

OT: 1 Samuel 2.18-20,26
NT: Col 3 12-17
G: Luke 2 41-end

I hope you have had a happy Christmas, that you have survived the celebrations unscathed managing to ensure that you continued all of the Christmas traditions. We all have traditions that make Christmas special for us, one of the more recent traditions is that of the Christmas movie, we each have our favorites for me it wouldn't be Christmas without at least half an hour of Home Alone the original version or Home Alone 2 : Lost in New York

The star of the film is a little boy called Kevin, who, through a series of mishaps, gets left behind while his family head off on holiday. It's a feel-good Christmas film, as you follow Kevin overcoming fears, enjoying having the house to himself, and defeating the wet bandits as they attempt to rob his house. While Kevin is having a great time, the camera keeps cutting back to his frantic parents as they try to get back home and find their son.

In our Bible reading this morning, we find a situation a little like the movie Home Alone. Joseph and Mary have taken Jesus up to Jerusalem for the festival of the Passover. It's one of the big festivals in the Jewish calendar, and there was a requirement for all who could to travel to Jerusalem to celebrate together. As they return to Nazareth, though, they discover after a day's travel that Jesus is not in their group. He's nowhere to be found.

Imagine that you're Mary for a moment. You've given birth to this special son, yet now that he's twelve years old, he has disappeared. Imagine the agony, the sense of blame, the panic as you begin to search for him. Where is he? Where could he be? What's going on?

But before we discover Jesus, I want to ask you why we're told about this incident at all. Just think for a moment – it's the only record we have of Jesus between the visit of the wise men in Matthew 2 and the moment when Jesus begins his public ministry around about the age of 30.

This is the only detail we have of his childhood. Why?

If you look to the beginning of his Gospel, Luke begins by stating that he has carefully investigated everything that has happened and written down this orderly account.

It seems that Luke has interviewed Mary, the mother of Jesus, and heard the account of the shepherds first hand. Perhaps Luke asks her if there were any other special moments, anything very interesting that could be included? Mary herself tells this story - she remembers it all so vividly. We see it there in verse 51. Even though she didn't understand what Jesus says when they find him, she 'treasured all these things in her heart.' Another version says she pondered them. The day is written in her heart, a day she returns to many times - what did he mean? What was it all about?

So we're given this 'bonus DVD material' only in Luke's gospel, because he thinks it's an important step along the journey. It adds something to the gospel as a whole, it helps us to see Jesus more clearly.

But first, back to Mary and Joseph, having travelled a day's journey towards home, they turn back to search the city. There was no Twitter to send out the word, no internet or newspapers to carry a missing persons appeal. In verse 46, we're told they find him after three days. A long, agonising time - probably with no sleep in the night times. And, where was he?

'After three days they found him in the temple, sitting among the teachers, listening to them and asking them questions. And all who heard him were

amazed at his understanding and his answers.’ (46-47) He’s in the temple, talking to, asking questions and answering questions with the religious leaders and teachers. Just a twelve-year old boy, yet with more understanding than the teachers.

It would be a bit like one of our young children taking part in a meeting of the House of Bishops, and holding their own. But while everyone else is amazed at him, Mary and Joseph are more than a little annoyed - they’re astonished. Here’s what Mary says: ‘Child, why have you treated us like this? Look, your father and I have been searching for you with great anxiety.’ (48)

And how does Jesus reply? ‘Why were you searching for me? Did you not know that I must be in my Father’s house?’ (49) At the time, Mary doesn’t understand, yet she never forgets his words, and now, looking back after the crucifixion and the resurrection, we can see what Jesus means so clearly.

Did you hear what Mary said? ‘Your father and I have been searching for you...’ but Jesus says ‘Did you not know that I must be in MY Father’s house?’ Rather than the movie Home Alone, Jesus is saying that he’s home, but not alone. He’s in his Father’s house - in the building belonging to God, in the temple, where God was at home.

In the previous chapter we’re told that Mary conceives Jesus as a result of the overshadowing of the Holy Spirit - Joseph is not Jesus’ father. Yet Joseph adopts Jesus as his own, appears as his earthly father. But Jesus here reminds Mary and Joseph that he belongs to another family, that Joseph isn’t really his father - that God is his Father. Jesus is gently saying that he is the Son of God, not the Son of Joseph.

As the footnote says, ‘Did you not know that I must be about my Father’s interests/business?’ For Jesus, his primary loyalty is to his heavenly Father, in

recognition of the fact that he is the Son of God, which is confirmed in the next chapter at his baptism: 'You are my Son, the Beloved; with you I am well pleased.' (3:21) Nothing will sway him from this primary identity, yet he willingly submits to them in obedience as he grows up (51).

Today's passages remind us of the immense power of God both in creation and within human lives and hearts. Here we have the great and wonderful contradiction of a God who is the author of the universe yet whose masterpiece is revealed in a little child; a God who is faithful to his word through all generations.

The child Samuel will grow to usher in major constitutional change in the form of monarchy, anointing Israel first two kings, Saul and David. The child Jesus, descendant of David, will grow to herald in a new kingdom in which all are anointed by the grace of God; a new kingdom reflected in the words of Paul's letter to the Colossians that we are all 'chosen, holy and beloved'.

But think for a moment of the very human experience of both Mary and Hannah who in a sense 'lose' their children to a purpose greater than either can explain. Hannah must watch from afar as her longed-for child grows up in the temple.

Mary comes to realise in the temple that day, and possibly earlier (v22), that her son is growing away from her. Both make huge sacrifices for the sake of God's purpose, even though it may not be clear to them exactly what that is.

What might we be prepared to lose, as a new year approaches, in order to fulfil God's purpose? What sacrifices might we be ready to make in order to live the kind of life Jesus demands of us?

Fresh from the joy of Christmas day and the celebration which characterise this time of year, we can take comfort and encouragement from the evidence that the God who is creator of all things often picks the marginalised and unimportant to effect transformation. We have seen it in the Bethlehem child, and we witness it every day in the world around us.

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