

## "CHRIST'S WHOLE LIFE IS MYSTERY"

Jerry Johnson

In speaking of the life of Christ, the Apostles Creed makes quite a jump from the incarnation "born of the virgin Mary" right into his passion "suffered under Pontius Pilate". The catechism touches briefly on what we can come to know and understand of Christ's life in between these very important events. What do we know of Jesus as he "grew and became strong, filled with wisdom...?" (Luke 2:40) Almost nothing is said of his hidden life in Nazareth and Scripture tells us that even much of his public life could not be written down. "There are also many other things that Jesus did, but if these were to be described individually, I do not think the whole world would contain the books that would be written." (John 21:25) Certainly it is important to examine and ponder the facts of Christ's life as we know them. After all, as paragraph 516 of the catechism tells us: "Christ's whole earthly life - his words and deeds, his silences and sufferings, indeed his manner of being and speaking - is Revelation of the Father." Jesus fully reveals God the Father to us. Even though this Revelation is complete, our understanding of it continues to unfold and develop in the life of the Church. As we seek this Revelation, we also see the path Christ took to redeem us. The poverty of his birth which enriches us; his submission and obedience which atones for our disobedience; his word that purifies us; his healing touch that bears our infirmities; his passion, death and resurrection that brings us eternal life. (CCC 517) This is the same path that he has laid out for us. As the Apostle John tells us "whoever claims to abide in Him ought to live just as he lived." (1 John 2:6) "He is the model of perfection which we are

called to emulate; "So be perfect, just as your heavenly Father is perfect". (Matt 5:48) But not on any power of our own! It is only by our mysterious union with Christ that He lives within us now all that He has lived. "yet I live, no longer I, but Christ lives in me..." (Gal 2:20)

This month we will look at the mysteries of Jesus' infancy and his hidden life in Nazareth and ask ourselves how these events affect our lives today. We'll begin with his *circumcision*, which would have occurred on the eighth day after his birth. This would be a sign of his incorporation into the people of the covenant. As a Jew, he would submit to the law and participate in the worship of Israel his entire life. This sign prefigures our Baptism by which we are incorporated into the Body of Christ. The *Epiphany* would follow as a manifestation of Jesus as the Messiah, the Savior of the world. As the Gentile Magi from the East come to adore the newborn king, the door is opened to all nations to join with the chosen people in seeking salvation from our God. The *presentation of Jesus in the temple*, named the "*encounter*" in the Byzantine tradition, brings to light who this child really is. By the power of the Holy Spirit, Simeon and Anna recognize Jesus as the "Messiah". As Simeon blesses the Holy Family, he foresees the pain and struggle in the life of Jesus and his mother. He speaks of the "fall and rising of many in Israel" and of the sword that will pierce Mary's soul. (Luke 2:33) Even as a child, Christ lives in the shadow of the cross. Do we see what Simeon saw? In the midst of our struggles can we unite ourselves even more closely to Jesus and his mother? After dying with Christ at our baptism, are we now rising with him as Simeon foretold?

Scripture then tells us of the *Holy Family's flight to Egypt and the murder of the innocents*. Here we see the evil that pursues Jesus his entire life. It seeks to force him away from his mission and destroy him. That same evil seeks to destroy our innocence and lead us away from a life with Christ and into the death that is sin. It will pursue us as long as we live. The journey or exodus of the Holy Family into the desert will play out many times in our own lives as well. It will be Jesus who will shield us from evil and finally bring us out and lead us to the promised land. Finally, we get a glimpse of the young boy Jesus as he is separated from his family and three days later is *found in the temple*, sitting among the teachers. "Did you not know that I must be in my Father's house?" (Luke 2:49) After this the Gospel tells us that He went back to Nazareth with Mary and Joseph "and was obedient to them... And Jesus increased in wisdom and stature, and in favor with God and man." (Luke 2:51,52) As Jesus lived a simple, working life in Nazareth, he grew in wisdom and stature through his obedience. This prepared him for his public life and ministry and ultimately for his passion and crucifixion. Our obedience to the Father will do the same. We will be strengthened for the trials of this life and will be prepared for the eternal life beyond our death! Next month we will examine the public life and ministry of Jesus and continue to ask ourselves the very central question: How are we to "live just as he lived"?

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## Catechism of the Catholic Church

520 In all of his life Jesus presents himself as our model. He is "the perfect man," who invites us to become his disciples and follow him. In humbling himself, he has given us an example to imitate, through his prayer he draws us to pray, and by his poverty he calls us to accept freely the privation and persecutions that may come our way.

521 Christ enables us to live in him all that he himself lived, and he lives it in us. "By his Incarnation, he, the Son of God, has in a certain way united himself with each man." We are called only to become one

with him, for he enables us as the members of his Body to share in what he lived for us in his flesh as our model:

"We must continue to accomplish in ourselves the stages of Jesus' life and his mysteries and often to beg him to perfect and realize them in us and in his whole Church. . . . For it is the plan of the Son of God to make us and the whole Church partake in his mysteries and to extend them to and continue them in us and in his whole Church. This is his plan for fulfilling his mysteries in us." (St. John Eudes)

## Sacred Scripture

"Jesus said to him, "Have I been with you so long, and yet you do not know me, Philip? He who has seen me has seen the Father; how can you say, 'Show us the Father?' 10 Do you not believe that I am in the Father and the Father in me?" (John 14:9)

"In this the love of God was made manifest among us, that God sent his only Son into the world, so that we might live through him." In this the love of God was made manifest among us, that God sent his only Son into the world, so that we might live through him. (1 John 4:9)

"For I have given you an example, that you also should do as I have done to you." (John 13:15)

"And at the end of eight days, when he was circumcised, he was called Jesus, the name given by the angel before he was conceived in the womb. And when the time came for their purification

according to the law of Moses, they brought him up to Jerusalem to present him to the Lord..." (Luke 2:21,22)



"In him also you were circumcised with a circumcision made without hands, by putting off the body of flesh in the circumcision of Christ; 12 and you were buried with him in baptism, in which you were also raised with him through faith in the working of God, who raised him from the dead." (Col 2:11,12)

"Now when they had departed, behold, an angel of the Lord appeared to Joseph in a dream and said, "Rise, take the child and his mother, and flee to Egypt, and remain there till I tell you; for Herod is about to search for the child, to destroy him." (Matt 2:13)

"For as by one man's disobedience many were made sinners, so by one man's obedience many will be made righteous." (Rom 5:19)

### Thoughtful Questions

1. Do I see Christ living his life in me?
2. Am I seeking a deeper communion with Christ through prayer, scripture and sacrament?
3. Is living a life of obedience to God my first priority?