

## Waiting in Silence

Isaiah 9:2-3, 6-7

Luke 2:22-35, 39-40

Here we are, Christmas Sunday. It seems like Christmas was long-ago, doesn't it?

Epiphany is right around the corner, but for the moment, we are caught "in-between". The celebrating is all done, and things are getting back to normal, well, sort of. This is an unusually quiet time in the year.

Today's Gospel reading tells us all we know about Jesus as a child. We have a few landmarks; the visit of the Magi, the infant Jesus being taken to the temple, and the boy Jesus going to the Passover festival in Jerusalem. That's about it. The next thing we know is the appearance of John the Baptist and then the full-grown Jesus appears on stage. It's almost as if Jesus went from boy to man in a heartbeat.

Of course, that's not what happened; however, we really don't know what DID happen. "The child grew and became strong" is hardly a full life history! Just like our calendar, our Christ story grows unusually quiet about now.

I can't help but wonder what happened in the silence of those years: Jesus playing tag in the streets of Nazareth? Jesus complaining to Mary about the evening meal? Jesus running so hard that he runs out of breath? Or falls and skins a knee or maybe tearing up when His girlfriend broke up with Him?

We have a hard time accepting the child and adolescent Jesus, don't we? The Babe is easy and beautiful and wonderful. The Man is awesome and powerful and overwhelming. But the child? The boy?

What happened in those silent years? This is God in human flesh we are discussing; however, it is also Jesus, the growing boy, needing everything that we need.

Like a mother to dress him and bathe him and put him to bed. Someone to watch over him to see he was dressed properly for the heat or the cold.

Can you see God as one of us, living with a human father? A father who scolded him, taught him the skills of a craftsman? Can you imagine him grieving his father's death and then being exhausted by running the business and supporting the family by himself? For his mother and younger siblings?

All of this and more happened during the 30 years between chapter 2 and 3 in Luke's Gospel.

Those silent years have much to say about how God works. They say that God has embraced and made holy every moment of ordinary, everyday life. Please mark that down, that's probably the most important thing I have to say to you today: God has embraced and made holy every moment of ordinary, everyday life.

What, then, about the silent years? They mean that God has sanctified washing the dishes, taking out the garbage, doing school homework – and, perhaps, even struggling to balance the family accounts.

More importantly, these silent years say that God spent the majority of time on earth finding out what it's like to be an ordinary human being. This is one of the most theologically important concepts we can share. God spent time, a full lifetime, learning what it means to be fully human. Fully "us".

There's a message there for us who live in this quick-fix, immediate-results, instant-computer kind of world, a message we should keep in mind this week as we are tempted to make big resolutions to change our of habits and lives.

These silent years in between the promise and the fruition say that God takes time before acting. God's movements in human history are rarely sudden. God does not create change overnight, and God rarely changes people that quickly either.

Salvation is never a quick fix, a dumbed-down liturgy, a simplistic reading of Scripture. Growth and maturity come in our spiritual life even as they do in our everyday life...with time, intentionality, attention.

Behind the silence is the sound of silence, God slowly growing within the silence. The promise of this Christmas Sunday, as we look forward to a new calendar year, is that God will be present to us in our silent times, slowly growing until Christ fills in all our gaps.

I suspect THAT is the gift of these days of silence; a reminder that God takes time to create His will. Time written in months, years, decades and millennia.

This is not the quick fix of a New Year's resolution, nor the easy change of "snap-your-fingers-and-it's-done." This is about the long, slow, real change that God brought to the world, and a reminder to us of the change that we can bring to our lives.

But it all starts...waiting in silence.