

Luke 2:39-40 (NIV)

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⁴⁰ And the child grew and became strong; he was filled with wisdom, and the grace of God was upon him.

Luke 2:51-52 (NIV)

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But his mother treasured all these things in her heart.

⁵² And Jesus grew in wisdom and stature, and in favor with God and men.

42-02-05-Faith in the Hidden Work of God

Epiphany, hiddenness of God, new birth, spiritual growth

Luke 2:39-40, 51-52

Faith in an unseen God includes trusting in His hidden work in us.

INTRODUCTION:

–“If God is real,” says the skeptic, “why doesn’t He show up to prove His existence?”

That question suffers from reverse-telescopic vision: look in a telescope backwards, and big things look little. Scripture calls God “*a consuming fire*.” [Those questioning God’s existence would learn nothing, if He showed up in His full glory: toast doesn’t know anything. It would be like sending a spaceship to film the Sun’s surface. It would disintegrate before even getting close.] This may be the reason for the hiddenness of God, and also why faith is our basis for relating to God and for growing spiritually. **HOM.idea.**

–This sermon’s **title** relates to Epiphany [*manifestation*]. The significance of something being manifested is that it emerges from hiddenness [think about the cocoon & butterfly; the egg & chick; the pregnant womb & human baby].

–Our **text** today comes after two epiphany passages where Jesus was in the temple first as a baby then as a twelve-year-old– Luke 2:39-40, *When Joseph and Mary had done everything required by the Law of the Lord, they returned to Galilee to their own town of Nazareth. And the child grew and became strong; he was filled with wisdom, and the grace of God was upon him. // v.51-52*, *Then he went down to Nazareth with them and was obedient to them. But his mother treasured all these things in her heart. And Jesus grew in wisdom and stature, and in favor with God and men.* These verses cover unrecorded years in Jesus’ life. What happened during His hidden years? He grew! Slowly, quietly, He grew. His hidden time of growth illustrates the hidden work of God in us...

I. God’s Hidden Work of the New Birth

- A. The unbelieving question, “Why doesn’t God just show up and prove His existence?” was answered by Christ’s 1st advent: God did show up!
 1. But, in order not to blow away sinners with the full revelation of His divine glory, He wrapped Himself up in human flesh.
 2. His incarnation into human history wasn’t to satisfy skeptics but to destroy Satan’s works and to liberate us from sin’s bondage.
- B. When the immaculate conception of Christ occurred in the virgin Mary, she looked like any other pregnant woman, yet hidden within her was the Son of God! (Just as Jesus entered and grew in her womb, He enters and grows in our hearts.)

C. *Conception is the hidden event illustrating new birth, and fetal development in pregnancy is a hidden process culminating in its manifestation at the time of physical birth. (That's what Epiphany is about: God's invisible work being manifested. [Before Christmas the early church celebrated Christ's birth as part of the Epiphany festival]).*

TRANS: Epiphany is what we really celebrate at Christmas. The birth of Jesus was a *manifestation* of His Incarnation 9 months earlier. We're called *saints* in Scripture, **not** because *new birth* immediately made us into people with obviously holy lives, **but** because, *at new birth, a Holy God took up residence within us*. We're still *ordinary humans*, but inside our *hidden inner beings* lives God's Son. Receiving Him brought us *a new birth*— John 1:12-13. Yet to all who **received** him, to those who believed in his name, he gave the right to become **children of God**— children **born** not of natural descent, nor of human decision or a husband's will, but **born of God**. Christ's *hidden life* also illustrates...

II. God's Hidden Work of Spiritual Growth

- A. Jesus grew in ways that were *hidden* from those who knew Him:
1. At age 12, in the temple, He told Mary & Joseph, "*Didn't you know I had to be in my Father's house?*" (*No, they didn't understand that.*)
 2. In John 7:5 it says, "even his own brothers did not believe in him."
 3. Once, His mom and siblings thought He'd gone too far— Mark 3:20-21. Then Jesus entered a house, and again a crowd gathered, so that he and his disciples were not even able to eat. When his family heard about this, they went to take charge of him, for they said, "He is out of his mind."
 4. His neighbors didn't see God hidden in Him— Mat 13:54-56. Coming to his hometown, he began teaching the people in their synagogue, and they were amazed. "Where did this man get this wisdom and these miraculous powers?... Where then did this man get all these things?"
- B. We are often unconscious of God's hidden work in us:
1. *Spiritual growth* is God's work— Eph 2:10. For we are God's workmanship, created in Christ Jesus to do good works, which God prepared in advance for us to do. (*Our part* in this is putting our trust in Him.)
 2. *Faith* keeps us moving in our spiritual journeys when *sight and understanding* is clouded by trial and testing. (Nobody had it worse than Job, but in his suffering, he said in Job 23:10, "But he knows the way that I take; when he has tested me, I will come forth as gold.")
- C. God plants the seed, waters the soil, and shines the sunlight...

1. **But** our free will can *hinder God's work of growth* by allowing sinful weeds to remain in the soil of our souls, or by polluting our heart's environment with *self-will resistant to God's plans*.
2. **OR**, we can fertilize the spiritual soil of our souls with *prayer and praise* and cultivate growth by *feeding on God's Word*.

TRANS: **Faith in an unseen God includes trusting in His hidden work in us.** *Faith accepts this invisible God's invitation to walk with Him in spiritual fellowship.* But *faith also trusts* God to finish what He started— Phil 1:6, being confident of this, that he who began a good work in you will carry it on to completion until the day of Christ Jesus. *God's ultimate goal is not just for us to enjoy a secret relationship with Him....*

III. God's Hidden Work is to be Manifested

- A. [9 months in the womb hopefully displays a new human being to the world; puberty manifests another stage in life; *finally*, adulthood is the climax of physiological growth.] Physical maturity involves time but *is seen* by visible development. (Similarly, spiritual maturity involves time, but is seen by how our faith-relationship with God manifests.)
- B. The *hidden life* of Jesus was *suddenly manifested*: a day came when He said, "I am the light of the world." *But then*, He also told us in Mat 5:14-16, You are the light of the world. A city on a hill cannot be hidden. Neither do people light a lamp and put it under a bowl. Instead they put it on its stand, and it gives light to everyone in the house. In the same way, let your light shine before men, that they may see your good deeds and praise your Father in heaven. (*God's goal is that the hidden work He's doing in us be seen, as Christ's indwelling glory shines out of our lives!*)

CONCLUSION:

—**Faith in an unseen God includes trusting in His hidden work in us.** The deeper our trust in Him, the more we will manifest our identity as His children. To those around us who are unconcerned about a relationship with God, our visible spiritual growth offers them an *epiphany*—another opportunity to see the hidden God manifested.