

was entertained. Putting together the accounts of the anointing of Jesus shortly before his death (Mt. 26:1-13; Mk. 14:3-9; Jno. 12:1-8), we gain a picture of a man, Simon, and his three children, Lazarus, Martha and Mary. We may surmise that their mother was dead, for in the incident recorded in Luke 10:38-42 Martha is in charge of the domestic arrangements, and we surmise also that they were young, else they would have been married.

It is good to see this household of young people, all faithful supporters of Jesus. It stands, presumably, as a testimony to how they had been brought up, but it is interesting to consider whether Judas was of the same family, for he is termed "Simon's son" in John 12:4. How sad it is for all concerned when one member of an otherwise faithful family goes astray from the Truth!

In the book of Acts we read of two households, rather than families, accepting the Truth, the first being that of Cornelius, which included relations and friends (10:24), and the second that of the Philippian jailor (16:32). Other households are mentioned in Paul's epistles, such as those of Aristobulus and Narcissus at Rome (Rom. 16:10,11), and that of Onesiphorus at Ephesus (2 Tim. 1:16). These households would have included children, both young and grown up, but servants as well.

In conclusion, we have a fine example of a child being brought up in the knowledge of

God's Word in Timothy, brought up in a religiously divided household, for his mother was a Jew and his father a Greek, and yet instructed in Scripture. We are told that "from a child" he knew "the holy scriptures" (2 Tim. 3:15), and this is attributable to the fact that both his mother Eunice and his grandmother Lois were women of "unfeigned faith", which Timothy learned to follow (1:5). Though having two parents equally committed to the Truth is the best environment for children to learn and accept the Truth, the example of Timothy shows that, if only one parent holds it, children can still be successfully taught to follow it.

### Conclusion

Broadly speaking, what we glean about families from the Old Testament histories does not make very happy reading (though there are exceptions), whereas the opposite is the case in the New Testament. This may be thought to reflect the failure of the old covenant and the benefits brought by the new. In particular, the widespread practice of polygamy by the leaders of Israel was disastrous for good family relations, being contrary to God's intentions at the beginning, though not forbidden by the Law of Moses, which sought to regulate what was widely practised at the time. How wise, then, that the New Testament consistently goes back to the original Divine intention of marriage as a relationship between one man and one woman for life!

## The Lord Jesus and his family

*Joseph and Mary would have provided a godly and happy home for the Lord Jesus to grow up in. However, because of Jesus' unique status as the Son of God, he and his family experienced trials the like of which have not been experienced by any other family. Nigel Bernard (Pembroke Dock, UK) discusses the human and Divine aspects of Jesus' upbringing, and the family relationships he would have experienced.*

**W**HAT WOULD a day in the life of the family of the young Jesus have been like? Joseph and Mary would have no doubt followed the command of the Law and ensured that the day was filled with talk about the Word of God from beginning to end: "and thou

shalt teach them diligently unto thy children, and shalt talk of them when thou sittest in thine house, and when thou walkest by the way, and when thou liest down, and when thou risest up" (Deut. 6:7).

### Spiritual development

Like any child, the Lord Jesus would have had plenty of questions. When at the age of twelve his parents found him in the temple, he was "both hearing them, and asking them questions" (Lk. 2:46). The temptation for young brethren who have some understanding of Scripture is to speak rather than listen. But the Lord Jesus, whether at home in Nazareth or in the temple in Jerusalem, was "swift to hear, slow

to speak" (Jas. 1:19). Of course, Joseph and Mary would have asked him questions too, to develop his understanding, and, like the "doctors", they would have been "astonished at his understanding and answers" (Lk. 2:47).

In addition to listening to Joseph and Mary, he would no doubt have read for himself from the Law; and, once he became an adult, he would regularly go to the synagogue and read from the Scriptures: "And he came to Nazareth, where he had been brought up: and, as his custom was, he went into the synagogue on the sabbath day, and stood up for to read" (4:16).

But, just as God spoke to Samuel (1 Sam. 3:4), so no doubt God also spoke directly to His Son. The Lord Jesus would often begin the day listening to God speaking to him, for "He wakeneth morning by morning, He wakeneth mine ear to hear as the learned" (Isa. 50:4). Indeed, it seems God spoke to him even as a baby: "But Thou art He That took me out of the womb: Thou didst make me hope [trust] when I was upon my mother's breasts" (Ps. 22:9).

All parents talk to their babies from birth. For brethren and sisters it is also important that the words they speak to their babies should include the Word of God. It is a good thing to begin reading or reciting verses from the Bible to a baby from the day it is born. There are several reasons for this. First, it must be very comforting for a baby to hear the sound and tone of the Word of God when it is spoken with understanding and feeling. Second, as a child begins to speak and understand, it relies on what it has previously been hearing. It will have been greatly helped if some of the words it has been hearing have been from God's Word. Third, some parents may feel embarrassed about having eventually to start speaking to their children in earnest about the Truth, particularly if they have put off this moment until teenage years. If they have been speaking to their children from the moment of birth about the Truth such problems will not arise.<sup>1</sup>

Luke states, "And the child grew, and waxed strong in spirit, filled with wisdom: and the grace of God was upon him" (2:40). The sense of "filled with wisdom" in the Greek is apparently that of 'being filled'. It was a process which was to continue to manhood, for Luke says later, "And Jesus increased in wisdom and stature, and in favour with God and man" (v. 52). His increasing wisdom was to become greater than Solomon's (11:31). At the transfiguration "his face did shine as the sun" (Mt. 17:2), and this was a manifesta-

tion of his wisdom, for "a man's wisdom maketh his face to shine" (Eccl. 8:1).

Perhaps mention in Luke 2:52 of the stature of the Lord Jesus relates partially to his natural height. However, it primarily concerns his spiritual height. As Paul shows, this spiritual height is based on knowledge: ". . . till we all come in the unity of the faith, and of the knowledge of the Son of God, unto a perfect man, unto the measure of the stature of the fulness of Christ" (Eph. 4:13). The home of Joseph and Mary would have provided a good setting for the Lord Jesus' knowledge to grow.

### Brothers and sisters

As the Lord Jesus grew up he acquired several younger half-brothers and -sisters. He had at least two sisters and four brothers, named James, Joses, Juda and Simon (Mk. 6:3). This would have made for a loud and bustling home.

How did the Lord Jesus get on with his half-brothers and sisters? No brother would have been more kind or loyal than Christ. However, it is written that, by the time he was in his thirties, "neither did his brethren believe in him" (Jno. 7:5). As the psalmist wrote, "I am become a stranger unto my brethren, and an alien unto my mother's children" (Ps. 69:8). But would Christ have spoken to his family when he was a child about the prophecies relating to himself? Joseph spoke about his dreams to his family (Gen. 37:5-11). Surely, likewise, Christ would have spoken to his family of how he would one day rule over them. This no doubt would have caused ill-feeling towards him, just as it had done to Joseph, whose brethren "hated him yet the more for his dreams, and for his words" (v. 8).

### Carpenter

Joseph was a carpenter (Mt. 13:55) and the Lord Jesus himself became a carpenter (Mk. 6:3). Working under the direction of Joseph would have

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1. Which translation should we use for our children? In the present writer's opinion we should use the most accurate version available from the outset. The Word of God is "powerful" (Heb. 4:12), but the poorer the translation the weaker will be the power of the Word on the child. Most ecclesias use the 1611 'Authorised Version', believing that, in the English language, it remains the most accurate translation. There is no reason why children cannot use this version too. If we want the best for our children, let's get them to use the best translation.

been a way in which he "was subject unto them" (Lk. 2:51). This humble obedience points forward to the end of the Millennium, when he will "be subject unto Him That put all things under him" (1 Cor. 15:28).

As the Lord Jesus helped Joseph with the heavy wood, he would have experienced the curse brought upon Adam and Eve: "In the sweat of thy face shalt thou eat bread" (Gen. 3:19). Yet the Lord Jesus had a greater work to do than carpentry. As he would later say, "My meat is to do the will of Him That sent me, and to finish His work" (Jno. 4:34). This work would also involve carrying wood, for it would culminate in his walking towards Golgotha "bearing his cross" (19:17). He would have been mindful from an early age of the cross he would later bear, and perhaps he would sometimes think of this as he worked with Joseph. Perhaps sometimes he would share a knowing look with Mary, for she had been told, "Yea, a sword shall pierce through thy own soul also" (Lk. 2:35).

#### **Wealth**

Carpentry would not have made the family of the Lord Jesus rich. However, he was personally rich, for as a young child he had been given "gold, and frankincense, and myrrh" (Mt. 2:11). This would have been a source of temptation to him, and perhaps a source of envy amongst his brothers and sisters. What did he do with this wealth? We can only assume that he followed his own advice: "go and sell that thou hast, and give to the poor, and thou shalt have treasure in heaven" (19:21). And so it was that, "though he was rich, yet for your sakes he became poor" (2 Cor. 8:9).

#### **The virgin birth**

As Christ grew up it was "supposed" that he was "the son of Joseph" (Lk. 3:23). Given that

Joseph and Mary were not married when he was conceived, the Lord Jesus, together with Joseph, Mary and their family, had to go through life with the rumours that he had been born of fornication: "Then said they [the Jews] to him, We be not born of fornication" (Jno. 8:41). How would Christ have dealt with this? He did not seek to falsify these claims in an argumentative or aggressive way. Instead, he sought quietly to show by his way of life that his Father was God, not Joseph.

To an extent this worked, for, at the very least, men questioned if such a man could be the son of Joseph: "And when he was come into his own country, he taught them in their synagogue, insomuch that they were astonished, and said, Whence hath this man this wisdom, and these mighty works? Is not this the carpenter's son? is not his mother called Mary? and his brethren, James, and Joses, and Simon, and Judas? And his sisters, are they not all with us? Whence then hath this man all these things?" (Mt. 13:54-56). However, most people did not really know him properly and therefore failed to realise his Father was God: "Then said they unto him, Where is thy Father? Jesus answered, Ye neither know me, nor my Father: if ye had known me, ye should have known my Father also" (Jno. 8:19).

#### **Conclusion**

The Apostle Paul wrote, "Children, obey your parents in all things: for this is well pleasing unto the Lord" (Col. 3:20). That the Lord Jesus had always been pleasing to his Father is shown by his own words: "And He That sent me is with me: the Father hath not left me alone; for I do always those things that please Him" (Jno. 8:29). From the very beginning of his life his Father had ensured he was not left "alone". Joseph, Mary and their family provided a healthy setting in which the Son of God "grew, and waxed strong in spirit".

### ***Jesus and his Father in the Gospel of John***

"As my Father hath taught me, I speak these things" (8:28).

"I speak that which I have seen with my Father" (8:38).

"All things that I have heard of my Father I have made known unto you" (15:15).

"I love the Father; and as the Father gave me commandment, even so I do" (14:31).

"I speak to the world those things which I have heard of Him" (8:26).

"I have not spoken of myself; but the Father Which sent me, He gave me a commandment, what I should say, and what I should speak. And I know that His commandment is life everlasting: whatsoever I speak therefore, even as the Father said unto me, so I speak" (12:49,50).

Compilation of verses taken from *The Pilgrimage of Jesus*, John Mitchell, p. 29