

CHRISTMAS 1 29.12.2024 All Souls' **BUDDING ON THE VINE** dtw

Luke 2.52 And Jesus increased in wisdom and in years, and in divine and human favour.

On this first Sunday after Christmas, while many people are travelling all over our wide brown land on holidays, some with caravans or boats or trailers packed with tents and fishing gear, our church calendar takes us most fittingly to the movements of the Holy Family, Joseph, Mary and Jesus. I just love the story, unique to Luke's Gospel, of their journey to Jerusalem and back when Jesus was 12. It is so domestic and so familiar; a sort of biblical equivalent to 'Home Alone'. When we're so excited or perhaps, just out of the normal routine, or out of our comfort zone, such as when we're packing for holidays, or leaving for home again, some of the most obvious things can be overlooked. There is a simple script repeated in many a vehicle that goes like this, "Oh, heavens, you know what we've forgotten?" And a recent TV commercial has preoccupied parents leaving the 12-year-old behind with his fishing rod – twice! – a lovely twist on today's story.

You just hope that you have such an awakening sooner than later, especially if it is something indispensable to the trip. In the case of Mary and Joseph, Jesus was certainly indispensable, but they had gone a whole day's journey back to Nazareth before they discovered that junior was missing. Now, according to my maths, it was 5 days all up before they laid their eyes on the boy. (Steve Daughtry, in his wonderful book *Caravan*, calls him the brat!) A day back to Jerusalem makes two, and then the scripture records, 'After 3 days they found him in the temple, sitting among the teachers, listening to them and asking questions'. By this time, they are obviously out of their brains with worry. And I'm quite sure that Luke's version of their words to Jesus is highly censored! I've only got to think back to when I was the same age; the onset of puberty, my first attempts at being adult, trying my first cigarette, wagging school just to rebel against Mrs Lux: I remember more names of teachers I didn't like than the ones I did. Well, Jesus was hanging out in the Temple and cigarettes hadn't been invented, which meant that the punishment wouldn't have been as severe as mine! Not that I didn't like Church; on the contrary, at 12 I was a churchaholic and I guess I've never looked back. Meanwhile, like Jesus, I learned obedience.

My mum and dad, just like Mary and Joseph with Jesus, simply immersed me in the Temple culture. The context of Luke's account, while only

mentioning Passover, is almost certainly Jesus' Bar Mitzvah, the Jewish equivalent of Confirmation. Jesus was obviously so intrigued with his faith that this Rabbi-in-waiting wanted to get as much information as he could. Me, I was a server at the age of eight at St Mary's West Perth, confirmed at the age of 10 and training other servers at the age of 12. But hey, I learned most of it from my dad, a staunch Anglo-Catholic who went to church twice on a Sunday and on every Saints' Day and we all had to be there too or else. But it wasn't hard for me; I loved it. As they say, 'mothers' milk'.

Now, I have my own children and they're adults, and two beautiful granddaughters. Like Mary and Joseph and like my own parents, Deborah and I have given their upbringing our best shot. They don't hand out manuals on how to be a good parent or grandparent and I'm conscious of more than one or two difficult turns along the road. But I'm more conscious of the privilege and joy of being a parent who has made with Deborah the best contribution we could to our children's formation. We will always be there for them too, in good times and bad, For the rest, we have to lean on faith, trust and the guiding hand of God. Like Jesus, every child eventually leaves the carpenter's shop.

I conclude with a reflection, one of my wine poems:

BUDDING ON THE VINE

*We have had the joy of seeing three children budding from the womb
each one so different, each opening to God's sun in unexpected ways*

We marvel at what fruit they will bear

*But the real fruit is what is so complex, so intense, rich and unique about
their characters
and we could only plan a little bit of that*

*Ultimately, it is the divine crafting that will reveal their different styles,
approachability and potential through life*

*But at least we like to think that through the grafting of our married love,
we've given them some careful nurture, pruning and watering along the way*

The rest is up to the Real Winemaker