

## Epiphany 1 (2023)

The birth of a baby, in most cases, is a time of great celebration.

Cards are sent Gifts are given. Everyone wants to see and hold the new baby.

Older women are generous in giving advice. Everything from the importance of burping the baby after feeding to when and what solid food should be introduced is passed on to the young mother

If the parents are convinced churchmen (and in some cases even if they are not), plans are made to have the baby baptized.

Many of you have experienced what I am talking about.

I remember one member of this church, a former Senior Warden, describing what he felt the first time he held his first-born son and looked into his eyes. It was a moment he will never forget. He was holding and looking into the eyes of ‘bone of his bone, flesh of his flesh.’ He was a worker together with God in carrying on the human race.

Babies are cuddly and precious, but no one wants a son or daughter to remain one.

Those of you who are parents probably have somewhere tucked away one of those books in which major moments in a child’s development are recorded . . . when he got his first tooth, took his first step and the like.

Babies don’t stay babies. The same was true with Jesus. In the words of one of our hymns: “Day by day, like us, he grew.” In the words of today’s Gospel: “He increased in wisdom and stature and in favour with God and man.”

Everyone – or at least most – love Christmas, but we dare not stop with the bare facts of the birth of a Child. We must go on to where this story is pointing.

If the nativity were the end of the story, nothing much would have changed in our tired, old, dark world.

The door of the prison into which humans had been entering as long as anyone could remember – the prison of death – would remain fast-closed . . . with everyone going in and no one coming out.

Philosophers would continue to ponder and debate the meaning and purpose of life, but there would be no definitive word from a Higher Authority.

The hope held out by such prophets as Isaiah in the Hebrew scriptures . . . the hope for a Saviour . . . the hope for a world put right . . . would be at best a hope deferred.

That would be the situation if the story ended with the birth of cute baby. But, it did not.

No, the infant Jesus grew, developed and His fame spread abroad.

The Wise Men, those mysterious figures from the East, came and worshiped. They were in all probability gentiles, non-Jews. Their coming symbolized that the mission of Jesus extended beyond ethnic Israel.

God's plan, going all the way back to Abraham, was to raise up one from the patriarch's line through whom all the families of the earth would be blessed.

Later in Isaiah 60, we read: **“The Gentiles shall come to thy light, and kings to the brightness of thy rising.”**

And that is what we see happening with the coming of the Wise Men.

But it was not just to the Gentiles to whom Jesus was revealed. He came first to His own nation and people. And thus, in today's Gospel, we find Him as a 12-year-old boy being revealed to the teachers in the Temple.

In this Gospel we are given the sole snapshot of the interval between our Lord's infancy and the beginning of His public ministry at around age 30.

This lack of information of Jesus' early years in the canonical Gospels has been supplemented by a number of fanciful accounts.

One recorded in the “Infancy Gospel of Thomas” has young Jesus raising a playmate who had fallen from the upper story of a house and giving him back to His greatly relieved parents.

Also, a number of legends have arisen. One is that as a boy Jesus travelled with his uncle Joseph of Arimathea to the West Country of England. Joseph was supposed to have been a tin merchant and a seafaring man.

With that said, all we know for sure about these so-called 'silent years' is what is recorded in today's Gospel. This is the one snapshot we are given.

This is truly a significant passage for at least two reasons, First, we have here Jesus' first recorded words. Secondly, in these words we get a glimpse of His own self-understanding.

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

we hear Him say.

No doubt, this self-understanding was appropriate for His age and grew and developed as he matured. Even so, there it was at age 12.

More than that, we discover that Jesus used this self-understanding, this faith awareness of vocation (a term theologians have coined), wisely.

Allow me to expand on that thought. Jesus balanced His responsibilities to God above with those He owed His human parents.

In the statement I have just quoted, He sees His highest allegiance to His Father above. But, at the end of this passage, we are told that He returned with Mary and Joseph to Nazareth and was subject to them.

Surely, there is something to we can learn from young Jesus in this respect. By virtue of our baptism, we are citizens of heaven. God is our Father. Our ultimate allegiance belongs to Him. But, even so, we have responsibilities below. We are citizens of earth.

For the young mother, that means changing diapers, heating formula and holding a bottle.

For the countryman that means getting up early, milking the cows, feeding the livestock and tending the crops.

For those who work in town, that means getting to work on time and doing your best at whatever you have been assigned.

For the university student, that means going to the library when you really want to go out with your friends, have a beer and party.

For the Rector that means meditating on the scriptures each week and pulling together a sermon, visiting the sick and even at times taking on a civic role.

For those who are retired, that means making good use of the time at your disposal. No time for rocking chairs and hammocks, you still have a contribution to make!

Citizens of earth, but also citizens of heaven. As such, we have dual responsibilities and are to carry these out in the same spirit as Jesus:

To witness while we work . . . to encourage and show respect . . . to be cheerful and stay on task . . . to bring heaven down to earth.

Societies has three major institutions which undergird and cause them to flourish: the civil state, the school and in Christian lands, the Church.

Undermine these, and society comes apart. It's chaos come again. No shots need to be fired to destroy a civilization.

All three appear to be under attack at this time in our own land. What can we do?

First, remember Christ has been born. The true King has landed. History has turned a corner and can never go back.

Secondly, keep before you the fact of D-Day. By D-Day, I mean the battle that determines the outcome of the war.

Our D-Day took place on the cross. There, death, the greatest enemy of all, was defeated, as witnessed by the empty tomb on Easter morning.

Thirdly and finally, remember that following D-Day there was quite a lot of mopping up to do. The guns did not go silent all at once.

And that, my friends, is where we find ourselves. The Kingdom has come and comes. The battle has been won and must be won.

Our calling, both as individuals and as the parish church, is not to leave the babe of Bethlehem in the manger but to bring the story forward . . . to balance the responsibilities of heaven and earth (just as young Jesus did) . . . not to lose hope . . . to be light.

The Christmas tree has come down, but the story begun in Luke 2 continues. Resolve to do your part to keep it expanding and moving forward.

Christ is born. Glorify Him!