

Sunday December 26, 2021

Feast of the Holy Family

Parishioner Reflection

By: Jonathan Tucker

Today's gospel reading - Luke 2: 41-52 - ends with good news; *Jesus is Found After an Intensive Search.*

Luke 2 is the only account of Jesus' childhood recorded in the gospels. Today's reading takes place when Jesus was just aged 12. So, what is to be made of the account of this child?

On the surface, it appears that Jesus was no different from any other child of his age; the cause for concern, embarrassment and frustration for his parents, at times. In verse 41, Jesus and his parents travel to Jerusalem for Passover, as was their annual custom. Following its conclusion, his parents left while he remained behind without their knowledge or permission. After having discovered him missing, Mary and Joseph began a search lasting days, ending back in the temple, in Jerusalem. They located him *sitting among the teachers, listening...and asking...questions.* They [the teachers] *were amazed at his understanding and his answers.* His parents were not so. Relieved to have found him, but, frustrated, exasperated and a little embarrassed, his mother asked him, *Child, why have you treated us like this? Look, your father and I have been searching for you in great anxiety.* His reply? *Why were you searching for me?* And the clincher; *Did you not know that I must be in my Father's house?* Put another way, *This is my real home, and you're not my real father!* is how some, watching this exchange, could have interpreted Jesus' response. As insolence. That was my thought at first glance. Even Jesus went through the rebellious phases of adolescence and was the source of tension for his parents, at times. But then Luke added this observation; *They [Joseph and Mary] did not understand what he said to them.* And therein lies the clue; that there is more going on here than appears on the surface.

St. Luke used chapter 2 to summarize Jesus' first 30 years of life. The stories inserted include the Shepherd's account, Simeon's proclamation, Anna's witness and the *teachers*, in verse 47. Each of these occurrences are marked by wonder and amazement. Contrast those reactions to Joseph and Mary's reaction when they finally find Jesus in the temple. It's here where *my* heart was provoked by the details of this encounter.

Earlier in the chapter (v. 18), Luke recorded that *all* - which included his parents - *who heard...what the shepherds told them...were amazed*. Later, in verse 33, Luke writes, *And the child's father and mother were amazed at what was being said about him, by Simeon; that He was destined for the falling and the rising of many in Israel*. Then the testimony of Anna the prophetess, who *began to praise God and to speak about the one to all who were looking for the redemption of Jerusalem*. There had been dozens of incidences in the 12 short years of Jesus' life that his parents had seen; the care and providence of God in their lives. But now, while Jesus was missing, those experiences of His closeness seemed farthest from his parent's minds.

At times, the fears (or distractions) of life can mask as reality. Mary's *needs* became more important than her son's. *Child, why have you treated us like this?*, she asked. We're I to have been in this same circumstance, this could have been my response. I identify with her reaction. Even as I reflect back over this past week there have been times when fear and anxiety took charge despite decades of God's continued presence. And so with the question, *Why were you searching for me?*, Jesus began to penetrate the fear that had distorted their minds. (After all, in normal circumstances, what parent would chastise their child for wanting to learn about their Heavenly Father?) But even after Jesus' question is asked, Luke writes, *they did not understand what he said to them*. But, often I take for granted God's presence and protection, His love and salvation from myself. This was Jesus's own parent's experience which should give all pause. How quickly we humans can forget.

(This passage or these comments should not be understood to mean that those called to be parents should not be good and caring parents, incidentally. That is not the point being made or questioned.)

Did you not know that I must be about my Father's interests? Jesus displays his openness to his heavenly father with his second question to his mother; *Did you not know that I must be about my Father's interests?* Whether the days spent in Jerusalem added to his own knowledge of his father or challenged the minds of the teachers with whom he sat, or both, Luke doesn't reveal. But the account indicates that *all who heard him were amazed at his understanding and his answers*. It is his openness to his heavenly Father that I find challenging. In my natural self, I find myself wanting to hide from God rather than to be open to Him and be about His interests. However, through the gentle prompting of the Spirit over time, I have found myself praying for transformation into the person God created me to be.

He went down with them...and was obedient to them. In spite of their frailty and lack of understanding, Luke records that *he went down with them* [his parents]...*and was*

obedient to them. Taken in the context of Jesus, being obedient to Mary and Joseph, as their child, is one thing. But cast against the backdrop of angels announcing the birth of *a Savior who is the Messiah*, as Luke describes Jesus as, is quite another. What a beautiful picture Luke describes for his readers. Emmanuel - God with us - in other words, *went down with them and was obedient to them.* God submissive to his own creation, was another example of the lengths to which he was willing to go to rescue humanity; you and me!

His mother treasured all these things in her heart. For the second time in Luke 2, this phrase appears; *His mother treasured all these things in her heart.* There had been a tension between her and her son. She had forgotten that Jesus was different in a time of fear and frustration. Yet, God was gracious to her. She was once again able to see this and other events from their true perspective and come to value them. No surprise then that this was an event that she chose to share and which Luke decided to record. It prompted me to ask myself: What are those experiences and encounters with God I most treasure? As we reflect on Emmanuel - God with us - this advent season perhaps this question will search your heart also.