

Christmas 2C (1/03/10 – *In the Father's House ... Among the Father's Things*)

In the Name JESUS. [Amen]

Last Sunday we heard how the 40-day-old Jesus was brought to the Temple to be consecrated to the Lord – according to the Law given through Moses ... according to God's command. This Sunday – as we continue our Christmas celebration of the incarnation of our Lord – we once again hear that Jesus is in the Temple. Only twelve years have now passed. Jesus is no longer an Infant ... but a “son of the commandment” (Bar Mitvah) ... responsible for Himself under the Law – more or less equivalent to our confirmation, I suppose. This time the Savior is not at the Temple because He was carried there ... but because He Himself desires to be there – *In the Father's House ... Among the Father's Things*.

But before we delve into just what that teaches us – these first recorded words of our Savior – let's go back to an easily passed over comment that the Holy Spirit inspires St. Luke to write down for all posterity. *Now His parents went to Jerusalem every year at the Feast of the Passover.* [LK 2.41] Here we have a glimpse as to another reason why Holy Scripture refers to Joseph as a *just* or *righteous man* [MT 1.19]. **Every year** Joseph went to the Temple to offer the Passover sacrifice – in accord with God's Holy Law. And not only did Joseph go as was required, but Mary also – which was not required ... nor that young Jesus go along, as the next verse tells us. This is a Godly example for all parents – and for grandparents to encourage their own adult children – to follow. Joseph – even only as stepfather and guardian – sets an example that we all do well to follow. He devoutly – yearly – made the not-altogether-safe journey to the Temple at Jerusalem to do what God required of him ... both for himself and for his family. And devout Mary went with him yearly as well. Though they had the Word made Flesh with them in their own home, they continued to gather with believers in God's House ... to be about the things of God. There is no more important parental duty than this – to hear God's Word and receive His Gifts of forgiveness, life, and salvation ... daily in home devotions ... weekly gathered in the House of the Lord.

So when He was twelve years old, they went up according to custom. And when the feast was ended, as they were returning – to Nazareth, that is – *the Boy Jesus stayed behind in Jerusalem.* [LK 2.42-43] Here we need to understand two things. First, Joseph and Mary were not acting irresponsibly. Because of highway bandits, it was common for people from the same region to travel together for safety. And as the next verse tells us, they naturally supposed Jesus to be in their group. No doubt Jesus had always been a model Son – always obedient and responsible. They had no reason to think that He was not with their group – He

always behaved that way. Which brings us to the second point: Jesus was, likewise, not acting irresponsibly ... in no way disobedient. And even His response is **not** to be taken as talking back to Mary. That is what **we** at times have done in **our sinfulness** – spoken disrespectfully to our parents and others in authority over us – but Jesus was and always has remained **sinless**.

And though there is no sin here, precisely, Jesus' response to Mary's question **does** reveal the **fallenness** of our sinful flesh. Because sin has so corrupted our nature, we no longer know where to look for God on our own. Oh, all but the most seared consciences know that God **IS** ... that He exists – and desire to find Him ... know Him ... please (or at least appease) Him. But like Joseph and Mary, we often look in the wrong places – everywhere but where He is sure to be found. We search for the assurance of sin forgiven and, instead of looking to Christ and what He has done **for us** once-for-all on the Cross, we look to ourselves, our own devotion, our own good works (paltry though they be) for that assurance. We long to see times of peace and goodwill, but we look to our own impotent efforts to attain them. We desire the guarantee of life, but fail to look first and last and **foremost** to our Lord's resurrection – instead we place our trust in diet, exercise, and modern medicine ... which at best prolong our days only slightly ... but cannot stave off the inevitable grave.

Now we come to the center of our text. When Joseph and Mary **do** finally find Jesus *after three days*, He is *sitting among the teachers, listening to them and asking them questions* [2.46]. Here our Lord Himself – though just a Boy of twelve – teaches us what it is to be a child of God. He is listening and learning from the called servants of the Word. God's children gather with God's people around His Word and Sacraments. That is where we hear that our sins are forgiven for Jesus' sake. That is where we sing with the Christmas angels: *Glory be to God on high, and on earth, peace, goodwill toward men*. That is where we sing with righteous Simeon: *Lord, now lettest Thou Thy servant depart in peace according to Thy Word, for mine eyes have seen Thy Salvation, which Thou hast prepared before the face of all peoples*. Here in this place – in this Temple of God – we find the Lord Jesus ... where He is **always** to be found.

And all who heard Him were amazed at His understanding and His answers [2.47]. As Man – even though only yet twelve – Jesus *grew and became strong* [2.40] like every other human being. As a Man *Jesus increased in wisdom and in stature and in favor with God and man* [2.52]. The Son of God incarnate had to grow and learn just like you and I. He completely identifies with us and with the weakness of our finite, mortal, human condition. And yet He is still – ever and always – the almighty, omniscient God. Thus His understanding and His answers

amazed everyone, even the expert teachers of the Law who were gathered there in the Temple.

Imagine, then, the manifold astonishment of Joseph and Mary when they find the Boy Jesus. First, they are astonished that after three days they have finally found Him – they were no doubt quite desperate by then ... perhaps imagining all sorts of evil that might have befallen Him. Second, they are astonished that He is in the Temple – I am supposing that it was a rarity that one so young would have been so intently interested in this part of the Temple. The sacrifices ... perhaps – but to sit among a bunch of old men discussing details of the Scripture and rabbinic interpretation? Above all, they are no doubt astonished that their young Jesus has this crowd of wise and learned Scribes and Rabbis enthralled with His questions and responses! They should have known, of course. The angels told them just Who Jesus is – the Son of God Most High ... God with us, Immanuel ... Who will save His people ... **all people** ... from sin. But they had probably grown accustomed to the fact that He had been mostly like every other infant and young boy – the same physical needs ... the same curiosity ... the same growth and changes of all boys they had known. Differences? No doubt there were some – like this event ... on a smaller scale. But Jesus was fully human – that's what His Nativity ... His Incarnation ... *Christmas* is about.

But Jesus is God – the Son of God ... the Word made Flesh ... dwelling among us. And He has come with a purpose – a high and holy and eternally important purpose. Even at the tender age of twelve Jesus knows exactly **Who** He is and **why** He is here. He said it when Mary, in great distress, questioned Him. *Why were you looking for Me? Did you not know that I must be in My Father's House?* [2.49] This verse is very rich in meaning. For by it Jesus indicates that He knows that His true Father is God – not in the sense that we are all children of the heavenly Father ... not in the sense that He has taught us to pray: *Our Father, which art in heaven* ... but in the sense that Jesus has no earthly father, for He was conceived in the womb of Mary by the Holy Spirit. His true and only Father is God. And though He has been a dutiful Son in the house of Mary and His guardian Joseph ... and will return with them and be submissive to them that very day – Jesus' true place ... true home ... is with God the Father. That is where He is from. That is where He will return. That is where He must be.

But more than that. Jesus says that He *must be in His Father's House*. He **must be** in the Temple. *It is necessary* is what the Greek actually says – necessary ... divinely necessary that Jesus be *in His Father's House* and *among His Father's things* ... about the matters of His Father. Which is to say, that it is divinely, theologically – **salvifically** – necessary for Jesus to be in the Temple and

in Jerusalem. For He Himself is the true Passover Lamb of God Who takes away the sins of the world. **All** the Passovers have pointed to **His** ultimate Passover/Holy Friday self-sacrifice to mark the lintels and doorposts of the hearts and souls of all people with His holy, precious Blood so that the angel of death may pass over us ... and we may enter the ultimate Promised Land of heaven.

The Temple – Jerusalem – is Jesus' ultimate goal and destiny on this earth ... to take away the sins of the world. That is why Jesus **must** be there – even as a Boy. And that is why **we** must be *In the Father's House ... Among the Father's Things* – to receive the Gifts purchased and won for us by our Savior ... to receive forgiveness, life, and our eternal salvation from Him Who still comes to His Temple in His Flesh ... for us.

In the Name of the FATHER and of the + SON and of the HOLY SPIRIT. [Amen]