

## **I EPIPHANY 2020**

**SERMON – SAINT JOSEPH PARISH**

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**ROM. 12.1 ST. LUKE 2.41**



*“Child missing...contact Jerusalem Police at the number below”...might have read the Amber Alert sign outside the city had they existed when Jesus went missing in today’s Gospel.*

Any of us who have seen an Amber Alert sign while driving on the freeway can only swallow hard, and say a quiet prayer the missing child will be found safe and returned unharmed to the family.

When I was eight years old, I wandered off to look at all the toys in the big Sears store near my house. To get to the store, I had to cross a railroad track and a busy major street. When my mother discovered I was missing, she asked the neighbors to help look for me. When she found me, safe and unharmed, she gave me the look only she could give...and made me promise never to do that again. I didn’t. Lesson learned!

This morning’s Gospel about Jesus’ unauthorized absence is the only event of the later childhood of Jesus mentioned in a gospel. The Holy Family traveled from their home in Nazareth to Jerusalem every year for the Passover. It was a distance of about 70 miles and would have taken several days. They would have traveled with their extended family and friends...for safety reasons...and because it’s more fun to travel in a group.

When it was time to return home to Nazareth...Mary and Joseph had traveled about a day’s journey before they discovered Jesus was missing. Jesus was 12 years old...almost a man by standards of the time. Mary and Joseph thought he was off doing his own thing with friends his own age or with other family members or friends.

We know this story about Jesus has a happy ending and the follow-up story on the Jerusalem Morning News program...had TV existed...might have reported a banner headline about the missing Jesus being found safe and unharmed in the Temple and reunited with his ecstatic...and perhaps just a bit upset parents.

When Mary asks Jesus why he put Joseph and her through such an ordeal, worrying them, causing them to fear the worst, he doesn’t say, “Gee mom. I’m sorry I upset you. I guess I just wasn’t thinking. It won’t happen again.” Instead, he says, “Why were you looking for me. Didn’t you know I have to be busy in my Father’s house?”

Jesus wasn’t being disrespectful when he told his parents they should not have been looking for him and should have known where he was. Jesus the adolescent boy was saying he knew who he was and that he was on a mission from his Father. The Temple was the ideal place to start his mission. He tried to reassure his parents not to worry about him and his work, but they did not understand what he meant, at least not then.

The epiphany...the striking appearance...in the Gospel is what Jesus reveals about himself to the lawyers and teachers in the Temple...to his parents...and to us when he says he has to be in his Father’s house. Jesus’ status as the promised Messiah and God’s Son was confirmed not only at his baptism and his Transfiguration...but from the very beginning of his life. Jesus knew from an early age his special relationship to God the Father might override his family ties.

The question we all want answered is what was Jesus up to from the time he returned to Nazareth with his parents when he was twelve years old and the time he began his public ministry after his baptism, when he was thirty years old. Did Jesus take any more unauthorized trips? Probably not!

Saint Luke tells us that when Jesus returned to Nazareth with his parents he was obedient to them. He knew God gave Mary and Joseph authority over him, and he was willing to submit to that authority until the time came for him to complete his mission.

The Gospel concludes by telling us “Mary treasured all these things in her heart.” We also treasure “these things” in our hearts...we begin to see more clearly what our own missions are...they are treasures in their own right...to bring others to Jesus.

