

Views from the Pews - Mary's treasures

Growing up is a long and confusing process. We all need to discover who we really are, even if it takes a long time and many puzzles to work out a real and satisfying answer that fits all the facts. Children of wise and supportive parents can certainly help, but ultimately, we all have to do the job ourselves. Most youngsters are content to identify their place in society as the offspring who are part of a family or clan, whanau or iwi. Jesus had a whole different experience.

Presumably Mary must have told him about the events reported to have surrounded his birth. Luke tells us, not once but twice, how Mary never forgot what the angel Gabriel had told her months before (Luke 1:28-36), or what had been said about him when he was still a baby. Even the shepherds, still reeling from hearing the angels' message,

'... went with haste and found Mary and Joseph, and the child lying in the manger. ¹⁷ When they saw this, they made known what had been told them about this child; ¹⁸ and all who heard it were amazed at what the shepherds told them. But Mary treasured all these words and pondered them in her heart.' (Luke 2: 16-19)

Twelve years later, after Jesus had attended a Jerusalem festival with his family but missed returning home with them, it took his parents and friends three days of increasingly anxious searching before they found him 'in the temple, sitting among the teachers, listening to them and asking them questions. And all who heard him were amazed at his understanding and his answers'. (Luke 2.46-47).

Even though the astonishing truth was beginning to dawn on him, Jesus still went down with them and came to Nazareth, and was obedient to them. Year after year he worked patiently in the family carpentry shop, gradually coming to terms with the unthinkable. Luke says, again, that his mother treasured all these things in her heart.

These scenes vividly describe, in just a few simple words, how Jesus began to work out who he actually was. Like all Hebrew boys of his age, he was taught all the sacred prophecies of the First Testament concerning God's chosen one. But Jesus began to see a personal implication in those ancient writings. His response to his parents' rebuke in Luke 2:50 'I must be in my Father's house' implied no disrespect to Joseph, only a growing understanding of his real mission.

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