

I Epiphany 2026

Sermon – Saint Joseph Parish

Father Craig Looney

Rom. 12.1-5 St. Luke 2.41-52

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“What were you thinking?”...exactly the question we would expect a distraught mother to ask her son who had been missing for almost a week and had just been found...and not where they expected. “What were you thinking?”

This morning’s Gospel is the only account we have of the adolescent Jesus. The Scriptures don’t give us any details about his life during the three or four years the Holy Family was in Egypt, or from the time he was twelve until he began his public ministry eighteen years later.

The Holy Family made an annual trip from their home in Nazareth to Jerusalem to celebrate the Passover. According to the Book of Exodus, they had a duty to make a pilgrimage to Jerusalem for the three great Jewish festivals...Passover, Pentecost and the Feast of Booths. The latter festival commemorated the Exodus and the Israelites wandering in the desert for 40 years.

Nazareth is located approximately 75 miles north of Jerusalem. It would have taken the Holy Family about 7 days to make the trip. It was a perilous journey and they would have traveled only during the day with a large group of friends and relatives.

When the Passover Festival ended it was time for the Holy Family to start the long journey home. According to the Gospel, Mary and Joseph discovered Jesus was missing after they had traveled a full day. They would have waited until the following morning before heading back to Jerusalem to look for Jesus. We can only imagine what Mary and Joseph were thinking...they couldn’t get back to Jerusalem fast enough.

The Gospel tells us when Mary and Joseph finally got back to Jerusalem they spent three more days looking for Jesus before finding him amazing all the religion teachers with his intelligent answers to their questions. Mary asked Jesus why he had put them through this ordeal and how worried they were trying to find him.

Jesus answered them, "Why did you have to spend so much time looking for me? Didn't you know where you could find me, in my Father's house?" That seems like Jesus is being snarky and rude in his answer. He isn't being snarky or rude to his parents. Jesus was showing he has profound wisdom and deep spiritual insight into his mission. Jesus is no longer a little boy...he is growing into the man who would redeem humankind on a hill outside the city.

Luke tells us Mary and Joseph didn't understand Jesus' answer. Mary, we are told, "treasured all these things in her heart". What did Mary and Joseph say to Jesus on the long journey back to Nazareth? Did Joseph have a "Wait until we get home" chat with Jesus. Did they send him to bed without supper? Probably not. All we are told is Jesus obeyed Mary and Joseph and grew in body and wisdom and received the approval of God and men.

The Epiphany part of 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. This was a defining moment in his life. 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. He also knew the time to carry out his mission would come later. For now...no more unauthorized absences.

Our own Epiphany journey can be a time of profound spiritual insight...through consistent prayer discover what our mission is...making this Season a defining moment in our lives...committing ourselves to joyful obedience to God's will...in the words of the Collect..."*to perceive and know what things we ought to do, and also have grace and power to fulfill the same.*"

"What were you thinking?"...Mary asked Jesus. He told her he had to be about his Father's business. We too must be about our Father's business.

