

## October 23 Adult Spiritual Growth Class Synopsis

### ***Let There Be Light: A Study of FPC Stained-Glass Windows – Jesus as a boy in the temple***

First Presbyterian Church has been blessed with parishioner memorial gifts of 15 beautiful stained-glass windows over the years, as summarized in the wonderful guide put together by Virginia Wiley in 1990, as part of the 175 year anniversary celebration of the church. The window of focus is Jesus as a boy in the temple, located in the left middle side of the sanctuary facing the chancel and framed in the upper medallion.

Collectively, we see the beauty of the story of Luke 2:41-52, pictorially characterized with Joseph and Mary, who has found their young boy of 12 years of age, sitting among the religious leaders in the temple, who are impressed with His questions, understanding and answers. Jesus, with a glowing nimbus around His head, is clothed in a red tunic, embodying His divinity and His blood, a complete and perfect sacrifice for our sins. As in the nativity window, Joseph's cloak and cowl are brown in color, representing his faithful humility and sincerity to God and Mary. Mary's cloak and cowl are blue in color, signifying her hope, sincerity, and piety as a bond-servant of God. Four religious leaders are clothed in green and blue tunics, signifying faith, contemplation, and piety. Again, the upper medallion is framed in a circle, which symbolizes the everlasting life that God has given us in Christ Jesus through His birth, life, death, resurrection, and ascension. On top of the circle frame rests an angel, robed in blue/violet on a half shell, who is God's messenger of the Good News of God's sacrificial love, saving grace, lasting truth, and presence throughout our life's faith journey.

In Luke 2, Jesus' birth narrative is concluded. The young Jesus became strong and filled with heavenly wisdom, benefiting from his faithful and religiously observant upbringing of his parents in Nazareth. When he was eight days old, Joseph and Mary had him circumcised and formally gave him the name assigned by Gabriel (Luke 1). When he was forty days old, he was dedicated in the temple as the Law of Moses dictated where Mary and Joseph brought their baby boy to Jerusalem for the rite of purification.

While they are in the temple courts, they have two separate encounters with older, prayerful saints, Simeon and Anna, who have been watching and longing for the consolation of Israel and fully knowing who Jesus is. For Simeon (Luke 2:22-35), the Holy Spirit had spoken to him that he would not die before he had seen the Messiah. On that day the Holy Spirit told him to go to the temple and nudged him toward this poor family. He takes the baby Jesus in his arms and prays, "Lord, now let your servant depart in peace, for my eyes have seen your salvation." He speaks a prophesy over Jesus and his mother.

Anna, an 84 year old widow, who dedicated her life to prayer and the Lord's service after losing her husband of seven years, lived in the temple courts, praying, and fasting for the redemption of Israel. She approaches Mary and Joseph and rejoices that God's redemption had come in their son Jesus. (Luke 2:36-38)

Mary and Joseph, as faithful Jews, make sure to fulfill their duties as parents toward their son Jesus, who is now 12 years old. They need to introduce Jesus to the Passover in Jerusalem. According to the Jewish tradition at that time, Joseph is obligated to teach Jesus the Torah. The rabbis agreed that a boy can start learning the Torah no later than puberty, which is about age twelve. Jerusalem was packed with Jewish worshipers from all over the world to celebrate the Passover. Usually, this celebration covers about one week. The Jews also traveled in groups to avoid danger on the road, such as thieves. The entire group had to watch over each other — particularly the children. Mary and Joseph had

relatives and friends in Jerusalem. They might stay with them during the festival week. At the end of the celebration, Mary and Joseph started to return home. They went a day's journey without checking on their son assuming he was in the group of travelers. It was then that they realized that they had accidentally left their son and returned to Jerusalem, arriving the next day to find Jesus in the temple.

*"But why did you need to search?" Jesus asked. "Didn't you know that I must be in my Father's house?" But they didn't understand what he meant. Then he returned to Nazareth with them and was obedient to them. And his mother stored all these things in her heart. Jesus grew in wisdom and in stature and in favor with God and all the people. (Luke 2:49-52)*

Of particular interest in Luke's account is that Mary and Joseph did not understand what Jesus meant when he said that he was in his Father's house, doing his Father's business as in the literal translation. From an adaptation of A. Edersheim's work<sup>1</sup> on the subject, our perspective 2000 years later may find this puzzling. After all, both Mary and Joseph had angelic encounters announcing Jesus' birth—not to mention the miraculous conception itself of a child to a virgin. Yet, when the shepherds told Mary what the angels said (Luke 2:8-20), she pondered this announcement as if not completely understanding.

Given the events surrounding His birth, Mary and Joseph might be expected to have fully known His divine nature as the Son of God. However, Jesus's mission on earth required that all events be fulfilled exactly as we have them. This includes His submission to a fully human life.

Had Mary known the complete mission from the beginning—that He was fully God and fully man—the human side could never have been fulfilled. The thought of His divinity would have been too all-consuming. The human bond shared between Jesus and His family and disciples may not have been possible if they had known they spoke with God. Christ humbled Himself to live as we do (Hebrews 4:15), something that would have been impossible if all had been known from the beginning.

Beyond this, the gradual revelation of Jesus's mission also provided important instruction to those closest to Him. Just as the disciples came to understand whom they followed, Mary realized day by day, revelation by revelation, that she had indeed given birth to the Son of the living God. The lessons had all the greater impact being understood gradually than they would have if given all at once. With each revealing event, Mary is said to have pondered and stored all these things in her heart.

This gradual revelation of who God is to us through Christ Jesus and His Holy Spirit in our day to day faith walk is no different in many respects than that exhibited by Mary and is consistent with how God reveals Himself through the Old and New Testaments. P. Miller writes on his understanding of the doctrine of progressive revelation<sup>2</sup>: "At each stage in redemptive history, the things that God had revealed were for his people for that time, and they were to study, believe, and obey those things. With further progress in the history of redemption, more of God's words were added, recording and interpreting that history."

In the scriptural revelation, God was referred to as "our Father" 13 times in the Old Testament. From Jesus' first reference to God as His Father in the temple story to His frequent use of this name throughout His ministry, Jesus brought a magnified and full understanding of our relationship with God. Jesus referred to God as His Father over 150 times, even calling Him "Abba" or "Daddy", and He spoke of God as being our Father 30 times.

We know that God is unchanging but his revelation of Himself to His people happens over time. *I am the Lord I change not (Malachi 3:6) Jesus Christ is the same yesterday, today, and forever (Hebrews 13:8)* In times past, before the canon of Scripture was complete, God did not provide his people with

all the revelation we have of him today. For example, before the Incarnation, God did not reveal the person of Jesus, the nature of the Trinity, the distinction between the first and second comings of the Messiah, or the exact means of the Atonement. Those pieces of revelation came later. This, then, is the picture of His Fatherhood that God wanted His people to have during that moment in redemptive history. As their Father, He had special tender mercy for them, but He also expected honor and obedience from them. The people of God are welcomed to approach their God not only as creator, lawgiver, and judge, but as Father - a relationship that is personal, affectionate, and promised.

The prophet Isaiah writes of God: *But you are our Father, though Abraham does not know us or Israel acknowledge us; you, LORD, are our Father, our Redeemer from of old is your name. (Isaiah 63:16)*

Miller writes that the passages that describe God as Father in the Old Testament seem to serve three purposes: 1) emphasize God's compassion and tenderness toward his people, 2) emphasize God's authority and the rightfulness of his judgment against his disobedient children and 3) point to the Messiah.

*Deuteronomy 1:31 - The Lord your God carried you, as a man carries his child, all the way that you went until you came to this place.*

*Psalms 103-13-14 As a father shows compassion to his children, so the LORD shows compassion to those who fear him. For he knows our frame; he remembers that we are dust.*

*Proverbs 3:11-12 My son, do not despise the LORD's discipline or be weary of his reproof, for the LORD reproves him whom he loves, as a father the son in whom he delights.*

*Isaiah 9:6 For a child is born to us, a son is given to us. The government will rest on his shoulders. And he will be called: Wonderful Counselor, Mighty God, Everlasting Father, Prince of Peace.*

God continues to reveal Himself through His Son Jesus and the empowering presence of His Holy Spirit. The Apostle Paul writes in *2 Corinthians 4:6: For God, who said, "Let light shine out of darkness," made his light shine in our hearts to give us the light of the knowledge of God's glory displayed in the face of Christ.*

In this light, the temple story of Jesus doing His Father's business amongst the priests of that day takes on even newer and fuller understanding of God's redeeming plan that leads to Hebrews 4:14-16. *Therefore, since we have a great high priest who has ascended into heaven Jesus the Son of God, let us hold firmly to the faith we profess. For we do not have a high priest who is unable to empathize with our weaknesses, but we have one who has been tempted in every way, just as we are—yet he did not sin. Let us then approach God's throne of grace with confidence, so that we may receive mercy and find grace to help us in our time of need.*

A song to reflect and pray on:

[\(971\) The Father's House - Cory Asbury \(Lyrics\) - YouTube](#)

## Looking ahead – Sunday October 30

Second Window on Left Middle Side Facing Chancel (Lower Medallion) – John Knox, Founder of the Scottish Presbyterian Church and spiritual father of American Presbyterianism

<sup>1</sup> Alfred Eldership (March 7, 1825-March 16, 1889) was a Jewish convert to Christianity and a pastor and biblical scholar known especially for his book *The Life and Times of Jesus the Messiah* (1883). *Adapted from The Life and Times of Jesus the Messiah by Alfred Eldership (Book II, Chapter VII).*

<sup>2</sup> “God as Father: Seeing the same God in both Testaments”, Paul D. Miller, professor of the practice of international affairs at Georgetown University, a visiting professor with the American Enterprise Institute, and a research fellow with the Ethics and Religious Liberty Commission.