

I Epiphany 2021
Sermon – Saint Joseph Parish
Father Craig Looney
Rom. 12.1-5 St. Luke 2.41-52



Mary and Joseph looked forward to their annual pilgrimage to Jerusalem to celebrate Passover. According to the Book of Exodus... they had a duty to try to celebrate the three great festivals...Passover, Pentecost and Tabernacles...in Jerusalem.

The distance from Nazareth to Jerusalem is about 70 miles. It would have taken the Holy Family about 7 days to make the trip. They would have walked...trains and buses didn't exist. They would have traveled with friends and relatives during the day...it was dangerous to travel at night. They would have camped out under the stars...Holiday Inn wasn't around yet either.

This trip started out as usual. Mary and Joseph were happy to get away from Nazareth for a few weeks. Jesus was growing up...this gave him a chance to hang out with friends his own age. Everyone had a good time at the Passover Festival and now it was time to start back home.

The Gospel tells us Mary and Joseph had traveled one day into the return trip home to Nazareth when they discovered Jesus was missing. They frantically searched for him...hoping he was with friends or relatives. It was a parent's worst nightmare...especially for Mary. Where was Jesus?

We can only imagine what was going through the minds of Mary and Joseph as they returned to Jerusalem as fast as they could. The Gospel tells us they spent another three days looking for him in the City...there were still many people there after the Passover. They found him in the Temple listening to the religion teachers and asking them questions. Luke tells us "all who heard him were amazed at his intelligent answers."

Mary and Joseph had a few questions of their own and they wanted answers. They wanted to know why Jesus stayed behind and had them worried out of their wits something had happened to him. Jesus doesn't say, "Mom, I'm sorry I had you and dad worried." He doesn't say, "I'm a big boy now, Nazareth is boring, I want to be where the action is." What he says to them is...astounding!

Jesus tells his parents they shouldn't have been worried about him...they should have known all along where he would be...going about his Father's business...in his Father's house...in the Temple.

Jesus isn't being rude or dismissive toward his parents. His answer...that he has to be going about his Father's business in his Father's house...makes it very clear he knew exactly who he was and what his mission was...the adolescent boy Jesus was becoming a man.

Luke tells us Mary and Joseph didn't understand his answer. That doesn't mean they didn't know who Jesus was...God's Son. It means they had to let the almost adult Jesus grow into the man he would become...they couldn't hold on to the little boy Jesus any longer. Their lives would change...they weren't certain how...but Luke tells us Mary, "treasured all these things in her heart."

The Epiphany part of the Gospel is in what Jesus reveals about himself to his parents and ultimately 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...but from the very beginning of his life. Jesus knew that his special relationship to God the Father might override his family ties.

Saint Luke tells us when Jesus returned to Nazareth with his parents he was obedient to them. He and his parents would have made many more pilgrimages to Jerusalem...but he didn't go missing again. Jesus knew he was God's Son, but he also knew the authority Mary and Joseph had over him...an authority given to them by God...and he was willing to submit to their authority until the time came for him to complete his mission.

Epiphany can be a time for us to discover through prayer what our mission is...experiencing our own epiphanies...and in the words of the Collect..."to perceive and know what things we ought to do, and also have grace and power to fulfill the same."

