

I Epiphany 2024

Sermon – Saint Joseph Parish

Father Craig Looney

Romans 12.1-5 Saint Luke 2.41-52



Let's imagine we're driving along Highway 101 and we see an "Amber Alert" on one of those electronic signs. The message strikes heartache and concern even among those of us who find ourselves becoming jaded over incessant "bad news".

This morning's Gospel is the only account we have of Jesus the adolescent boy. The Holy Family was heading home to Nazareth after celebrating Passover in Jerusalem. Nazareth is about 70 miles from Jerusalem. It's a trip they would have made every year. They would have traveled with friends and relatives. They would have traveled only during the day. Travel alone or at night would have been dangerous.

Now let's imagine we're traveling with Mary and Joseph when they discover Jesus is missing. Children sometimes wander off...but this was a time before electronic billboards, cell phones and the Internet to alert people a child has gone missing. Mary and Joseph were in a state of panic.

The Gospel tells us Mary and Joseph had traveled one full day before they discovered Jesus missing. We're not told how long it took them to get back to Jerusalem. We are told they spent three days looking for him. Why did it take them so long? There were a lot of people still in Jerusalem. Have we ever wandered around looking for someone in a crowded airport?

When Mary and Joseph finally find Jesus sitting in the Temple talking with the religious leaders, they are both relieved and probably a bit angry. The surprise element in the Gospel is how Jesus responds to his parents concern over his unauthorized absence...he asks them why they spent so much time looking for him. After all...they should have known where to find him...in his father's house.

Mary and Joseph could not have understood what Jesus was saying...at least not at that time. The Gospel tells us Jesus went back home with his parents and was obedient to them...and Mary kept all of this close to her heart.

The Epiphany Season is about God making himself known to us in Jesus' many striking appearances: the baby boy in the manger; the adolescent boy tackling tough questions from religious leaders in the Temple; the adult Jesus who was baptized and declared by God to be his Son; the teacher, healer, miracle worker; the One whose mission it was to save us. Jesus is God made Flesh.

There is also a surprise element in the Gospel for the Epiphany and it is the message of the Epiphany Season. God's plan for salvation includes us...bringing us together with his Chosen People...into one great fellowship through Jesus. Jesus is the "Light to lighten the Gentiles, and the Glory of his people, Israel".

In 1966, Kathleen Thomerson wrote a wonderful hymn called "I Want to Walk as a Child of the Light". If the words seem familiar... the hymn was woven into a sermon 10 years ago. The words are powerful and the message is loud and clear:

I want to walk as a child of the light.

I want to follow Jesus.

God set the stars to give light to the world,

The star of my life is Jesus.

I want to see the brightness of God.

I want to look at Jesus.

Clear Sun of Righteousness, shine on my path,

And show me the way to the Father.

I'm looking for the coming of Christ.

I want to be with Jesus.

When we have run with patience the race,

We shall know the joy of Jesus.

In him there is no darkness at all.

The night and the day are both alike.

The Lamb is the light of the city of God.

Shine in my heart, Lord Jesus.

The Epiphany message is that we are children of light...the Light that **IS** Jesus. We want to follow Jesus the Lamb of God. We want to be the best possible epiphanies...the best striking appearances to the world...for him.

