

Epiphany 1 (2025)

It was Vacation Bible School.

We had finished our closing exercise for the day. Parents were arriving to pick up their children.

Those children who had no one to pick them up were getting into a van to be driven home.

One little boy who lived around the corner from the church, for a reason known only to himself, got into the van.

It was not long before his father arrived to pick him and his brother up. He was nowhere to be found. A mad search ensued. There was panic.

It was not long, however, before the driver of the van called and reported that she had an

extra little boy. The mystery was solved, the panic ended!

One can only imagine the panic that shot through Mary's heart when she realizes that her precocious 12-year-old boy was missing.

The same, no doubt, was true with Joseph and other family members travelling back to Nazareth following the annual Passover observance in Jerusalem.

This Passover was an especially important one for Jesus and his family. At age 12, a Jewish boy was on the cusp of becoming a son of the Law and taking upon himself its obligations.

For Mary and Joseph, thoughts about Jesus' new status must have quickly been cast aside when it was discovered He was missing. At this point only one thing mattered – finding Him!

One commentator mentions that in those days there were unscrupulous men who scouted for boys and others for slavery. With the influx of so many people into Jerusalem for the festival, it seems likely such men were out there on the streets plying their dastardly trade.

Perhaps, one thought that raced through Mary and Joseph's minds was that Jesus had been seized by one of these slave traders and was being carried off to who knows where.

Whatever their exact thoughts, it is certain they were in a state of panic.

Maybe you have been there? You were at a fair or carnival or some other place where there were lots of people, and you looked around for your child only to find him missing. If so, you know the panic of Mary and Joseph that day, as well as the relief they felt when He was found.

As we look closer at this account from Luke's Gospel, we find here a corrective for a way of thinking that plagues at least some modern readers of the Bible.

That way of thinking involves viewing the stories of the Bible as distant and otherworldly . . . as scenes from stained glass windows where everyone wears halos and has a holy glow.

The story we have before us this morning tells us otherwise. We are dealing with real people and real life situations.

The incident recorded in today's Gospel is precious because it is the only snapshot we have of Jesus in the years between His nativity and the beginning of His public ministry at age 30.

Someone has said that the boyhood of Jesus is like a walled garden from which we have been given but a single flower. We wish we had

more, but this is the only one we have been provided in the canonical scriptures.

There are no doubt many insights we can glean from today's Gospel, but I want to focus on just two. The first involves **our Lord's full and real humanity**.

He bled red blood; if someone stepped on His toe, He hurt and cried . . . and He grew and developed as any child does.

Let me hasten to say, His humanity takes nothing away from His divinity. Both are essential.

If Jesus came to bridge the gap between the finite and the Infinite, He had to be both man and God.

A bridge broken at either end is no bridge at all or at least a worthless one.

A 4th century Church Father, Gregory of Nazianzus, wrote: **“That which is not assumed is not healed.”**

Well, Jesus assumed our full humanity so He could make us whole head to foot . . . restore the divine image – the Imago Dei -- marred at the Fall.

There is a more immediate aspect of this assumption of human nature as well. Jesus' humanity enables us to bring our needs and cares to Him confident that He understands.

The writer of Hebrews turns the fact of our Lord's humanity into an invitation when he 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. Let us therefore come boldly unto the throne of grace, that we

may obtain mercy, and find grace to help in time of need (4:15,16).

What are your needs and cares the morning? Bring them to the divine / human Saviour. He understands as no one else.

But there is a second insight we can glean from today's Gospel. This one has to do with **the seriousness with which Mary and Joseph approached their religious responsibilities.**

The trek from Nazareth to Jerusalem was a costly and arduous one. It took about ten days, yet they did not let that deter them from making the trip.

Technically it was only the menfolk who were required to go for the major festivals, yet they did it as family.

Who can doubt that they observed attending the synagogue at Nazareth with the same diligence?

In Luke 4:16, we read: **“And he [Jesus] came to Nazareth, where he had been brought up: and, as his custom was, he went into the synagogue on the sabbath day.”**

Notice in particular the phrase “as his custom was.”

From whom did Jesus acquire this ‘custom’?
/// From Mary and Joseph.

I want to suggest further, that the instruction He received at the synagogue did not end when the family got home for Sabbath lunch. It seems likely to have continued throughout the week.

This instruction, along with the special relationship Jesus enjoyed with the Father in heaven as the incarnate Son, made it possible

for Him to engage as He did with the learned rabbis in the Temple.

The instruction He received at home was set on fire from on high. So much so that the learned teachers in the Temple were amazed at His understanding and answers.

A few years ago, while at summer school in Oxford, a lecturer invited those present to ask questions. One woman raised her hand and asked: **“When did the decline in faith in Britain begin?”**

His answer: **“When mothers ceased to pass on the faith at home.”**

If we accept this man’s precise as true, it stands to reason that the same is the cause for the decline in religious faith and practice in this country.

The demands of modern life, especially those made on working mothers, makes it very difficult to do what mothers before them had done.

Susanna Wesley comes to mind. She home-schooled the surviving ten of her nineteen children. John and Charles Wesley, leaders of the Methodist movement of the eighteenth century, were among her students.

Who is to say that her ministry was not equal to that of her husband, an Anglican clergyman, and her sons John and Charles who would take the Gospel to thousands?

Instruction at home remains important today.

Children are not going to get it in government-run schools, even though in our part of the country, I am happy to say, many of our teachers are practicing Christians. They do their best to model the Christian faith.

Nor is the church able to do this job perfectly one day a week on Sunday.

For that reason, every home must be a school. Every parent, grandparent and anyone else who cares for children must do their part, as did Mary and Joseph and Susanna Wesley.

In summary, in today's Gospel we are reminded of our Lord's full and complete humanity – He's one of us and understand our challenges -- along with the importance of instruction in the faith in the home.

What is clear in this passage is that Mary and Joseph were faithful. Their understanding may at times have been lacking, but they did their best. May we learn from them and do our best.

The words Jesus spoken to Mary as a gentle rebuke – “I must be about my Father’s business” – give us our marching orders.

Let me challenge you (even as I challenge myself) to look for opportunities for doing just that – being about the Father’s business -- in the coming week . . . at home, at work, at school, at the grocery store, at the gym, wherever you are.

Seek those opportunities and they will come. Ask and they will be given. And you will be blessed and a blessing.

