

December 30, 2018
Feast of the Holy Family of Jesus
Luke 2:41-52

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After three days they found him in the temple, sitting in the midst of the teachers, listening to them and asking them questions, and all who heard him were astounded at his understanding and his answers. When his parents saw him, they were astonished, and his mother said to him, "Son, why have you done this to us? Your father and I have been looking for you with great anxiety." And he said to them, "Why were you looking for me? Did you not know that I must be in my Father's house?" But they did not understand what he said to them.

He went down with them and came to Nazareth, and was obedient to them; and his mother kept all these things in her heart. And Jesus advanced in wisdom and age and favor before God and man.

Background:

For Luke, the author of this Gospel and of the Acts of the Apostles, Jerusalem is a significant place. His gospel begins in Jerusalem, with Zechariah entering the Holy of Holies and learning of the future birth of John. Luke's gospel ends in Jerusalem with the death and resurrection of Jesus. Jerusalem is where the disciples receive the Holy Spirit and are sent out into the world.

In this gospel text Luke notes that Jesus is twelve years old. The Law of Moses requires that every male child at this age make the trip to Jerusalem for Passover. This then is the first time Jesus would have been allowed to make the journey with the other adult members of his community, and read the Word of God in the temple. It marks his standing as an adult within the community and a time of transition for Jesus.

Traditionally twelve was the age when boys left the world of their mothers and the other women, and they entered the much harsher world of their fathers and the other adult males. The women of the extended family had been exclusively responsible for the raising of the children. Sons, because they were more valued, received special attention. When the boys left the protection of the women, the fathers and men of the community believed it was their responsibility to prepare them for the harsh realities of the world, where they would be responsible for the survival and protection of their family and community.

The caravans of pilgrims, like the rest of society, were segregated. Women and children traveled separately from the men. Because Jesus was just twelve, he might have traveled with either the men or the women. Therefore, Mary could have reasonably presumed that Jesus was traveling with Joseph, and Joseph assumed that he was traveling with Mary. Apparently, when the caravan stopped for the night, each learned that Jesus was not traveling with the other. Mary and Joseph returned to Jerusalem, perhaps without the benefit of traveling with a group.

They found their son involved in a discussion with the religious teachers of the temple. Luke seems to portray Jesus as one of the learned religious wise men of the day. But at the same time, Jesus is also shown as an irresponsible member of his family. He has been the cause of great stress and perhaps imperiled Mary and Joseph in their return to Jerusalem. His response to them in verse 49 adds to his poor behavior. (The form of verb that is used in "don't you know" is plural, indicating he is addressing both Mary and Joseph.) While the text does not include Jesus' recognition of his lack of responsibility, or an apology to Mary and Joseph, it does conclude by stating that Jesus returned with them and remained obedient to them, again plural. In the last verse of the text, Luke states that Jesus advanced in age, wisdom, and favor before God and men.

By including what might be looked upon as a humiliating story about Jesus' shameful lack of consideration to his parents, Luke is making a theological statement about who Jesus' true Father is. In responding to his parent's concern about his absence from their caravan, he tells them he has been in his Father's house (verse 49). Jesus is not only living between the worlds of men and women of his day, but he is also living between the world of his father Joseph's house

and that of his Heavenly Father. Just as Jesus has not fully made the transition to a responsible adult of his day, neither has he completely made the transition to God his Father at this point in the gospel. Therefore, he returns to Nazareth, and in doing so he advances before God and men.

Reflection Questions:

1. When you think of your own transition from adolescent to being an adult, some of the things that come to mind are...
2. When you think of Mary and Joseph stopping at the end of a day's journey and discovering that Jesus is not among them...
3. When you imagine Jesus getting caught up in a discussion with the teachers of the day...
4. When you hear Jesus respond to his parents' concern for him, "Why were you looking for me? Did you not know that I must be in my Father's house?", what feelings and thoughts are most present to you?
5. Can you take some time now to talk with God about the image of Jesus that Luke presents here, or about your own experience of becoming an adult, or your struggle now to live both in your real world and in the world of God?

The gospel background and reflection questions are written by Fr. Paul Gallagher, OFM. They are edited by Sister Anne Marie Lom, OSF and Joe Thiel. The excerpts from the Sunday readings are prepared by Joe Thiel. To be added to the distribution list, send your name and email address to annemarie.lom@gmail.com.

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Excerpts from the readings for December 30, 2018, Feast of the Holy Family of Jesus, Mary and Joseph

In year C of the liturgical cycle, the Lectionary has multiple choices for 1st and 2nd readings on this feast.

Sirach 3:2-6, 12-14

God sets a father in honor over his children; a mother's authority he confirms over her sons.
Whoever honors his father atones for sins, and preserves himself from them.
When he prays, he is heard; he stores up riches who reveres his mother.
Whoever honors his father is gladdened by children, and, when he prays, is heard.
Whoever reveres his father will live a long life; he who obeys his father brings comfort to his mother.
My son, take care of your father when he is old; grieve him not as long as he lives.
Even if his mind fail, be considerate of him; revile him not all the days of his life;
kindness to a father will not be forgotten, firmly planted against the debt of your sins
—a house raised in justice to you.

Or 1 Samuel 1:20-22, 24-28

In those days Hannah conceived, and at the end of her term bore a son whom she called Samuel, since she had asked the Lord for him. The next time her husband Elkanah was going up with the rest of his household to offer the customary sacrifice to the Lord and to fulfill his vows, Hannah did not go, explaining to her husband, "Once the child is weaned, I will take him to appear before the Lord and to remain there forever; I will offer him as a perpetual nazirite."
Once Samuel was weaned, Hannah brought him up with her, along with a three-year-old bull, an ephah of flour, and a skin of wine, and presented him at the temple of the Lord in Shiloh. After the boy's father had sacrificed the young bull, Hannah, his mother, approached Eli and said: "Pardon, my lord! As you live, my lord, I am the woman who stood near you here, praying to the Lord. I prayed for this child, and the Lord granted my request. Now I, in turn, give him to the Lord; as long as he lives, he shall be dedicated to the Lord." Hannah left Samuel there.

Psalm 128:1-5

Blessed are those who fear the Lord and walk in his ways.

For you shall eat the fruit of your handiwork; blessed shall you be, and favored.

Your wife shall be like a fruitful vine in the recesses of your home;

your children like olive plants around your table.

Behold, thus is the man blessed who fears the Lord.

The Lord bless you from Zion: may you see the prosperity of Jerusalem all the days of your life.

Or Psalm 84:2-3, 5-6, 9-10

Blessed are they who dwell in your house, O Lord. How lovely is your dwelling place, O Lord of hosts!

My soul yearns and pines for the courts of the Lord. My heart and my flesh cry out for the living God.

Happy they who dwell in your house! Continually they praise you.

Happy the men whose strength you are! Their hearts are set upon the pilgrimage.

O Lord of hosts, hear our prayer; hearken, O God of Jacob!

O God, behold our shield, and look upon the face of your anointed.

Reading 2 Colossians 3:12-21

Brothers and sisters: Put on heartfelt compassion, kindness, humility, gentleness, and patience, bearing with one another and forgiving one another, if one has a grievance against another; as the Lord has forgiven you, so must you also do. And over all these put on love, the bond of perfection.

And let the peace of Christ control your hearts, the peace into which you were also called in one body.

And be thankful. Let the word of Christ dwell in you richly, as in all wisdom you teach and admonish one another, singing psalms, hymns, and spiritual songs with gratitude in your hearts to God.

And whatever you do, in word or in deed, do everything in the name of the Lord Jesus, giving thanks to God the Father through him.

Wives, be subordinate to your husbands, as is proper in the Lord.

Husbands, love your wives, and avoid any bitterness toward them.

Children, obey your parents in everything, for this is pleasing to the Lord.

Fathers, do not provoke your children, so they may not become discouraged.

Or 1 John 3:1-2, 21-24

Beloved: See what love the Father has bestowed on us that we may be called the children of God.

And so we are. The reason the world does not know us is that it did not know him.

Beloved, we are God's children now; what we shall be has not yet been revealed.

We do know that when it is revealed we shall be like him, for we shall see him as he is.

Beloved, if our hearts do not condemn us, we have confidence in God and receive from him whatever we ask, because we keep his commandments and do what pleases him.

And his commandment is this: we should believe in the name of his Son, Jesus Christ, and love one another just as he commanded us. Those who keep his commandments remain in him, and he in them, and the way we know that he remains in us is from the Spirit he gave us.

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