

WESTON PRIORY

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What Will This Child Become?

It is the question deep in the heart of every parent, the wonder in the eyes of grandparents and friends. The newborn infant brings the open future near, and brimming with anticipation, we inevitably ask, "What will this

child become? What will she make of her new life?" Luke the evangelist tells us that the entire hill country of Judea was astir with this question at the birth of John the Baptist (Luke 1: 66), "for indeed the hand of God was with him."

Surely this question must have trailed the young Jesus of Nazareth too, as he grew into adolescence and young adulthood. The more Jesus failed to meet the conventional expectations of family, village, and society, the more he seemed to elicit perplexity and often worry. "What is he making of his life?"

If we read the gospels imaginatively, we can recognize that this was Jesus' own guiding question as well. He absorbed the sacred texts

of Israel, which he heard in the Nazareth synagogue, like honey penetrating newly-baked bread. The presence of the Holy One of Israel, who heard the cries of the slaves in Egypt and came to their rescue, seemed to flood his young heart. At the same time, Jesus felt

more unsettled than ever. Like the young Samuel before him, Jesus' question, "What am I living for?" evolved into a prayer.

"Here I am. You called me. Speak, Adonai. Your

servant is listening" (1 Samuel 3: 8-9). Through his hard work as a day-laborer, Jesus came to feel a deep compassion for the poor and burdened people he encountered each day. "Your servant is listening." One evening, surrounded by the silence of the countryside, he



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realized that this compassion, this fellow-suffering, must have been what the Holy One felt toward the people enslaved in Egypt! Yes, this is what he would live for: to bring that same liberating compassion of God into the farthest reaches of hopelessness in his world. "Your servant is listening."

For a young man, Jesus took his vocation as a Jew with amazing seriousness. He embraced it as a "yoke" that is easy, a "burden" that is light. The song of the Servant of Yahweh resounded within him: "I have taken you by the hand and kept you. I give you as a covenant to the people, a light to the nations, to open the eyes of the blind, to bring out prisoners from the dungeon, and from the prison those who sit in darkness" (Isaiah 42: 6-7).

It would not be enough, he realized, to *bring* compassion to his sisters and brothers. Could he, Jesus prayed, empty himself enough to *become* God's liberating compassion, simply giving himself away like that honey-soaked bread? His response to that questioning prayer has become our Good News. To be nothing less than God's compassion, made flesh in his fully human life—this is who Yeshua, the son of Miriam, became for us—Emmanuel, God with us in the most needful reaches of our world. This Christmas, let us make our own the questioning prayer of Jesus and his people: "Speak, Adonai. Your servants are listening." And may we respond. ☒

