

# FIRST SUNDAY AFTER EPIPHANY

## The Holy Family

Readings Colossians 3:12-17 & Luke 2:42-52

*And it came about that after three days they found Him in the temple, sitting in the midst of the teachers, both 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 this way? Behold, Your father and I have been anxiously looking for You." And He said to them, "Why is it that you were looking for Me? Did you not know that I had to be in My Father's house?" And they did not understand the statement which He had made to them.*



There are only a few details about the life of Jesus before He began His public ministry in the Bible. This is one of them - very nearly the only one. Jesus is making the Passover pilgrimage to Jerusalem with His family, possibly for the first time. It may be that Jesus went with them every year - since the text tells us that His parents went every year, but this year was different. This year the boy Jesus was twelve. That is significant because that is roughly the age at which boys go through Bar-Mitzvah. "*Bar-Mitzvah*" means "*Son of the Commandments*". It is roughly equivalent to our confirmation, except that it is the time when a young Jewish boy formally becomes a man under the Law and is held to be responsible for his own life and conduct before God and his fellow-man. So, this is the visit of Jesus - the first visit of Jesus as a man before the Jewish law and religion - to the Temple. It is this age / relationship to the Temple religion that makes this event noteworthy - and gives meaning to the thing Jesus says to His parents. Keeping that in mind, I invite you to consider with me the Gospel for the Sunday after Epiphany with the theme, "You Should Have Known".

The account focuses on the fact that Jesus, the young boy, stayed behind in Jerusalem when the family caravan headed back north to Nazareth. No one seemed to be aware of it - which seems strange to our modern mind, but fits well in the close communities of the ancient world, particularly of Israel in the time of Jesus. Nearly everyone in Nazareth were probably related, and young boys, just recently declared a man might be expected to hang out somewhere in the caravan with others their age and not report for an attendance check immediately. They just presumed that Jesus was in the caravan.

Did Jesus miss the departing caravan deliberately? That is difficult to say, and yet, Jesus probably figured, after three days, that they were gone. He was obviously not worried. This was the first year He was at the temple for the Passover as an officially "a man" - an adult before the faith. Finally, Jesus was now permitted to ask the questions, and join in the discussions about the Scriptures, and the traditions of Israel, and the theology of their faith in the presence of the most learned scholars of His day. That opportunity would be like a meal of "red meat" to anyone who took their religion seriously!

Clearly, Jesus took His religion seriously. His parents took three days to find Jesus - after the first day's journey, before they noticed He was absent from the caravan - presumably because they spent their days searching all of the places a young boy might want to go, places that would fascinate a child, and places where young

adolescents would likely be drawn to. It seems that they did not deal with Jesus in their heads, yet, as a man - but clearly Jesus was now acting and thinking as a man. "Why is it that you were looking for Me? Did you not know that I had to be in My Father's house?" The question meant, "*Why did you need to search? You should have known were I would be.*"

And they should have. They were not thinking particularly about who Jesus was, or what His age meant. If they had been, they would have naturally looked for Him in the Temple first. It might be surprising to find Him teaching the teachers - but only because He had never done such a thing before. But when you consider that He was the One speaking through the prophets, His ability to understand the Scriptures is not as amazing.

Naturally He would find misunderstandings and distortions among the theology of the priests and teachers of His day, and He taught them with loving gentleness and humility. He did not lecture, He asked questions. He did not expect them to get it all at once, but allowed them to ask Him questions too. And He left them all amazed at His questions and His answers - pleasantly surprised, and learning.

How do I know He was teaching? He was sitting among them and asking questions. A student would have stood. An equal might have sat among them, but a student would have stood in the presence of one teacher, much less a group of them. And questioning is the ancient method of teaching. Today it is called the Socratic Method of teaching. Jesus was teaching them, preparing the soil, as it were, for the ministry to come. I could imagine that some of those who learned from Jesus, there, spread their learning to others with the result that His approach to Scriptures was scattered in advance to prepare the Jews to hear and understand and believe the truth. I could also guess that none of them ever confessed that they had learned anything new from this mere child!

Jesus was just twelve, and yet He was right that His parents should have known. They should have realized that their Son, though a dutiful son and a good boy, was also the Son of God. They should have realized where they needed to search for Him. I would hazard a guess that His interest in religion did not blossom over night in Jerusalem. I would suspect that it had matured in a young boy asking a lot of questions and trying to understand the faith in which He was being raised. It was one thing for Jesus to understand as God, and another for Him to understand as a young child - and He had to learn how to understand as a person, too. They should have known.

And You should know, too! You should always keep in mind just who Jesus is. Although it was my mothers favorite hymn, and is among mine, "What a Friend we have in Jesus" does us a disservice today because our culture tends to hear those words in a way that distracts from who Jesus really is! He is God, Almighty and Creator and - "Wonderful, Counselor, the mighty God, the everlasting Father, the

Prince of peace." We focus so much on the human in Christ, that we often neglect to think about the divine in Him.

He is God. He made everything, and so He owns everything. He can do whatever we need, and He will never fail to provide - but always in accord with His will - which we confess to be good and gracious. We can trust Him, and He has a claim on us! Our morality is to come from who He is, and that we are freely and gladly associated with Him. Our world-view should also come out of the knowledge of the goodwill and love of God, and the great lengths to which Jesus was willing to go out of His great love for you. We cannot be defeatists, or pessimists. God is good, and His will toward us is marvelous! So whatever is happening and however 'things' look to us, we can be confident in Jesus Christ.

Look at what He has done for you. He died on the cross. He lived for thirty-three years among people who were as twisted, from His perspective, as the wildest Islamic suicide terrorist is in ours. He did it all for you. He lived, and died in such a gruesome manner, without sin AND without taking recourse to His divine power for Himself and His own sake. He did an occasional miracle but always for us and our understanding, but He took life as it came to Him, trusting God, just as you are to trust God.

Then He endured torture and mocking and false imprisonment and unjust conviction and grisly execution by crucifixion - all to endure, though innocent, what you and I deserve due to our guilt and sins. Because of Jesus, your sins are completely forgiven, and You have been given the gift of everlasting life. How good He is! How good He has been to us! We should know that we are safe and secure, and that whatever may trouble us is for good - usually our own good. And we should know that Jesus simply will not let evil come upon us to destroy us. Sometimes He lets us suffer to help us remember to call upon Him and trust in Him and make a habit of crying out to Him for forgiveness and help and healing and strength, but not for evil. You should have known.

And knowing, you should know right where to look for Him, just as His parents should also have known. Some people look for Him in entertainment. Others are searching for Him in their moods and "feelings". People judge His appearance by how life seems to be going for them today. They look for Him on Television, or in pious looks and pious sounds. You know where to look though, don't you? You should know.

You need to look for Him where He has promised to be - "Did you not know that I had to be in My Father's house?" Jesus said, "Wherever two or three are gathered together in My name, there am I in the midst of them." You need to look for Him in worship, where His Word is proclaimed, and His gifts are given - in the absolution, in the waters of Baptism, and in the Holy Supper which He lays before us every Sunday for our refreshment, and for our forgiveness, and for our blessing, and our strengthening. Here, in His holy Word. Here, in His body and blood is where you need to look. Here in the fellowship of His people - His holy body - is where He is to be found, and no

where else. Others may catch a glimpse of Him in you and through you, but when you want to find Jesus, you should not need three days of searching, but find Him in worship, in hearing His Word preached, and in eating of this Holy Meal.

Of course, He is always with you. You know that, too. You don't have to search. You just have to believe Him, you know, take Him at His Word. Sometimes He doesn't permit us to feel like He is there, for a time. That is to strengthen our faith. At those moments, we must simply cling to the naked Word of Promise, "Lo, I am with you always, even to the end of the world." We must close our eyes, at times, so that the sight of things doesn't blind us to Him and His truth. He is with us - and when we want to be sure to find Him, we have to go to the place where He has promised to be, where you hear His voice speaking, and hold him in your hands and in your mouth. Here, among His people, and yes, His friends, is where He is to be found in every need. You should have known. And I think you do. Amen!

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