not a “sacrament” as we define the word. However the Passover and all the sacrifices did serve much the same function for the Israelites as the Lord’s supper does for us. God gave many promises of grace and every blessing through these rituals. Jesus did not look at the Passover and sacrifices and think these are empty rituals which accomplish nothing. Rather he knew that God’s grace was promised through them. So that even though they were rituals which in and of themselves accomplished nothing,

nevertheless because God had given his promises God's grace was given through them. Jesus did not avoid these things but even when He was older eagerly went every year to Jerusalem for the Passover knowing that through it he was strengthened by God's grace.

Luke emphasizes also that Jesus dug into the word.

Luke 2:46 both listening to them and asking them questions.

First, He listened to the word of God.

There is a scene in Pirates of the Caribbean where two pirates are sitting in a rowboat and one is "reading" the bible. The other says to him, "you know you can't read." To which the first responds, "it's the bible you get credit just for trying."

Unfortunately, we too often approach God's word in that same way. Thinking we get credit if just sit through church regardless of if we are listening to God's word.

Jesus didn't do that. He listened seeking to learn and grow. And you can tell He was really listening because He responded with questions, seeking understanding.

This is the only thing we know about Jesus. We do not know anything about what diet He ate, or what games He played, or how much exercise He got. We do know that He dedicated himself to word, sacrament and prayer and grew strong in the Spirit.

He did this for us.

When his parents asked him why He was here in the temple. Jesus responds, "I must be about my Father's business." We often fail to fulfill the will of the Father, but Jesus always put it first in His life. He accomplished in our place what we did not do, so that we who have sinned might receive grace through Him who took our place.

Where else would Jesus be other than working towards the fulfillment of our salvation, that we might receive grace through Him?

1 John 4:9 By this the love of God was manifested in us, that God has sent His only begotten Son into the world so that we might live through Him.

Therefore, we begin a new year in Jesus for by Him we are redeemed. Yet if we would not simply make it through this year but have it be a year filled with the grace of God and the strength of the Spirit let us pray that God would lead us to dedicate ourselves to the word, the sacraments for it is through the daily use of these things that God would strengthen us to be people of "faith and filled with the Holy Spirit."

Amen