

I Epiphany 2025

Sermon – Saint Joseph Parish

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Romans 12.1-5 St. Luke 2.41-52

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What exactly is an *epiphany*? In the secular world, an *epiphany* is the light bulb going off over a person's head, when they suddenly figured something out on their own, such as a scientific breakthrough. We could say the medical professionals who developed Covid-19 vaccinations had "epiphanies" that helped end the pandemic.

The Epiphany Season is about God showing himself to us in the manifestations, or striking appearances Jesus makes. These epiphanies, or striking appearances, reveal to us who Jesus is...God's only-begotten Son. They are revelations from God...and not things we could figure out on our own. God provides the light bulb to reveal himself to us!

This first epiphany Jesus made was as the fragile flame we talked about during Advent...the baby boy born in a barn on Christmas Day. With the exception of the Presentation of Christ in the Temple when he was 40 days old, the Gospels are silent about Jesus' early childhood. Wouldn't we like to know more about what Jesus was like growing up?

This morning's Gospel is the only record we have of Jesus the adolescent boy. Father Massey Shepherd, author of the *Oxford American Prayer Book Commentary*, calls today's Gospel a story full of human interest. Parents who have raised young children can readily identify with the anxiety and fear Mary and Joseph must have experienced when they discovered Jesus missing.

Jesus was born in Bethlehem about 6 miles from Jerusalem. However, Joseph set up his carpentry business and made the family home in Nazareth. The Gospel tells us the Holy family traveled every year from Nazareth to Jerusalem...a distance of about 70 miles...to celebrate Passover. They would have traveled with family and friends, during daylight hours. The trip would have taken them about 7 days.

Mary and Joseph started the trip home and had traveled a full day...maybe 10 miles...when they tried to find Jesus. He wasn't with their friends and relatives. Where was he? What could have happened to him? Mary and Joseph must have been filled with worry and fear...God's Son...their son...had gone missing!

Mary and Joseph decided to return to Jerusalem. It would not have been safe for them to travel alone...they probably joined a group heading that way. They spent another full day getting back to Jerusalem...and then three more days looking for Jesus...until they found him in the Temple...teaching the teachers...amazing them with his questions and answers.

Mary asked Jesus why he had done this to them and caused them to worry about him. Their worry and anxiety are quickly replaced by relief at finding Jesus safe. But Jesus doesn't give Mary and Joseph the answer they expected. Instead, he asks them why they *had* to look for him. He is not being disrespectful. He is saying they should have known where to find him...in God's house...doing God's work. They did not understand what he meant...at least not yet.

The Gospel doesn't give us any more information about what happened next. Did Mary and Joseph send him to his room without dinner? Probably not! Did they have a long chat with him about not scaring them out of their wits again? Perhaps! We are simply told he went back to Nazareth with them and was obedient to them.

We begin to understand the Epiphany message...that Jesus is God's Son and the Second Person of the Holy Trinity...when we see him as the adolescent human boy who worried Mary and Joseph when he stayed behind in Jerusalem. It's also not hard for us to imagine he told them he wouldn't worry them again.

It was God's will Jesus fulfill his mission to redeem mankind...but at the right time. There would be many more epiphanies...striking appearances...Jesus would make that showed God's power and love to the world. It was also God's will Jesus go home with Mary and Joseph and do some growing up.

Our friend Saint Paul tells us in the Epistle we also have to do some growing up. We should avoid conforming ourselves to the world's standards. Instead, we are to offer ourselves to him as a living sacrifice and let him transform us from within so we are able to do his will. We can then become epiphanies...striking appearances...showing Christ to the world.

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