

It's a funny thing about Christmas presents. They get played with so much in the first day or two. But after that they're largely forgotten. I try to remember things I got as a kid and I can only remember a few. As essential as they were when I got them, they're nothing to me now. What I remember is my family being together. I remember my grandparents being there every Christmas Eve. And because my dad is an only child I didn't share Grandma Born with anybody. My cousins on my mom's side all live farther away. Grandma and Grandpa spent most Christmases with us. My cousins only talked to them on the phone most years at Christmas. My sister and I had our grandparents all to ourselves. I appreciate that now more than any gift.

When all your grandparents live in the same village as you seeing them is easy, especially on Christmas. My Grandma Born went to our church. She was always at our Christmas Eve Sunday school program. Sometimes my Grandpa and Grandma would come too. Then they all came to our house for presents. It was great. I can still see my grandparents sitting on the couch or in the chairs. I can see my Grandma Born opening up gifts and laughing with her head back like she always did. I can see my Grandpa giving a little grin as he delicately tore the paper open. These were my Christmas Eve moments. I appreciate them now, I just don't know that I appreciated them then.

The first lesson describes a little boy named Samuel who was appreciated. Samuel comes up at Christmas because Samuel's story of growing up so closely compares with the story of Jesus growing up. And Jesus is someone we appreciate! As we compare Samuel with Jesus we will grow in our faith and...

Appreciate what we got for Christmas

A brother

A Savior

While we don't know exactly how old, Samuel was a boy here. I'm thinking younger than teenager. He lived at the temple with the high priest Eli. But Eli wasn't his father. Eli's sons weren't Samuel's brothers. Hannah and Elkanah were Samuel's parents, but they lived up north. Why didn't Samuel live with his parents? It all went back to the fact that Hannah couldn't have children. She prayed asking the Lord to grant her a child. Each time she prayed she made this promise. **"O Lord Almighty, if you will only look upon your servant's misery and remember me, and not forget your servant but give her a son, then I will give him to the Lord for all the days of his life."** Quite a promise Hannah made. And a promise she kept. That's why Samuel lived at the temple miles away from home and his mother and father. Hannah gave Samuel back to the Lord.

She visited once a year. **"Each year his mother made him a little robe and took it to him when she went up with her husband to offer the annual sacrifice."** Who knows which Hannah and Elkanah looked forward to more, worshiping the Lord at the temple or seeing their son? No matter because you can imagine how they appreciated the moments they spent together. They watched their son grow. Samuel served at the temple doing things he could handle at his age. Probably lighting candles, checking the bread, and cleaning. Little things but valuable experience. Hannah supported Samuel's growth even from far away by making new robes. She continued to teach her boy that service to the Lord and learning the Word of God are most important. Samuel learned that service to the Lord came first. Through hearing the Word of God Samuel's faith continued to grow. Hannah only saw the progress in jumps. So one year he was learning his ABCs and the next speaking in complete sentences. She appreciated every moment with her son, but knew Samuel's service to the Lord was most important.

Through service, the Lord was preparing Samuel. **"The boy Samuel continued to grow in stature and in favor with the Lord and with men."** The Lord was pleased with his progress both as a man and spiritually. Samuel would soon be ready to lead God's people. He would be used by God to appoint the next great leader of Israel, which would continue the promise of the Messiah, and the salvation of the world. And God would use Samuel to bring his own people back to a closer relationship with him.

Those really paying attention may have noticed a similarity between these words and the wording in the gospel. Luke describes the boy Jesus, **"And Jesus grew in wisdom and stature, and in favor with God and men."** We don't hear anything about Jesus' early years from infant to young boy. Just this little glimpse into Jesus' early life, about as old as Samuel was. Already Jesus is special. Like Samuel, Jesus is progressing like all other boys his age. He's getting bigger, faster, stronger. Spiritually he's making progress too. Jesus is being prepared by his heavenly Father to lead God's people. Jesus will bring his people back to a closer relationship with him. It's his Father's business and the reason why Jesus came to earth. It's why he stayed behind when Mary and Joseph left town. Jesus showed what was most important to him was doing the work his Father sent him to do. It's the reason why Jesus became human. To prepare, grow, get older, gain experience. In short, it all confirms for us he is truly human.

It hurts to grow up. Life isn't always a big giant success and learning that isn't easy. How you handle the defeats says a lot about you. If you cry unfair or get mad and start making accusations, that's not helpful. Learning to see that people aren't always going to give you what you want is hard. If you stomp your feet and start screaming you demonstrate lack of maturity. Getting older requires patience and skills to adapt. But those aren't gained the easy way, they only come through hardship. The difficulty of life is a sign of sin in your life, but how you react shows the signs of sin as well. Unfortunately none of that growing and learning stops when you reach adulthood. Sin is still there and the sinful reactions to hardship are still there.

As you glimpse Jesus growing up see him as he was, a human being. Jesus is your brother. He traveled with his parents. He walked the dirt of this earth. He got tired and stopped for drinks of water. He and his parents found a place to stay and things to eat. They spent time at the temple. This was all pleasing to the Lord. All sounds like things you and I do as human beings, except for one difference. Jesus did it all without sin. He never stomped his feet when he didn't get his way. He never shouted at his parents that they were not doing enough for him. He didn't get mad or lose his cool when finding food was difficult. Jesus, even as a little boy, was perfect and never sinned.

All the comparisons between Samuel and Jesus end here. Samuel grew up, Samuel was prepared by the Lord to lead God's people, and Samuel grew in spiritual maturity. Jesus too grew up, was prepared, and grew in spiritual maturity. But Jesus did it all perfect and Samuel did not. Jesus went far beyond Samuel because Jesus is the Savior. Jesus was in the temple not just to worship God. The temple was Jesus' Father's house and Jesus was involved in the family business. He would serve and minister to all people of all time. Jesus was the Savior for Samuel, Samuel's parents, Eli the high priest, for you and me, and for all people.

To fully be the Savior, Jesus had to be fully like you and me. There is no Savior unless there is a God man who knows exactly what life is like as a human being. So Jesus was obedient to his parents. He showed that every law, every command, everything that God wanted human beings to do but couldn't he kept. His life was perfect from beginning, from the manger at Bethlehem, to the cross at Calvary. With a perfect life his sacrifice was perfect. The cross is where Jesus sacrificed himself for all peoples' sins. His boyhood years were merely the prelude, the preparation, the perfection needed to make the payment for you and me.

I appreciate now the moments my grandparents were able to spend at my house for Christmas each year. It was special. Samuel was appreciated as a child because his parents only saw him once a year. The time was always a blessing as Samuel served the Lord. Compared to Samuel, Jesus was doing much the same thing at pretty much the same age. But there's more to appreciate about Jesus. Our brother was growing up just like Samuel was. He was growing and preparing for what he had come to do. Jesus is our brother and our Savior. Those are things to truly be thankful for and appreciate that we have received this Christmas.