

Author explores Jesus' childhood in new children's books

written by Maryanne Meyerriecks |



Seven-year-old Viviana Gordon wondered what Jesus was like as a little boy. With few stories to fill in the gaps, Dr. Kim Gordon, a professor at the University of Arkansas Fort Smith's Center for Economic Development, decided to co-write four children's books with her granddaughters Viviana and Olivia, 5.

"I was in Washington, D.C., for my Viviana's sixth birthday when I decided to write a series of books about Jesus as a little boy," Gordon said. "I was putting Viviana to sleep when she started asking questions about what it was like for Jesus to grow up in Israel as a little boy and what it was like when he lost his first tooth. I told her that the Bible didn't have any stories about that, and she said, 'Why not? Maybe they didn't look hard enough.'"

Later that evening, talking with her husband and son and daughter-in-law, Derek and Daniela Gordon, Gordon decided to venture into self-publishing, using ideas and storylines her granddaughters shared with her. "Little Jesus Chronicles" was born.

"Olivia, who lives in Oklahoma, wanted me to tell a story about Jesus going to work with his dad in the carpenter's shop. We wrote a story about Joseph building a small ark with carved animals while Jesus watched, and Uncle Cleopas and Cousin James came to visit."

While her primary focus was writing about Jesus' childhood, Gordon tried to incorporate as much biblical history and characters as she could.

"The books are juvenile historical fiction," she said, "because there is very little we know about Jesus' childhood. I did a lot of research to portray his environment and culture accurately and to keep things real and inclusive, tender and pure. The books are written for children 4-10."

Each book has a special section in the back, with a glossary, a regional map of the Roman Empire in 5 B.C., Jesus' family tree, drawing pages, and an I Spy activity.

"We have two little creatures, Olee the ladybug, named for Olivia, and Cham the Chameleon, named after Viviana, on several pages, and the I Spy page invites readers to find Olee and Cham throughout the book," Gordon said.

Gordon, a member of Christ the King Church in Fort Smith, collaborated with a team of illustrators from FolksnFables, who do freehand digital drawings that look like watercolor and pen.

She self-published the books, which are available in English and Spanish, through KDP, a branch of Amazon.com, and they are distributed by Ingraham-Spark, which owns a catalog used by bookstores and retailers around the world.

The books are available on Amazon and barnesandnoble.com for \$14.99, softcover, and \$24.99, hardcover.

The collection will eventually have 10 books. Two books are currently available, "Little Jesus and the Lonely Puppy" and "Little Jesus and the Bethlehem Birthday."

In "Little Jesus and the Bethlehem Birthday," Jesus asks his mother to tell him the story of his birth, including his early childhood experiences of being blessed at the temple, living in Egypt and returning to Nazareth. Gordon had grandparents, aunts, and uncles visiting Jesus as a baby along with the shepherds and Wise Men, because her granddaughters wanted to know

Jesus was part of a big, loving family.

Gordon's granddaughters visited for Thanksgiving, and the trio had a book signing at Bookish the following day, with cupcakes for Jesus' birthday and a craft activity. The girls are excited to sign each book under their pen names, Olivia Francine and Viviana Camille.

"I prayed about this project before making this investment," Gordon said. "I had been saving money for a new car and knew nothing about publishing, but I saw these stories as a way to bring children closer to Jesus. I love hearing my granddaughters talk about little Jesus like he's one of the neighborhood kids.

"This series is a legacy gift my granddaughters will have forever that they will be able to give to their children. I loved creating these beautiful stories with them. When I was a little girl in Christ the King School, my teacher, Sister Gervase (Goellner, RSM), told me that one day I would be a writer. It was a dream that lay dormant for many years until Viviana gave me a story to tell. Who would have thought her prophecy would come true?"