

I EPIPHANY 2014
SERMON - CHRIST CHURCH PARISH
FATHER CRAIG LOONEY
ROM. 12.1 ST. LUKE 2.41



Headline from the Jerusalem Times: Parents in desperate search for missing son...asking anyone who has seen him to contact them!

It is not hard for us to imagine what was going through the minds of Mary and Joseph as they searched frantically for Jesus. Any of us who have seen an Amber Alert sign on the freeway can only swallow hard, and say a quiet prayer the missing child will be found safe and unharmed.

The Gospel tells us that Mary and Joseph were one day into the return trip to their home in Nazareth after a visit to Jerusalem for the Passover. Nazareth is about 70 miles from Jerusalem, and the trip home would have taken them about a week.

It was not safe to travel alone, so Mary and Joseph were traveling with a large group of friends and relatives. They were not concerned about Jesus' whereabouts until they tried to find him later in the day, and discovered he was missing. Every parent's worst nightmare had become a reality for Mary and Joseph. We know this story about Jesus has a happy ending and the follow-up story in the Jerusalem Times might have had a headline about the missing Jesus being found in the Temple and reunited with his ecstatic...and justifiably angry parents.

Before Jesus was baptized, there is only this one story in the New Testament about his youth, when he was twelve years old. Saint Luke tells us that after his parents spent three days looking for Jesus, they found him in the Temple listening to the teachers and asking them questions.

It is also not hard for us to understand the astonishment Mary and Joseph felt when they discovered their adolescent boy was teaching the teachers, or their relief that he was safe and unharmed. Neither is it hard for us to understand why Mary asked Jesus why he had caused Joseph and her so much grief.

When I was eight years old, I wandered off to go look at the model trains in the big Sears store near my house. To get to the store, I had to cross a railroad track and a busy major street. When my mother discovered I was missing, she asked the neighbors to help look

for me. When she found me, safe and unharmed, she gave me a look that only a mother could give, that said I had some explaining to do when we got home. I'm sure I said something like, "Sorry, mom. It won't happen again." It didn't.

When Mary asked Jesus why he had put Joseph and her through such an ordeal, worrying them, causing them to fear the worst, Jesus didn't say, "Gee mom. I'm sorry I upset you. I guess I just wasn't thinking. It won't happen again." He answers Mary in an almost dismissive way, as if they should have known all along where he was and what he was up to...in his Father's house.

The epiphany...the striking appearance...in the Gospel is in what Jesus reveals about himself to his parents and ultimately to us when he says he has to be in his Father's house. Jesus' status as the promised Messiah and God's Son was confirmed not only at his baptism...but from the very beginning of his life. Jesus knew that his special relationship to God the Father might override his family ties.

Jesus wasn't being a smart aleck kid when he told his parents they should not have been looking for him and should have known where he was. Jesus the adolescent boy was saying he knew who he was and that he was on a mission from his Father. He tried to reassure his parents not to worry about him and his work, but they did not understand what he meant, at least not then.

One question remains unanswered...what was Jesus up to from the time he returned to Nazareth with his parents when he was twelve years old and the time he began his public ministry after his baptism, when he was thirty years old. Did Jesus take any more unauthorized trips?

Saint Luke tells us that when Jesus returned to Nazareth with his parents he was obedient to them. Jesus knew he was God's Son, but he also knew the authority Mary and Joseph had over him, and he was willing to submit to that authority until the time came for him to complete his mission.

We too have a mission: to learn through prayer the things God wants us to do and then to proceed to do those things. We want to become effective epiphanies...striking appearances...for Jesus.

