

I Epiphany 2023

Sermon – Saint Joseph Parish

Father Craig Looney

Romans 12.1-5 Saint Luke 2.41-52



This morning's Gospel has all the elements of the lead story on the 6 o'clock News: **Twelve Year Old Boy Missing...frantic parents in desperate search for boy in crowded city.**

Missing persons stories catch our attention. When children are involved...it tugs at our hearts. Perhaps we say a silent prayer for the child's safe return.

Several years ago a mother and her ten-year-old daughter visited with me one day at the church. When it was time for them to leave the little girl decided to trick her mom and hide. We spent 15 minutes looking for her and were about to call the police when she reappeared and said, "Surprise!" The little girl probably never tricked her mom like that again.

One of the questions we often ask is what was Jesus up to during his childhood. Did he play games with the neighbor kids? We know from the Gospels he helped his dad in the family carpentry business. What was Jesus like while he was growing up?

The Epiphany Season is about the striking appearances Jesus makes...God reveals Jesus to us for who he really is. This morning's Gospel gives us the only glimpse of the life of the adolescent Jesus. The Bible doesn't give us any information about Jesus' life from the time he was two years old until the day he went missing.

Jesus was born in Bethlehem but the family home was in Nazareth...about 70 miles from Jerusalem. Like most families who were able to make the trip, the Holy Family traveled every year to Jerusalem for the Passover Festival. The trip would have taken them about a week...traveling only during daytime. The Gospel tells us Mary and Joseph were one day into their journey home to Nazareth when they realized Jesus was not with them. They might have said something like, "I thought he was with...." only to find out he wasn't. Time to turn around and go back to Jerusalem.

The city was still crowded with people and it shouldn't surprise us it took Mary and Joseph

three days to find Jesus...teaching the teachers in the Temple. Joseph, always the dutiful husband, lets Mary do all the talking. When she asks Jesus to explain why he has put them through such an ordeal...and how they spent three days looking for him...Jesus gives them a surprising answer.

Luke tells us Jesus asked his parents why it took them so long to find him. He tells them they should have known right away where to look for him...in his Father's house...doing God's work. They shouldn't have been worried about him.

The epiphany...the striking appearance...in 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.

Jesus wasn't being disrespectful of his parents when he told them they should not have been wasted three days looking for him. Jesus the adolescent boy was saying he knew who he was and that he was on a mission from his Father.

Jesus was trying to reassure his parents not to worry about him and his work. He was doing what God wanted him to do. They did not understand what he meant, at least not then. Luke goes on to say Mary kept all of these things in her heart. That's what mothers and fathers do...they love their children from the heart.

In the Epistle, Saint Paul tells us we are also supposed to be true to our calling. His urgent appeal is we offer ourselves as living sacrifices to God, dedicating ourselves to him and pleasing him in everything we do.

Jesus knew obeying his parents was also part of God's plan. But wouldn't it be fun to know what Mary and Joseph said to him on the way home. We will have to wait until Jesus makes his final epiphany, his final striking appearance, at the end of time, to get the whole story.

And it should be quite a story!

