

§ 017

THE CHILDHOOD OF JESUS AT NAZARETH

⁴⁰ *And the child grew and became strong, filled with wisdom. And the favor of God was upon him.*¹

Luke 2:40

Introduction

1. In comparison to the account of John the Baptist's growth in Luke 1:80, which contains a twofold description ("grew and became strong in spirit"), this verse gives a fourfold description of Jesus ("grew and became strong; he was filled with wisdom, and the grace of God was upon him").
 - This again shows that Jesus was greater than John.
2. Instead of a reference to Jesus' becoming strong in spirit, Luke made mention of Jesus as full of "wisdom."
3. This prepares us for the following account, where Jesus' wisdom is displayed (cf. Luke 2:46–47, 52; cf. also 4:22; Acts 6:3) and perhaps highlights the Spirit's coming upon Jesus at his baptism (Luke 3:21–22). Compare 1 Sam 2:21, 26; 3:19.²

Commentary

1. *The child grew.* Luke is fond of summary statements that allow both for the passage of time in the story with minimal representation and commentary, and for brief evaluative comments on his part.
 - His chief concern is Jesus as an adult, but as with contemporary Jewish and Greco-Roman literature, he relates that the child already possessed the qualities that will make him extraordinary in later life.³

¹ *The Holy Bible: English standard version*. 2001 (Lk 2:40). Wheaton: Standard Bible Society.

² Stein, R.H. (2001, ©1992). *Vol. 24: Luke* (electronic ed.). Logos Library System; The New American Commentary (118). Nashville: Broadman & Holman Publishers.

³ Green, J.B. (1997). *The Gospel of Luke*. The New International Commentary on the New Testament (154). Grand Rapids, MI: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co.

2. With this note, the story of Jesus' infancy ends.
 - The narrative picks up in verse 41 some twelve years later.
 - These two verses reveal the growth of Jesus' human nature, whereas in the divine nature He was unchanging and infinite.
 - Christians must balance both these natures when speaking of the Lord Jesus.
 - Failure to do this has resulted in many unbiblical traditions about the boyhood of Jesus.⁴

3. In this short verse the history of _____⁵ of the life of Jesus is told.⁶

4. *The child grew and became strong.* As a true human Child He passed through a process of physical and spiritual growth and increase.
 - This verse expressly tells us that the intellectual, moral and spiritual growth of Jesus as a Child was just as real as His physical growth.
 - He was completely subject to the ordinary laws of physical and intellectual development, except that in His case there was nothing of the influence of sin or shortcoming.
 - Physically and spiritually He grew up perfectly as no one before or after Him.

5. He was truly Man, but a perfect Man, even in childhood.
 - "His was a perfect humanity developing perfectly, unimpeded by hereditary or acquired defects. It was the first instance of such a growth in history. For the first time a human infant was realising the ideal of humanity." (Plummer, *in loc.*)⁷
 - His physical and spiritual development was the most beautiful of all time, because it was perfect.

⁴ Radmacher, E.D., Allen, R.B., & House, H.W. (1999). *Nelson's new illustrated Bible commentary* (Lk 2:40). Nashville: T. Nelson Publishers.

⁵ **twelve years**

⁶ This brief report has precedent in Israel's Scriptures—for example, Gen 21:8, 20; Judg 13:24; 1 Sam 2:21, 26. Echoing these earlier, sacred texts, Luke's statement draws on their capacity to communicate the progression of the story under God's care and within his purpose. Luke's summary also echoes the similar report concerning John in 1:80 and anticipates the summaries of the growth of the Christian movement in Acts. (Cf., e.g., Acts 2:41, 47; 4:4; 5:14; 6:1, 7; 9:31; 11:21–24; 15:5; Laurentin, *Truth of Christmas*, 473n.7.) The effect is the same, to tell of the advancement of God's aim toward its consummation. [Green, *The Gospel of Luke*.]

⁷ Plummer, A. *A Critical and Exegetical Commentary on the Gospel According to St. Luke* (5th ed., I.C.C., T. & T. Clark, 1922)

6. Only later on, when He appeared in public and had to walk upon the *via dolorosa*, the path of sorrows, did that which was prophesied concerning Him in Isaiah 53:3 begin to be fulfilled.
 - And through all the years of growth and increase in true wisdom the grace of God, His guiding, protecting and supporting love and power, rested upon the Child.
 - There was no partition-wall between Him and God, because He was perfect in all things.

7. Simeon uses exceptionally striking words where he declares to Mary: “Behold, this child is set for the fall and rising again of many in Israel; and for a sign which shall be spoken against; yea, a sword shall pierce through thy own soul, that the thoughts of many hearts may be revealed.”

8. Jesus is the Inescapable One—sooner or later everyone *must* take up a position with regard to Him and must choose for or against Him.
 - A man’s attitude towards Him reveals and defines the real quality of his character.
 - It is not an outward “doing good” or a “good life” that counts before God and reveals the deepest inclination and character of a man; what really matters is his attitude towards Christ.
 - On this, and on this alone, the eternal weal or woe of everyone depends.
 - He who in his pride of self-satisfaction despises Christ thereby dooms himself to everlasting ruin.
 - But he who humbles himself under His mighty arm is raised up by Him to everlasting salvation.⁸

9. *Filled with wisdom. And the favor of God was upon him.* Of special interest is Jesus’ wisdom and a certification of God’s valuative point of view vis-à-vis the child.
 - Both qualities will come to the fore in the following story, which may be understood as an illustration of these features.⁹

Conclusion

⁸ Geldenhuys, N. (1977). *Commentary on the Gospel of Luke: The English Text with Introduction, Exposition and Notes*. The New International Commentary on the Old and New Testament (122). Grand Rapids, MI: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co.

⁹ Green, J.B. (1997). *The Gospel of Luke*. The New International Commentary on the New Testament (154). Grand Rapids, MI: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co.

We naturally compare what Luke says about the child with what he states about John in 1:80 and note both the similar bodily and mental growth and the difference in what is added about wisdom and God's grace being upon Jesus. The verbs are imperfect and denote continuance, and this includes also the participle. We refer ἠϋξανε to physical growth and ἐκραταιοῦτο to mental and spiritual increase in strength, for it would be superfluous to add a second verb to tell of the physical development and to leave only a participle for the mental and spiritual growth. The Savior of the world, God's Son incarnate, grew up physically in the most normal way with nothing to mar his bodily development. He grew mentally in the same way and attained more and more strength of mind, understanding, and reason. But a modifier is necessary here (in 1:80 it is πνεύματι in the case of John) lest we think only of mere intellectual strength: "by being filled with wisdom," the participle modifying the verb and its subject. The participle is passive (not middle, R.V. margin) and durative and describes the process of filling. The young lad attained more and more wisdom, σοφία (the genitive after a verb of filling) in the Biblical sense as the right knowledge of God and his salvation coupled with its application to life. In the case of Jesus this included the realization of his own relation to God in connection with the saving thoughts of God. A clear view of this wisdom of Jesus flashes out in v. 49.

It is impossible for us to penetrate the mystery of this development in Jesus—body and soul untouched by sin, unchecked and unretarded by any result of sin, his mind and his soul absorbing the wisdom of God's Word as a bud drinks in the sunshine and expands. His mind and his soul, which were truly human indeed, grew in strength and in the range of wisdom but in perfection and in power beyond anything that is possible to sinful mortals. His development was absolutely normal, that of all others is to a great degree abnormal. We see his mind and his soul in full action during his ministry, a mind and a soul that are vastly beyond those of mere man. He sees through every error and deception, all truth is his glorious possession, he is master of every situation. This came to him by degrees, but every degree of the growth was perfect.

When Luke adds that God's grace was upon the child (αὐτό instead of τὸ παιδίον) he aims to say that this was evident from the way in which the child developed. The word χάρις is used in the wider sense of God's favor, not in the narrower sense of undeserved favor for sinners. As a man Jesus was under God and dependent upon him for all things just as we are; but because he was sinless, God's favor never turned from him to discipline and chastise him. From his childhood onward he lived in the undimmed sunshine of God's blessed favor.¹⁰

¹⁰ Lenski, R.C.H. (1961). *The Interpretation of St. Luke's Gospel* (159). Minneapolis, MN: Augsburg Publishing House.