

## Superboy

Grace, mercy, and peace to you from God our Father and from our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ. Our text is from the Gospel reading. **And Jesus increased in wisdom and in stature and in favor with God and man.** Here ends our text.

His personal name was Clark Kent, but his title, what the crowds called him, was Superman. You might remember the fictional accounts of Superman in the comics or from the many movies that have been made of him. Superman was really from another world, the planet Krypton. His father, or space dad, sent him to earth as a baby just before Krypton's destruction. His hope was that his son might live and make a better world for the inhabitants there. Clark's earthly parents, who were farmers in Kansas, rescued him from the wrecked cradle of his spaceship. They soon discovered that he was a special child with superhuman powers. Clark grew up like any other boy, though. He grew in height and learning. He went to school and worked on the farm. He was faster than a speeding bullet and more powerful than a locomotive. But Clark refrained from using his powers to showoff or benefit himself. He didn't run track or go out for the football team. He didn't use his true strength to beat up bullies or his ex-ray vision or acute hearing to cheat on exams. With his great power, Clark could have taken anything he wanted, done whatever he pleased, but he put himself under the law as an ordinary citizen. After he grew up, he moved to Metropolis and worked as a humble newspaper reporter. But whenever anyone was in danger or injustice was done, Clark would make use of his superpowers. For brief flashes of time, he became Superman. He used his powers, not to bring glory to himself, but to defeat evil and save others. Superman had one weakness, though. If he was exposed to the material of his home planet, Kryptonite, he lost all his power and became mortal. Superman's archenemy, Lex Luther, would often try to defeat Superman by hanging a chain of Kryptonite around his neck or stabbing him in the side with a Kryptonite dagger. Superman was then weakened to the point of death, but he always managed to rise again to defeat his enemies and save the world.

His personal name was Jesus, but his title, what the crowds called him, was the Christ. You know the true accounts of Jesus from the Bible and many other books written about him. The Christ was really from another world, from heaven. His heavenly Father sent him to earth with the purpose that his Son would die and rise again to save all its inhabitants and make a better world for them. The Christ was conceived by the Holy Spirit in the womb of the virgin Mary. She bore him as her firstborn son and laid him in a manger for a cradle. She and his stepfather Joseph were his earthly parents. They soon discovered that Jesus was a special child of supernatural origin. Shepherds came to worship him the night he was born, sent by a heavenly host of angels. Not long afterwards, wise men from the east brought him the treasures of a king. They too bowed in homage to the child. Mary treasured all these things in her heart but didn't speak about them to the other moms of Nazareth. Though Jesus was a divine child, they raised him like any other boy. He went to the synagogue school, learned the Scriptures, and worked in his father's carpentry shop. His childhood was quite ordinary.

Now I know that we'd all like to know a little more about Jesus' childhood. We're curious. What was Jesus like as a boy? To satisfy this curiosity there were some fictitious accounts of Jesus as a boy written hundreds of years after his birth. Some of these false accounts were recorded in the spurious Gnostic gospel of Thomas. It speaks of how the child Jesus used his divine powers all the time to perform great miracles. It says that at the age of five, Jesus formed twelve sparrows out of clay, clapped his hands, and they all flew away chirping. When one of his playmates fell off a roof and died, Jesus raised him from the dead. Another time, a man cut his foot with an axe, and Jesus healed the wound. One day his father Joseph was working in his carpenter shop and cut a board too short. But Jesus laid his hands on it and stretched it to its proper length. When his brother James was bitten by a poisonous viper, Jesus healed the wound and made the viper explode. But also, according to these false accounts, Jesus had a dark side. He often behaved like a spoiled brat, using his powers to strike fear into the hearts of his village. When another boy chided him, Jesus hexed him and made him wither up like an old man to the dismay of his parents. After another boy bumped into him, Jesus become provoked, and the boy fell down and died. When his teachers scolded him or his father Joseph tried to correct him, Jesus often smarted off and talked back, reminding them of what he could do. The village lived in dread of this seemingly possessed child who slew their children. They worshipped him out of fear. But again, all of these accounts are false. They might reflect how you or I might act given that much power as a child, but not Jesus. They don't reflect the true Jesus but were only written long after the true Gospels to satisfy curiosity and sell parchments. Kind of like a modern day tabloid.

The only true account we have of Jesus' childhood is written in our Gospel reading this morning. It reflects Jesus' true behavior as a child, more like the humble Clark Kent as a boy. When Jesus was twelve years old, he went to Jerusalem with his parents to celebrate the Passover. But sort of like the "Home Alone" movie, when it came time to leave, Jesus was mistakenly left behind due to either the forgetfulness of his parents or miscommunication among his relatives. In a panic Mary and Joseph return to search for Jesus. They look everywhere they might expect a twelve-year-

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old boy to be: at the market place, with the other children, down at the stables near the horses, splashing in the water fountain, or playing on the steps of the theater. But after a daylong search, they finally find Jesus in the Temple courts. He's sitting among the teachers, listening to them, and asking them questions. Everyone who heard him was amazed at his understanding and his answers. Jesus, apparently a boy genius, is able to converse about theology with some of the smartest adult teachers in Judea.

Now when I first heard this story when I was a kid, I wasn't so amazed at Jesus' great knowledge at the age of twelve. I thought, "Big deal. Jesus is God. He's the Super boy. He's all knowing, omniscient. Of course, he knows and understands the Word of God better than anyone else, even at age twelve. As God, he could answer any question about the Bible or stump the wisest pastor. Jesus was certainly smarter than a fifth grader." But what I didn't understand is that Jesus was able to do all this without tapping into his divine powers. He did this as a normal boy of twelve. How do we know this? This is what we understand as Jesus in his state of humiliation.

Now Jesus' state of humiliation began at his incarnation, when he became a human being. But Christ's humiliation wasn't that he became a baby, or child, or man because he's still man today. There's nothing humiliating about being human. Humanity is God's highest creation. Our risen and ascended Lord remains both God and man even today in what we now call his state of exaltation at the right hand of God the Father. But Christ's humiliation was that as God and man, he laid aside the full use of his divine power and became like us. Though Jesus could have if he wanted to, he didn't come out of the womb speaking like a full grown adult. "Excuse me mother, I'm ready for nourishment now and a change of swaddling cloths." That would have been creepy. No, Jesus cried and cooed like a baby. Jesus also didn't use his divine powers as a boy to blow the doors off the other kids when they raced or to levitate bullies out of his path, though that would have been cool to watch. Jesus also didn't use his divine powers when he was in school or doing his homework, though that would have made life easier for him. No, Jesus listened and taxed his brain. He studied. Just like he learned to walk, so Jesus learned to speak. He learned his ABC's. He learned to write and spell. He learned the Words of Scripture by memorizing them. He learned what the words mean, the "What does this mean?" by meditating on them. And then Jesus learned how to apply the Words of Scripture. Just like Jesus grew in height, so he also grew in wisdom. Our text says that Jesus grew in wisdom and stature and in favor with God and men. How can God grow in wisdom? He can't. He already knows and understands it all. But Jesus in his state of humiliation, having laid aside the full use of his divine knowledge, can grow in wisdom. Just like you as a youth and our confirmands today, Jesus studied the Bible and did his memory work. He kept the Third Commandment. And as a boy of twelve, he amazed people, even his adult teachers, with his knowledge and understanding.

Now notice that Jesus is still conscious of who he is. His mother Mary tells him, "Son, why have you treated us so?" She points at Joseph and says, "Your father and I have been searching for you in great distress." But Jesus gives a very insightful reply. He asks, "Why were you looking for me? Didn't you know that I must be in my *Father's* house?" Now Jesus isn't giving his mother any lip, but he's reminding Mary what she already knew from the angel Gabriel, that Joseph wasn't his real father. Joseph was his earthly step-dad. But Jesus' real Father was his Father in heaven. At the age of twelve, even in his state of humiliation, Jesus is conscious of who he is and what he came to do. But even though Jesus knows he's God, he's still obedient to his mom and dad. Jesus humbled himself, returned to Nazareth, and was submissive to his parents. Even though he was God, he put himself under the Law and kept the Fourth Commandment.

Of course, there came a time when Jesus, the superhero, became a man. When he began his ministry after his baptism, he sometimes did make use of his divine powers and for brief flashes of time, so to speak, he became Superman. He walked on water, calmed storms, multiplied loaves, healed the sick, cast out demons, and even raised the dead. But he didn't do these things to make life easier on himself or terrify the villages into worshipping him. He did these things to fight evil and injustice and show compassion to those in need. He used his powers to save others.

But there came a time in his ministry when Jesus didn't use his divine powers at all to save others. During his passion, Jesus allowed himself to be tied and bound by the instruments of his archenemy, the devil. When they beat him, he bruised. When they pierced him, he bled. Upon the cross the sins of the world were hung upon him. But Jesus didn't lose his divine powers like Superman strapped to Kryptonite. Rather he chose not to use his divine powers to save himself in order that he might save the world. He chose mortality and died. Jesus died for you to remove all the sins that hung around your neck. He became mortal and died so that you might become immortal and live forever. By the power of the Holy Spirit, Jesus rose again and defeated all his enemies of sin, death, and the devil. He ascended to his true Father who exalted him above heaven and earth. In this exalted state, now and always, Jesus uses his divine powers for the benefit of his Church. On the Last Day he won't come as the humble Clark Kent or the boy Jesus, but he'll come in all his glory as the Christ. Faster than a blink of an eye and more powerful than a host of angels. Amen.

The peace of God which passes all understanding keep your hearts and minds in Christ Jesus. Amen.