

## Epiphany 1 (2025)

I was driving towards McCaysville. For some reason – I can't now remember why -- I reached for my wallet. I didn't have it. I panicked.

If a missing wallet can strike panic into a person, imagine a missing child. Maybe some of you have experienced such a thing.

Perhaps you were at a sporting event or at a mall. You looked around and your child was gone.

What did you do? What would you do?

I can tell you, panic and then begin a search.

Well, this is what we find Mary and Joseph doing in today's Gospel, searching for the missing Jesus.

In their case, they make their way back to Jerusalem where they had been for the Passover celebration.

Before I go further with the missing Jesus sage, I should probably round off my own. Happily, it ended well.

As it turned out, I had left my wallet on the table at what around here is popularly known as “Cheap Chinese,” and someone had turned it in. Nothing was missing.

Mary and Joseph’s search for young Jesus likewise ended well. After making the three-day journey back to Jerusalem, they found Him . . . not idling His time away in a pool hall . . . not wandering the streets . . . not in the local detention center . . . but in the Temple engaging with the learned teachers.

I imagine Mary and Joseph had mixed emotions when they saw Him.

Their first instinct, no doubt, was to hug Him; the second, scold Him for not staying with the group.

Those of you who are parents have likely experienced those two emotions when dealing with your children.

In any case, the story we have before us this morning is very real and believable. It takes Jesus out of the realm of stained-glass and plants His feet firmly on the ground of this earth.

And this is where I am going with this: Jesus was just as much a person as you and I. If a briar pricked His finger, He bled red blood. If He stubbed his toe, He hurt and cried. If He got bad food, He got a tommy ache.

What I am saying is that He was no pretend person. This may seem a given to you and me, but in the early days of the Church there were

those who denied His full and complete humanity.

They did so because they believed the material order to be irrevocably evil. The goal was to get away from this dark realm of physicality, to fly free and be pure spirit. The high God, therefore, could not possibly have sullied Himself by taking on a real human body.

The name given to these people is **Docetics**.

The Greek word from which this word comes –*dokein* -- means “to seem.” According to the Docetics, Jesus only *seemed* to have a human body like ours.

But why is Jesus’ humanity important? Why does the realness of our Lord’s body matter?

The first reason is rather obvious. The realness of Jesus’ body takes Him out of the

realm of a fairy story character and grounds Him in real history.

The second is: His full humanity is essential to the fulfilment of His divine mission. That mission was to bridge the gap between God and man, heaven and earth.

According to Genesis, right from the start humans rebelled against their God and creator and tried to have it their own way.

A chasm resulted. The intimate relationship Adam and Eve shared with God in the garden ended. They went and hid themselves, we are told.

Later, according to the biblical story, man himself tried to bridge this chasm. He did so by attempting to build a tower to heaven. I am, of course, referring to the Tower of Babel story. But it didn't work. It ended in failure.

Many years later God Himself set about to do the same thing . . . to bridge the chasm between earth and heaven . . . to bring His estranged human creatures back to Himself . . . to restore lost fellowship.

Where man's attempt failed; God's succeeded.

Jesus was uniquely qualified to bridge this gap. Why and how so? /// Because He was both man and God.

Had He not been God, it would have been a bridge broken at the farther side.

Had He not been man it would have been a bridge broken at the nearer side.

Because He was and is both, reconciliation is possible and has been effected.

And so, back to where I started, Jesus being fully human was absolutely essential, and we see His human nature laid out before us in today's Gospel.

Jesus was subject to childhood experiences not that different from our own, including getting separated from His parents.

Moving on, Jesus' full and complete humanity is further affirmed in the verse just preceding where we picked up reading. Here we are told **“the child grew, and waxed strong in spirit.”**

Words of Cecil Frances Alexander's hymn come to mind:

**Day by day like us he grew,  
He was little, weak, and helpless,  
Tears and smiles like us he knew.**

But what does all this mean for you and me?  
/// Well, it works like this:

Because Jesus is fully human, He understands our plight as frail children of dust.

He knows what it is like to be cold, hungry . . . and yes separated from His earthly family.

He knows what it is like to sorrow over the death of a loved one. Remember how He wept at the tomb of Lazarus of Bethany.

He knows what it is like to be falsely accused and betrayed by a friend.

He knows what it is like to be tempted to achieve some great and lofty aim by improper means.

In short, because He was and is fully human, He is just the Saviour we humans need.



When you find yourself in any of the circumstances I have just mentioned, remember you are not alone. Jesus has been there. Bring your needs to Him, knowing He understands.

Hebrews 4:15 says: **“For we have not an high priest which cannot be touched with the feeling of our infirmities; but was in all points tempted like as we are, yet without sin.”**

Good news!

So far, I have focused primarily on Jesus’ humanity, but what about His divinity? /// It is not left behind in today’s Gospel.

His first words to be recorded in scripture are found in this passage. They are those He spoke to Mary and Joseph just after they had found Him in the Temple:

**“How is it that ye sought me? wist ye not that I must be about my Father's business?”**

In those days a boy around the age of 12 began his work as an apprentice learning His father's trade.

We have no reason to doubt Jesus did this with Joseph in the carpenter's shop of Nazareth. As one of our hymns says: **“Whose strong hands were skilled at the plane and the lathe.”**

But, in His words to Mary and Joseph, He was not speaking of His earthly father but of His Heavenly.

What we learn from His words here is that even at the age of 12 He had what theologians call a “faith awareness of vocation.”

How it came about we don't know. No doubt, it would grow and develop, but here we are given a glimpse of it even at age 12.

If Jesus were *only* human, He might understand our plight, but He could do nothing about it. Because He is God, He can.

He and He alone is able to forgive sins, banish death and open heaven to all believers.

As I said earlier, a Christ who is not God is bridge broke at the farther point.

Epiphany is about His glory showing forth. In this Epiphany story, something of that glory was revealed to the learned men in the Temple and those who stood around listening to them. Luke tells us: **“All that heard him were astonished at his understanding and answers.”**

It was also revealed to Mary and Joseph. As they heard His words about “being about His Father’s business”, they were reminded of what they already knew, He was no ordinary child.

On this occasion their eyes were opened further.

What happened to Mary and Joseph we pray will happen to us . . . that our eyes will be opened further to who Jesus is, why He came and what He has accomplished for us. And beyond that, what our mission is in the present.

In the words of a saint in the past:

**“Lord, grant that I may see thee more clearly, love thee more dearly, and follow thee more nearly.”**

May this be our prayer on this First Sunday after Epiphany.