

## Ask Fr. James

### What do we know about Jesus' childhood days before his public ministry?

The questions about the childhood and youthful days of Jesus has always been a very interesting issue theologically. Scholars have long debated the events of Jesus' childhood. The biblical accounts offer few details of his life before age 30. The scholars who asked this question wondered if Jesus really had two natures, divine and human, would this mean that he was both a divine and human child? And if a divine child, was he a real child? Would he have experienced the whims, narcissism, petulance, and bouts of anger that children are subject to? And if he is simultaneously fully divine, would that not be, to say the least, somewhat dangerous for his playmates and for the adults around him?

In the Gospels, there is only one reference (Luke 2:40-52) to Jesus as a boy before the age of twelve. That was his famous visit to the temple. Many people have interpreted this story to mean that his parents, Mary and Joseph were grappling with the adolescent years of a most unusual child. They say that Jesus, a soon to be a teenager, a young gifted boy is growing up and beginning to assert his independence against his parents and so didn't want to be seen walking his parents and so chose to stay back in Jerusalem.

When his parents finally found him, Jesus was sitting with the teachers in Jerusalem listening and asking questions. Those listening to him, including his parents, were filled with admiration and astonishment. But this didn't hold Mary back from her rebuke. "Child, why have you treated us like this?" And Jesus' answer actually was like that of a typical teenager; "Why did you seek me? Did you not know that I must be about my Father's business?"

Just like us today, the early Christians in the first and second centuries were interested in Jesus' youthful days out of mere curiosity. As they encountered a lack of information about the early years of Jesus' life they decided to fill in the gaps with several literary constructions of myths and legends drawn from apocryphal gospels, especially *the Infancy Gospel of Thomas*. Some of these legends talks about the schooldays of a young unusual esoteric kid-Jesus who healed a man's axe wound, raised his neighborhood playmates from the dead, and healed his brother's viper bite. They also recorded other bizarre stories of him as an enfant terrible, for instance, that Jesus diverted water from a stream in order to create a pool in which to play and that when another boy interrupts Jesus' fun by dispersing the pool with a willow branch, Jesus becomes enraged struck him dead and later raised him back to life.

All we know from scripture about his early childhood and youthful days is that after Jesus returned with his parents to Nazareth, "the child grew and was filled with wisdom" (Luke 2: 40). Then he left Nazareth for the city of Capernaum and sometimes later, Jesus went back to visit Nazareth where he had been brought up. And as was his custom, he went to the synagogue on the Sabbath day (Luke 14:16).

*You may email/send your faith questions to Fr. James and he will answer them in our Sunday Bulletins.*