

Epiphany I 2017
Sermon – Saint Joseph Parish
Father John Altberg
Luke 2.41



“I don’t get it...show me something I can really understand...tell me about God.” NOT an uncommon question.

Sixteen years ago Fathers Hobbs and Looney were ordained to the diaconate. Our late Bishop Cahoon made the profound point in their ordination sermon – underscoring the instruction manual of Epiphany...clergy job one is fulfilling the simple request, “Show me Jesus”...

All of us (not just the clergy) frequently encounter the question...who is God? Then it’s as if everyone is suddenly from Missouri...for the answers are often punctuated with the responsive challenge **Show me...**

The sharp challenge tends to cause some shifting - often stammering, discomfort...!

Take heart...Epiphany is about the pragmatic growth and realization of the total person of Jesus...it’s precisely about answering the question. The season concentrates on the understandable, pragmatic humanity of Jesus...God as the human being among us...the person we come to know in the Gospels.

Because responding to the ‘go tell’ instruction is not limited to the clergy...everyone is called to involvement...all of us received the message at Christmas...Epiphany equips us with information to be used in personal evangelism – *personal telling* - remember those Angels...the ones who showed up in Bethlehem telling shepherds...

Today’s Gospel narrative provides a ‘who is’ for us to tell...Jesus growing up as a young boy - behaving in completely predictable youthful ways...wandering away from his parents, engaging in precocious discussion with adults who are fascinated by how smart he seems to be and then appearing something close to indifferent when confronted with Mary and Joseph’s apparent panic before they finally caught up with him.

The formalized narrative of the King James Bible never seems to quite fit the scene...I seriously doubt the discussion was all that

calm! It also seems slightly analogous to the stories we hear about families who drive all the way to the next gas stop before discovering that someone between the age seven and fifteen is missing from the back seat in which they were sleeping at the last stop!

The Gospel clearly illuminates why today is often referred to as Holy Family Sunday...it provides the only insight into the years of Jesus growing up and living an essentially normal existence in the home of Mary and Joseph. God provides a family setting to teach the order and reality of life...albeit not always perfect in that, like all families raising children, even Mary and Joseph had some scary and interesting moments.

There is no day on which the Church teaches us more about the very natural way God planted himself in our midst as a human being than on this day...there is nothing at all abstract about the manner in which the story plays out. A very real family with very real opportunities of a very precocious young boy on their very own hands!

We do not know a lot more about Jesus and his earthly family years. The narrative of Jesus and Mary and Joseph ends with the story that we heard today. Undoubtedly Mary told Luke much more but it simply did not get written down and we are left to fill in the blanks for ourselves. From St Matthew we know that Joseph was a carpenter in Nazareth so we can pretty readily assume that Jesus spent at least some time working with Joseph in the business...the Nazareth Cabinet Company? But any real information about his growing up beyond the age of twelve is left to speculation.

The point of today’s study is Jesus was a fully functional person just as we are, he had a “normal childhood” and grew into adulthood quite naturally.

God delivered on his promise to make it easier to understand who he is and show himself to us...today tells the evolution of that process. Reflect upon this and you’ll find new meaning and easier understanding as the story unfolds...that’s why God did what he did, to make things easy!

