

Section 103

Jesus' Early Life

Boyhood

Jesus' Boyhood

Of Jesus' early life we very little. One thing however was very clear. Jesus was very well read in the scriptures. He must therefore have spent a considerable time in study, learning to read and working with the rabbis. Luke inserts a vignette to explain this.

LUKE 2.41 to 2.52

Now his parents went to Jerusalem every year at the feast of the Passover. And when he was twelve years old, they went up according to custom; and when the feast was ended, as they were returning, the boy Jesus stayed behind in Jerusalem. His parents did not know it, but supposing him to be in the company they went a day's journey, and they sought him among their kinsfolk and acquaintances; and when they did not find him, they returned to Jerusalem, seeking him.

After three days they found him in the temple, sitting among the teachers, listening to them and asking them questions; and all who heard him were amazed at his understanding and his answers. And when they saw him they were astonished; and his mother said to him, "Son, why have you treated us so? Behold, your father and I have been looking for you anxiously."

And he said to them, "How is it that you sought me? Did you not know that I must be in my Father's house?"

And they did not understand the saying which he spoke to them. And he went down with them and came to Nazareth, and was obedient to them; and his mother kept all these things in her heart.

And Jesus increased in wisdom and in stature, and in favour with God and man.

Of his later childhood and early manhood we know nothing except a brief reference in Mark 6.3 to his having been a carpenter.

Mark 6.2 - 6.3

And on the Sabbath he began to teach in the synagogue; and many who heard him were astonished, saying, "Where did this man get all this? What is the wisdom given to him? What mighty works are wrought by his hands! Is not this the carpenter, the son of Mary and brother of James and Joses and Judas and Simon, and are not his sisters here with us?" And they took offence at him.

Numerous legends have arisen. Perhaps the one most appealing to British Christians is the one linking Jesus to Glastonbury in Somerset.

The legend gives Joseph of Aramathia as Jesus' uncle and a wealthy trader. The story goes that the young Jesus would accompany Joseph on some of his voyages, one which took him to tin mines of Cornwall and on to Somerset levels. In those times there would be many trade goods as well as the tin which would fetch a good price back in Palestine. Certainly Phoenecian boats regularly traded with Britain. While they were there Jesus and Joseph visited Glastonbury which was on an island in the marshes and which had been a holy site for centuries. Joseph is reputed to have planted his staff at Glastonbury which took root and which flowered every Christmas thereafter.

What actually seems very much more likely is that Jesus was actually brought up in Alexandria in Egypt whence Mary and Joseph had fled following Jesus' birth. Alexandria had a very large Jewish quarter which had a strong Essene flavour. The other major Essene stronghold was of

course Galilee. Alexandria was also the Roman world's seat of learning with its fabulous library and tradition of scholarship going back centuries. Much of what Jesus was to preach has echoes in Alexandrine philosophy and it would have indeed provided him with the opportunity to bring that knowledge back to Palestine and amaze the teachers at the Temple.