

The child, father of the man

Katharine Smith *reflects on* Luke 2:41-end

I remember that day well and I've often wondered what happened to the boy. Now I know. He's back again. Once more he's in the Temple, questioning and challenging the elders, scribes and Pharisees, attracting attention, amazement and speculation. But not, I think, receiving the same universal approval.

He was only twelve when I first saw him. We knew from his accent that he was from the north but we assumed his parents were still in the city after the Passover. It never occurred to us that he'd stayed behind and they were frantically searching for him.

We were spellbound. Boys of that age can usually recite scripture, they know the commandments and something of the history of our people. But this boy was different. He knew so much more. Even more astounding was the passion, the eagerness and the depth of his interest. This was not a boy who wanted to be a rabbi or a great scholar. This was a boy who had absorbed knowledge of God into his very being and who reached out for more as if his life depended on it.

He was remarkable. I've often wondered what happened to him. Now I know and I remember his name, recognise those searching, piercing eyes and experience once again the power and passion of his faith.

Jesus of Nazareth who are you?

Arguments over precedence have no place in God's kingdom; they sap its strength, drawing us away from striving for equality. To achieve God's vision requires a preference for the least powerful, those who are marginalised, the "non-person", alongside each of us choosing to reject selfish ambition in favour of loving, willing service. 🍷

Boxing Clever

by Caroline Hodgson

In recent years Boxing Day has become associated with sales and sporting fixtures, but you don't have to go back very far to find its origins in charitable giving.

Traditionally it was when the alms boxes – collection boxes kept in churches – were opened and the contents distributed to the poor people of the parish. Later it became the day when the landed

gentry would give gifts (which might be some leftover food from the Christmas meal) to those who worked and lived on their land. Eventually it became traditional for servants to get the day off on Boxing Day, to enable them to celebrate Christmas with their families. Up until World War II it was common for working people who did rounds (such as milkmen) to travel round their delivery places and collect their Christmas box or tip on Boxing Day.

This year, true to the spirit of Boxing Day, why not pray for generosity, compassion and wisdom in charitable giving? 🍷

“We all want progress, but if you're on the wrong road, progress means doing an about-turn and walking back to the right road; in that case, the man who turns back soonest is the most progressive.”

C. S. Lewis (1898-1963), writer and theologian



Lord Jesus, the Temple was your Father's house, your home. Thank you for inviting us to join you, as your brothers and sisters, in your Father's kingdom. Give us the grace to accept that invitation and to know the joy of belonging to your family. Amen.

St Stephen (c. AD 5-34)

by Caroline Hodgson

Today is the feast of Stephen. But who was this man, traditionally venerated as the first martyr of Christianity?

Stephen is first mentioned in Acts 6 as "a man full of faith and the Holy Spirit". He was one of seven deacons appointed to distribute food to poorer members of the community. In Acts 6:8 we read that Stephen, "full of grace and power, did great wonders and signs". A few verses later we're told that when

some argued with him, "they could not withstand the wisdom and the Spirit with which he spoke".

Eventually he was accused of blasphemy. At his trial he made an impassioned speech, denouncing those who sat in judgement on him, and was sentenced to death by stoning. But death wasn't the end of his story. His martyrdom was witnessed by Saul. Who knows what impact the experience had? Did it start to soften the hard heart of the persecutor of Christians and begin the process that would lead him to become Paul, tireless worker for Christ?

Even in death, it seems, the Spirit was able to work through this remarkable, faith-filled man. 🍷