

Sermon- Epiphany1-2021

The Holy Gospel is written in the 2nd Chapter of Luke beginning at the 41st verse

Glory be to thee, O Lord

⁴¹ Now Jesus' parents went to Jerusalem every year at the feast of the passover. ⁴² And when he- Jesus- was twelve years old, they went up to Jerusalem after the custom of the feast.

⁴³ And when they had fulfilled the days, as they returned, the child Jesus tarried behind in Jerusalem; and Joseph and his mother knew not of it. ⁴⁴ But they, supposing him to have been in the company, went a day's journey; and they sought him among their kinsfolk and acquaintance. ⁴⁵ And when they found him not, they turned back again to Jerusalem, seeking him.

⁴⁶ And it came to pass, that after three days they found him in the temple, sitting in the midst of the doctors, both hearing them, and asking them questions.

⁴⁷ And all that heard him were astonished at his understanding and answers.

⁴⁸ And when they saw him, they were amazed: and his mother said unto him, Son, why hast thou thus dealt with us? behold, thy father and I have sought thee sorrowing.

⁴⁹ And he said unto them, How is it that ye sought me? wist ye not that I must be about my Father's business? ⁵⁰ And they understood not the saying which he spake unto them.

⁵¹ And he went down with them, and came to Nazareth, and was subject unto them: but his mother kept all these sayings in her heart. ⁵² And Jesus increased in wisdom and stature, and in favour with God and man.

The Gospel of the Lord
Praise be to thee, O Christ

Opening Prayer

We thank thee, O Lord our God,
that thou didst give thy Son Jesus Christ
to be the light of the world,
and that in him thou hast revealed thy glory
and the wonder of thy saving love.
Help us to love thee who hast so loved us;
strengthen us for the service of thy kingdom;
and grant that the light of Christ
may so shine throughout the world
that men and women everywhere
may be drawn to him who is the Saviour and Lord of all, and
the whole earth be filled with thy glory;
through the same Jesus Christ our Lord.
Amen

Do you know what a "tween" is?

The official definition is:

a youngster between 10 and 12 years of age,
considered too old to be a child
and too young to be a teenager.

Interestingly, JR Tolkien author of the Lord of the Rings
used the word *tween* to describe hobbits ...
in their twenties.... who were reckless.

Have you known any crazy..reckless...tweens?

How crazy?

How about this example from Georgia

In an article in the Atlanta newspaper

the reporter wrote about a concert featuring
Sixteen-year-old Canadian singing sensation Shawn Mendes.
Have you ever heard of him... you over 50 crowd?
How about his songs which he performed
smiling shyly as his adoring fans sang every word
to all of his hits ... from “Show You” to “Something Big” to
“Stitches” to his breakthrough smash “Life of the Party.”
How many of you know those songs...much less the words?
Unsuspecting moms and dads ..and grandparents too
who took their offspring to the show, left the performance
with a clear idea of what today’s tween pop sounds like ...
the unified voices of 4,000... 10-, 11-, 12-year old girls
screaming as loud as is humanly possible.

Interestingly though it wasn't just tweens.
While Mendes, whose aw-shucks grin and Disney charm
were everything discerning parents...who actually keep track
of what their kids are listening to could hope for,
put on a very G-rated show ...
for his legion of screaming tween fans...
What was a bit surprising
was that it also included a lot of their moms, who it was noted,
were singing along, note-for-note, with their daughters...
if not quite as boisterously.
I guess they were tweeney Moms.

Where were the boys?.... I guess they got left behind!

So then ...What was the worst thing you ever did....
When you were a tween ? or acted like a tween?
Say the time when you were about 12 years old?

I asked that question to our vestry
at a vestry retreat a few years ago
After we read together
Luke's Gospel story of Jesus ...
when he was 12 years old
when his family made their annual pilgrimage
to the Passover Festival in Jerusalem...
the same gospel reading today....
In the passage
Jesus somehow managed –intentionally- to be left behind
in the Temple in Jerusalem-talking with the scholars
While his family—his parents, Mary and Joseph,
started the journey home to Nazareth –some 80 miles away

When I asked our fearless vestry the question
What was the worst thing you did when you were that age?
I got a lot of bemused smiles..even a red face or two ..
A few gawfaws and one weak laugh ...
BUT ...no one raised their hand to tell their story
of their worst tween behavior....
Proof ... that we had a very wise vestry indeed!

I suspect that by the age of 12
Most of us had a story of some misadventure
That caused our parents grief, heartburn and anguish
and as a matter of justice
by the time we were 35...many of us had kids
who dished out to us ...the same type of tween behavior
that provided us the same grief, heartburn and anguish
Payback!
Today...experts today call tweens the "blunder years"
there is even a book..."The Everything Tween Book"
to help Tweens and their parents make it safely to the other side
The most important tip..."maintain your parental status"
This is not the time to try to be your child's best friend
That despite appearances to the contrary
Your child is looking for guidance
to get through this confusing age

I bet Mary and Joseph could have used some help
As they had the awesome job ...of raising God's Son
You can tell the matter came to a head
When they took 12 year old tween Jesus
on what is apparently their annual trip
from Nazareth to Jerusalem to celebrate the Passover.

For Jewish men- it was considered to be an obligation
to go to Jerusalem for the Passover.
The fact that the entire family travels to Jerusalem
is an indication that Joseph and Mary

were faithful adherents to the tradition and faith...
and intentionally bringing up Jesus in a strong and pious faith

The Passover was... and still is... the major feast in Judaism
Celebrated on the 15th of the Jewish month of Nisan –
which in our modern calendar is March or April

Passover remembers the Exodus ...
the miraculous deliverance by God
of the Israelites from slavery in Egypt
out of the hands of the Pharaoh and into freedom
Led by Moses into the desert and eventually to the promised land

Joseph and Mary and Jesus lived in the town of Nazareth
They made the 80 mile –four day trip to Jerusalem
In the large company of family and friends from Nazareth
The word translated "company" is literally “caravan” –
They traveled in a caravan ...
Because in large numbers they were protected from robbers
That lurked along the dangerous roads
Typically in the caravan the women and children rode up front
While the men walked together in the back
The caravan would typically make about 20 miles a day
Camping by the roadside at night

The year Jesus was 12 years old ...was an important year for Jesus
For according to Jewish custom

Boys came of age...when they turned 13
which is to say....

13 is when they became legally responsible before God
Instruction toward this turning point
would be intensive for 12 year olds ...
What is now ...but not then ...called a bar mitzvah...

So we have the picture of the faithful family
Taking Tween Jesus in tow...instructing him...preparing him
To celebrate the most important holy day in the life of Judaism

Typically ... observant Jews were only required to celebrate
the Passover day itself and then return after only two days

But here we see the holy family spending an entire week –
the whole 7 day period

Remember that Joseph is a working man- a carpenter
These are 7 full days he is not earning a living
a full week he is willing to sacrifice
without earning any money
this is yet another indication of their devotion
to Jewish custom and the worship of God
This is the kind of family Jesus is raised in

So after 7 days of the Passover Festival...
The caravan back home to Nazareth begins its journey home
Probably pulling out of Jerusalem
in the wee dark hours before dawn

Whatever the exact situation....the account is clear
That neither Joseph nor Mary were worried about Jesus

Only at the end of the first day's travel
Now some 20 miles down road
As they set up camp for the night
Did they discover that their son – Jesus – was missing
You can almost hear their conversation
As Joseph ...walking in the back of the caravan
catches up with Mary in the front
“Where is Jesus...I thought he was with you” says Joseph
“I thought he was with you” says Mary
Maybe he is with our relatives or perhaps his little friends
But he is not
They discover Jesus is not present
with the company of the caravan
Jesus is AWOL ...he has been... left behind

Luke mentions only –that Jesus “tarried behind”
Today...such behavior ..leaving a 12 year old behind
Would most certainly result in a visit
by the Youth Protection Services for child neglect
But in that time and place
Luke makes no effort to blame the parents

Having discovered that Jesus is missing
The parents trek the 20 miles back to Jerusalem on day 2
Then on day 3...they begin the search in Jerusalem

A total of three days
First day out by caravan
Second day walking back to Jerusalem
The third day..in Jerusalem searching

And lo and behold
They find young Jesus in the Temple-
The single most important structure in Judaism
Sitting at the feet of the greatest teachers of the Law
Who are astonished by the child's understanding

Jesus is portrayed as listening...taking instruction..
entering into conversation...with the teachers..

A boy with a spiritual hunger and thirst
For knowledge about God

And the young boy's wisdom astonishes everyone
But what is taking place does not suggest...yet...
an Epiphany....

An awareness by the teachers or the crowd –
Or even of Jesus himself...an awareness of divinity
Rather here is a child prodigy - even a genius -in their midst

When Mary and Joseph finally find him
Mary clearly indicates that she is not impressed by his conduct
I can't but help wonder if Luke has made more gentle
What Mary actually said....

I would have expected something like..

"Just what do you think you are doing Jesus bar Joseph ?"

"You are in serious trouble young man...!"

But rather, Luke reports that Mary...

speaking for Joseph as well... says:

Son, why have you treated us like this? Your father and I have been anxiously searching for you."

In the original Greek the phrase "anxiously searching for you"

Is closer to meaning they were searching

"with great mental anguish or trauma.."

In other words...Mary and Joseph were deeply worried

Why has Jesus done such a seemingly insensitive thing

Why is Jesus acting ...like ..sucha ..tween?

Jesus' reply...

Is his very first statement recorded in the Bible

⁴⁹ "Why were you searching for me?" he asked. "Didn't you know it was necessary ...that I had to be ...in my Father's house?" That I must be about my father's business?

What is Mary and Joseph's reaction to his answer?

They simply did not understand

what he was saying to them.

Why?

Their lack of understanding relates to the exact nature of Jesus' true identity and the exact nature of his mission

Perhaps if they had understood his mission better-
then his presence in the Temple –
would not have been so confounding and surprising

Jesus' parents lack of understanding
will be matched by his disciples lack of understanding
some 18 years later.

No one quite gets...who Jesus really is...
and what he came to do ...until the resurrection

Mary's reaction to her child in the Temple...
Has caused problems for some who find it hard to believe
that Mary in light of all that has happened
and all she has experienced ...
has failed to understand Jesus' mission

A lot of attempted explanations have been offered
In words of Theologian Darrell Bock..
Jesus' parents ignorance demonstrates
that it was hard to fathom the new ground
Jesus was breaking.

Jesus had come to set men free...
not from Rome ...but from sin
And in so doing he would indeed ascend a throne..
but not one of gold like King David,
but one made of wood in the form of a cross.

I like the observation made by Bock. He writes:

“Is it any wonder that those around Jesus were slow to realize fully who he was? If such a man were to come today ...would not the uniqueness of the claim give us pause. The problem of the people wrestling to comprehend who Jesus actually was and what he might be doing in a place like the Temple was a real one in the face of Jewish national hope. This was a problem not only for Jesus parents, It was a problem that continued on into Luke’s own day.”

Thus Joseph’s and Mary’s struggle to figure out Jesus may well picture our own struggle to answer the very same questions in our day.

So we come to the question of the Epiphany
What has been revealed... to whom?

But first... we need to come to the end this story
Jesus has been found by his relieved parents
Thus Joseph and Mary and Jesus returned home to Nazareth
With some very interesting discussions
taking place along the way I bet!

Back home again in Nazareth
Jesus lived, we assume, a normal life
But unlike many... tweens and teenagers we are told
Jesus was actually obedient to his parents direction

For we are told by Luke
Jesus was obedient to them. But his mother treasured all these things
..these sayings.... in her heart. ⁵² And Jesus grew in wisdom and
stature, and in favor with God and men.

If fact, we do not hear another word about Jesus
for the next 17 years of his life

So what then of Epiphany

The first Epiphany was the child Jesus' own Epiphany

We need to understand
Jesus did not come into the world with a fully programmed
brain as if he were a divine robot
Jesus had to develop and reach maturity
Just as every human being is expected to do
He will need to learn to pray
To learn God's ways,
to be led by God
And be taught God's truth
Just as you and I are expected to do

So this was Jesus' Epiphany
He discovered the beginning of self-understanding
That it was necessary...that he was called ...
to be about God's business...in God's house

That it was necessary that he be involved
with religious thought and discussion and action
like that at the Temple
That it was necessary that his sense of priorities
be henceforth first toward his father in heaven
That this divine relationship
has priority over all other relationships
So...it will require certain painful adjustments for everyone
All of this being a foretaste...the genesis ...
of his later ministry...all of which would take place...

As Jesus grew in wisdom and stature, and in favor with God and men.

There is also an Epiphany for Mary and Joseph
They must struggle further with the idea
of what it means to be the earthly parents of the Son of God
as the angel so told them they would become
some 12 years before.

These are the very things we learn
that Mary will ponder in her heart ...
from this time forward...
even as she stands at the foot of the cross
That Mary and Joseph too
must accept the God given priorities
with respect to their relationships as well ...
and the joy and well as the pain that will come with them

And finally there is meant to be an Epiphany
for you and me as we hear this story

We are called to read on ...in the Bible
And ponder the same things as Mary
To see what Jesus' ministry will reveal
And in the end...
To stand at the foot of the cross
And we too are thus able
By the grace of God

To grow in wisdom and stature, and in favor with God and men.

May it be so - Amen