

*God is Very Human!* - Luke 2:41-52

Joseph and Mary had a tradition to visit Jerusalem for the Passover festival. Perhaps you have family traditions too. But I hope what happened to Mary and Joseph does not happen to you!

As they all head back to Nazareth, twelve year old Jesus wanders off to explore the wonders of the big city. Because people didn't drive cars or coaches in those days, the boy Jesus isn't missed among the large crowd returning to Nazareth. His parents just assume he is with his cousins. But he isn't.

As night begins to fall people break up into discrete families. That's when Mary and Joseph discover to their horror Jesus isn't there. Their search becomes more anxious as they scour through the crowds. Everyone is alarmed when Jesus isn't to be found. And, as a last and desperate resort, Mary and Joseph turn around and head back to Jerusalem. Can you imagine how they feel?

I have no doubt that the words and expressions on Joseph and Mary's faces were laced with worry and anger. Anger at the inconvenience he had placed upon them: they had to turn around and trudge all the way back. Tempted to blame each other for such an oversight. And the worry! What manner of evil might have befallen him in the big city?

At twelve years of age Jesus is quite able to understand how to keep up with his family. But no. All normalcy dissolves into fear. I'm sure as Mary and Joseph hasten to Jerusalem they went over and over what they should have done and how he should have behaved.

When bad things happen to us, why do we dwell on the open barn doors? Why do we dwell on the loss, instead of closing the

doors and moving on -a little wiser for the experience? Why do we argue with one another over whose fault it is, instead of going ahead and making things right?

After three days, three days of searching through the streets and public places in Jerusalem, two worried parents finally discover their son in the great Temple.

*When his parents saw him they were astonished; and his mother said to him, "Child, why have you treated us like this? Look, your father and I have been searching for you in great anxiety."*

How human this all sounds! Luke and the church are at great pains to show that God in the flesh, our Christ, is truly as human in flesh and blood and mind as a twelve year old child. We have here no abstract deity, no high and mighty distant Lord, no god who hates the flesh and bone that we are. We have here the very human antics of a twelve year old.

Jesus' response to his parents is perhaps a little high and mighty:

*"Why were you searching for me? Did you not know that I must be in my Father's house?"*

The Scripture says that, "they did not understand what he said to them." But he did go with them back home to Nazareth "and was obedient to them."

If I responded like that to my parents who have been searching for me for three days, my life would have been in danger. Or, at

least, heavy sanctions would be imposed. But this twelve year old's heavy reply was the hint of his growing self-understanding, his connection to God's vision and love for the world.

This humanity and divinity, of course, are at the heart of our Christian revelation in history; this story of Luke is one of the seedlings for what would become the great forest of Trinitarian creeds we recite in worship. "True God and true man, begotten not made, of one being with the Father..."

As we enter a new calendar year we have, in one sense, come no further than Luke. In our so-called sophisticated world with all its gadgets and the thoughtlessness of guns, we too have been savaged by the slaughter of the innocents. Herod did it once. It happened again last weekend. Slaughter happens weekly in Chicago too. How far have we really come?

But like Jesus in the Temple, as we hear Scripture, hear the Word preached and discussed, our baptized faith grows in understanding of God and of God's ways with human beings. Our baptized faith grows as Luke's faith grew as he gathered or penned these wonderful stories of Jesus' life.

Luke's Gospel goes on to say that that, "Jesus increased in wisdom and in years, and in divine and human favor." Perhaps that included letting his parents know where he was going.

Of even more human significance is Luke's observation that "his mother treasured all these things in her heart." Not only do we see the beginnings of the elevation of his mother Mary towards the title of *theotokos*, mother of God, but also we see her very humanity.

Mothers and fathers treasure their experiences with their children. As do aunts and uncles and other friends of children. How often I draw on my memories with my children as a source of great comfort and meaning! I remember carrying them from the hospital; feeding, bathing and celebrating their accomplishments through their stages of life. I remember, now with a special fondness, the times when they made us anxious, worried and angry over their antics. Like Mary, we treasure all these things in our hearts.

The point of this Gospel reading is to show how very human Jesus is! God is *with* us –not way, way over us. God is with us in this sacred place. We meet God in each other and in the stranger too. Even when we run away from our parents, or from the right, or from our responsibilities, there are “Marys and Josephs”, yes, even Jesus, who seek us out. We get lost. We get distracted on our journey to fullness in Christ. But Mary and Joseph find us. Jesus finds us. It’s OK. It’s very human! It’s very divine! Amen