

Christmas 2 / January 2, 2022

Luke 2:40-52

“After three days they found Him in the temple.”

Looking for Jesus.

Our gospel provides one of the few insights to Jesus' life before He was baptized and began His public ministry at the age of thirty years. We know little about His childhood, except that at a certain point within the first two years, King Herod became aware of His birth and tried to kill Him. An angel warned Joseph in a dream and he fled with Mary and the child to Egypt, where they remained until Herod's death. What was a matter of personal survival, served a theological purpose. God brought Israel out of Egypt to make His name known in the world. God brought Jesus out of Egypt, in accordance with the words of the prophet Hosea, “Out of Egypt I have called my Son,” to fulfill Israel's purpose and bring salvation to the ends of the earth.

The gospel writers don't tell us what happened during the holy family's time in Egypt, how long they stayed, or if they went anywhere else. There are many pious legends. One is that they travelled as far as ancient England. The legend is preserved in popular English hymns, including the Christmas Carol, “I saw three Ships Come sailing in on Christmas Day.” The gospel writers do not provide much information about Jesus' life before the age of thirty, because they are only concerned with the purpose for which Jesus came into the world, to earn our salvation by fulfilling the law through His perfect obedience and paying the penalty for our sins through His sacrificial death on the cross.

Jesus came to proclaim God's favour. As an adult, He claimed the words of Isaiah, saying, “The Spirit of the Lord is upon me, because He has anointed me to proclaim good news to the poor...liberty to the captives...recovering of sight to the blind, to set at liberty those who are oppressed, to proclaim the season of the Lord's favour.” He came to set His people free from bondage to sin, the tyranny of the devil and the condemnation of eternal death. He came to establish the righteous reign of God on earth, which begins in the human heart through faith in Him as our God and Saviour! Looking for God? Looking for His grace and favour? Looking for His salvation? Then look for Jesus! We find God's grace and favour in Jesus our Saviour. We find Jesus in the gospel of His love.

Our gospel relates an incident that happened at Passover when Jesus was twelve years old. His parents lost track of Him and travelled a day's journey homeward, before they realized He wasn't with either of them, or among their company. We can imagine their horror. We can appreciate their anxiety, as they spent three days looking for Him in Jerusalem. We can sense their exasperation and anger upon finally finding Him in the last place they looked, the temple. It's easy to focus on those aspects of the story and miss the main point. The point is not so much that they lost track of Jesus, or their anguish looking for Him. The point is where they found Him and what He was doing.

They found Him in the temple. The temple expressed God's presence with Israel. Everything the temple expressed about God's presence with His people, Jesus embodies! Jesus is God with His people. He is Immanuel, God with us! His body is the true temple. Sacrifice was offered in the Holy of Holies for the sins of the people. Jesus is the true Holy of Holies. He sacrificed His holy body on the cross for our sins. Before He was crucified, He said of His body, “Destroy this temple and in three days I will raise it up.” In Him we receive forgiveness. He was raised for our justification. He brings us into God's presence in peace. Mary and Joseph found Jesus in His Father's house. We find Him in His Father's house. He is the Lord's House. He is God with His people in forgiveness and peace.

It is easy to focus on Joseph and Mary. They lose Jesus and do not know where to find Him. We can question their understanding of His purpose and mission. We can wonder why the temple was the last place they looked, rather than the first. However, this gospel is not a critique of Joseph and Mary's parenting, or an expose of their understanding. This gospel is about Jesus; who He is, what He does, what He came to do and where we find Him. Jesus is the child of Mary and Joseph, but first and foremost He is the Eternal Son of God. Where would you look for Jesus? He was where the Son of God would be, in His Father's house. Jesus was taken aback that His parents hadn't at least suspected He would be found in the temple. He asked incredulously, “Why were you looking for me? Did you not know that I must be in my Father's house?” Looking for Jesus? Look for Him in His Father's house, where believers gather in His Name.

In case anyone might think He was simply a highly motivated religious adolescent; the second point refers to what He was doing in the temple. He was teaching in His Father's house, asking questions that amazed the teachers and giving answers that astounded them. It's amazing that a twelve-year-old would have such understanding of the scriptures and insight as to their meaning. It's astounding that the teachers in the temple accorded Him such respect. They gave Him this respect, because they were amazed at His understanding, His insights, the questions He asked and the answers He gave. This foreshadows the powerful and profound effect His words would have on people eighteen years later, when He began to proclaim the kingdom of God and call people to repent.

At the conclusion of the Sermon on the Mount, Matthew says, "The crowds were astonished at His teaching, for He was teaching them as one who has authority, and not as their scribes." He spoke God's word with authority, because He is the word of God in human flesh. He is the voice of the prophets. In Revelation it says, "testimony to Jesus is the spirit of prophecy." He is the fulfillment of their words. The author of Hebrews said, "Long ago, at many times and in many ways, God spoke to us by the prophets, but in these last days, He has spoken to us by His Son." Looking for Jesus? We find Him in His word!

Don't wait until you lose Him to look for Him. It is good to look for Jesus at all times. Isaiah sang, "Seek the Lord while He may be found; call upon Him while He is near." Where do we find Jesus? We find Him in the same place Mary and Joseph found Him, in His Father's house, the church. We find Him in God's word, the Holy Scriptures. We find Him in the sacrifice of His cross; baptism into His death and resurrection. We find Him in the words of absolution, giving forgiveness and peace. We find Him in the sacrament of His holy body and precious blood, given and shed for the forgiveness of our sins, a foretaste of the feast of life to come. If we can't find Him, it's because like Joseph and Mary, we are simply looking in the wrong places. Jesus is not hiding. He's here in plain view; in His word, in the sacraments, within and among His people!

We find Jesus in the gathering of believers. Jesus said "Where two or three are gathered in my name I am there with them." Looking for Jesus? Remember those words! We find Jesus in the gathering of believers. The church is the body of Jesus on earth. Jesus upholds our faith, nourishes it and makes it firm to endure the trials of life through the prayers, worship and fellowship of the church. The author of Hebrews speaks of the benefits of meeting together and warns of the danger of failing to meet as His body, saying, "Let us consider how to stir one another up to good works, not neglecting to meet together, as is the habit of some, but encouraging one another, and all the more as you see the Day drawing near." When as few as two or three gather in His name, Jesus is with us in a special, profound and powerful way to stir us up to good works, encourage our faith and empower us to believe.

Looking for Jesus? We find Jesus where He has promised to be: In the word, the sacraments and the fellowship of believers. When we look in those places, we will always find Him. God bless us with His Spirit that we may always seek His face and find His grace in Jesus. In Jesus' Name. Amen