

Theme: Mary's ponderings (2 January 2022)

"Mary treasured all these words, and pondered them in her heart" verse 19

"Mary treasured all these things in her heart" verse 51

We have nearly finished relishing our annual feast of Christmas stories and music, celebrating the birth of a special child...

(Epiphany is later than usual this season: Lois will be reflecting on that part of the story next Sunday...)

But apart from the account of Anna, the 84 year old prophet in the Temple who recognised the baby as being special, there is no further comment about this baby -

Except for verse 40, that "the child grew and became strong, filled with wisdom; and the favour of God was upon him."

Then the story appears of him as a twelve year old going to Jerusalem for the Passover with his parents, and disappearing...

And we discover that he knew his Scriptures well enough to be able to have an informed conversation with the teachers in the Temple (the King James version calls them doctors... PHDs??). They were "astonished at his understanding and his answers."

{note the picture on the front of the OoS: the boy Jesus seems to be pointing to some verse on the scroll maybe?}

And Luke tells us:

"Mary treasured all these things in her heart" verse 51

A few weeks ago Jim commented that the Christmas stories do not appear in all four gospels: only in Matthew and Luke, and that Luke's writing is the most tuned in to a woman's perspective (my paraphrase perhaps....)

So my guess is that it was Mary who told Luke about that incident in the Temple...

However, what *were* the influences on Jesus in his childhood (so that he could be so informed, so noteworthy at the age of 12)?

In 2006, New Zealand author CK Stead published a novel “My name was Judas”. The narrative begins 40 years after the death of Jesus, and is based on the premise that Judas did not hang himself after he realised he had made a horrible mistake in betraying Jesus to the Temple authorities, but had run away, and changed his name and identity.

At the age of 70, he had begun to come into contact with travelling preachers who sometimes called themselves ‘Christians’, and Judas didn’t quite agree with their stories, so decide to record *his* recollections...

CK Stead’s version of Judas’ version starts with Judas revealing that he and Jesus were childhood friends.

The “cosseted only child” of a rich businessman, Judas loved going to play at Jesus’ house where there was a large family where “...[he] liked the cosiness, the hugger-muggerness of it...

(but) They also had their times of prayer, observance and fervent worship. Mary saw to that and Joseph played his part...” [end of quote p26]

The story continues with the information that Judas’ father could *afford* to pay for his son’s education and so chose a “learned man” to be his teacher, but that this teacher also taught Jesus for free because “Jesus was exceptionally quick and clever”. [p11]

Judas continues:

“As boys we got on well and became friends. He was clever, but I was by no means stupid, and we enjoyed learning, playing word games, competing to memorise great tracts of scripture. Those texts were like a *loam* laid down in the mind. They remain with me now – not as a source of faith, but as an enrichment. And I was to see Jesus, in his great days as a preacher, make wonderful use of them. For me the language of the scriptures was (and still is) a source of beauty and comfort: for [Jesus] it became a source of power.” [end of quote p15]

[By the way, CK Stead’s record of the boy Jesus getting lost in Jerusalem has Judas’s father saying: “If he were my son, I would have taught him to be where he was supposed to be at the appointed hour.” Perhaps Mary would have agreed...]

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At this point I need to confess that I love reading historical fiction of any sort. For me, it helps to bring lots of historical fact to life. However, I’m now going to STOP giving you CK Stead’s take on Jesus’ childhood, and turn to Mary.

The story (or parable) of the lost coin is one of the most *domestic* of the stories Jesus told: it is recorded in Luke chapter 15, in between the parable of the lost sheep and the parable of the prodigal or lost son. Apparently the Pharisees and the scribes were “grumbling and saying that this man Jesus welcomes sinners and eats with them” (NRSV). Each of the stories points to the joy in heaven over one sinner who repents.

I would like to think that the boy Jesus might have seen his mother in a total flap over having lost something very precious. After all, they were a modest if not poor family. And if so, he would have seen her utter relief and delight at having found the lost something or the other.

Maybe much later, as a young adult having to earn his living, and learning the hard way the value of silver coins, and drawing on his developing understanding of the compassion of God, he was able to dwell on that very domestic scene to tell a story as a rebuke of the uncompassionate / arrogant religious authorities.

“Mary treasured all these things and pondered them in her heart” verse 51

Another domestic story is the parable of the yeast rising (Luke 13:20-21):

“The kingdom of heaven is like yeast that a woman took and mixed in with three measures of flour until all of it was leavened.” If in fact Jesus was the eldest of a number of children, he would have learnt very early on in his childhood how important that baking of the bread was, and that it tasted better if it had risen properly...

Finally, I would like to think that Mary might have sung her Magnificat more than once: maybe/ perhaps quite regularly at the family prayers, so that the boy Jesus learnt that God had “looked with favour on the lowliness of his servant:

that God had brought down the powerful from their thrones and lifted up the lowly;

that God had filled the hungry with good things, and sent the rich away empty.
(Luke 1: 48 – 53 NRSV)

Maybe Mary also taught her family about the Hebrew scripture's record of another Magnificat called Hannah's prayer, in First Samuel chapter 2 where Hannah, the mother of the much longed-for child Samuel says:

"My heart exults in the Lord...

The bows of the mighty are broken, but the feeble gird on strength. *Those who were full have hired themselves out for bread**, but those who were hungry are fat with spoil:

The Lord raises up the poor from the dust: he lifts the needy from the ash heap, to make them sit with princes and inherit a seat of honour." (VV4, 5, 8)

*Did that verse influence Jesus when he told the story of the prodigal son?

....

So when the 30 year old Jesus began his ministry, he was well prepared to make the gospel of good news for the poor a cornerstone of his teaching.

Luke 4: 14 – 19 records him choosing the reading in the synagogue in Nazareth:

"The Spirit of the Lord is upon me, because he has anointed me to bring good news to the poor...

(continued: He has sent me to proclaim release to the captives and recovery of sight to the blind, to let the oppressed go free...)

I would like to think that Mary was present on that occasion, as the Synagogue in Nazareth would have been where she attended regularly. (See CK Stead p96)

(So) "Mary treasured all these things and pondered them in her heart" (Luke 2:verse 51)

And so Jesus developed his troublesome message of proclaiming good news for the poor.

And *that* is still the challenge for us in this New Year. Amen