

**In the Name of the Father and of the ☩ Son and of the Holy Spirit. Amen.**

**Grace and Peace to you from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ and may our Lord and Savior sanctify you in the truth, for His word is truth. Amen**

**First Sunday after the Epiphany (2022)**

**Christ is in His House**

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*“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. And when his parents saw him, they were astonished. And his mother said to him, “Son, why have you treated us so? Behold, your father and I have been searching for you in great distress.” And he said to them, “Why were you looking for me? Did you not know that I must be in my Father’s house?” And they did not understand the saying that he spoke to them.” (Luke 2:46–50, ESV)*

What a wonderful Gospel Reading we have for this celebration of the First Sunday after the Epiphany. St. Luke continues his gospel narrative of the early life of Jesus from His presentation in the temple on the fortieth day after His birth to now as a young boy of twelve being present in His house once again. In this Gospel the passion narrative inferences are as overwhelming as are practical inferences for life of as a Christian.

Our Lord Jesus has blossomed as a young boy in Nazareth. He has become **“strong [and] filled with wisdom. And the favor of God was upon him.” (Luke 2:40, ESV)** Every year, as He grew, His parents would travel from Nazareth up to Jerusalem to observe the Passover along with the Feast of Unleavened Bread. It is the Passover which is of greater interest to the Christian. For on the celebration of this day our Lord Jesus was offered up as our “Passover Lamb,” as our “paschal sacrifice” for the forgiveness of our sins. The presence of the young Jesus in the temple is more than just His parents traveling to Jerusalem to celebrate the Passover in remembrance of God’s rescue of His people from Egyptian slavery, it also points to God’s plan of our rescue from slavery to sin by the blood of the true Passover Lamb, His beloved Son, Jesus Christ. So there is something quite different about this trip to Jerusalem to celebrate the Passover than any before.

The ordinance of God required every Jew to celebrate the Passover, but sin and apostasy had led the people of God to forget this requirement. Thus, for many years they failed to observe God’s ordinance. But after their return from captivity in Babylon, Hezekiah cleansed and restored the temple, decreeing that the people should come to Jerusalem and observe the Passover in the holy city on its appointed day (2 Chron. 30:5). So Passover and the Feast of Unleavened Bread were celebrated every year. The two feasts lasted for eight days, but those who were pilgrims to Jerusalem to celebrate the feast, were only required to celebrate the Passover and the first day of the Feast of Unleavened Bread. So, most likely, when St. Luke tells us that the feast ended and Mary and Joseph began to go down to Nazareth (v. 43), this would have been on the third day of the celebration, but unbeknownst to them, Jesus was not with them.

As they were returning to Nazareth, Mary and Joseph discover that Jesus is not with the group they were traveling. Seized by worry and fear, they immediately return to Jerusalem in search of their son. The Gospel tells us they looked for three days, there it is again, this reference to three days, before they found Him, and to their great surprise He was in the temple astounding the teachers of the Law with His understanding.

The term, **“three days”** is found throughout the OT and NT. There are the **“three days of darkness”** of the ninth plague brought on Egypt by God when Moses stretched out his hand Ex. 10:22). There is Jonah in the belly of the great fish for **“three days”** (Jonah 1:17). The crowd of four-thousand which Jesus fed with seven loaves of bread and a few small fish were with Him on the mountain for **“three days”** without eating (Matt. 15:32). St. Paul was blinded by Christ for **“three days”** (Acts 9:9) and so many more. But each of these references have but one significance, to point us to the **“three days”** our Lord Jesus is in the tomb after His crucifixion on the Passover, leading to His resurrection.

Having found Jesus, Mary sick with worry asks, **“Son, why have you treated us so? Behold, your father and I have been searching for you in great distress.”** (v. 48) “Why,” we ask ourselves, “are they surprised? Did not His mother and father know that the Son of God should be found in His Father’s house?” Did Mary forget what Simeon had told her when they first brought Jesus to the temple. **“My eyes have seen your salvation that you have prepared in the presence of all peoples, a light for revelation to the Gentiles, and for glory to your people Israel.”** (Luke 2:30–32, *ESV*) This child is the Son of God whose destiny is to be fulfilled in the city of Jerusalem. To His mother, Jesus responds, **“Why were you looking for me? Did you not know that I must be in my Father’s house?”** (v. 49) Indeed, in the Greek it is even more emphatic saying, **“it is necessary for me to be about the things of My Father.”**

St. Luke tells us, **“And they did not understand the saying that he spoke to them.”** (Luke 2:50, *ESV*) But should we really be surprised that neither Mary nor Joseph understood? Not really, for every person who encounters our Lord during His life, including His apostles seek to understand Him but fail.

When a contemporary believer listens to Luke’s Gospel, they know who Jesus is and what He must do, but the people who are part of the story, those who should have known best, they are incapable of understanding our Lord’s words. Simeon has already predicted that Jesus is destined for the fall and rising of many in Israel (Luke 2:34-35), so we do not expect that Mary and Joseph would be the first to stumble over the cross. Three times our Lord told His apostles of His impending suffering and death, but they refused to believe Him. St. Peter even rebuked our Lord for speaking what he considered to be nonsense. It is not until after our Lord’s resurrection that their eyes are opened so they may perceive His true identity and purpose. When our Lord says, **“it is necessary,”** He shows His devotion to His heavenly Father as He walks to the Cross as our Passover Lamb. Sadly, Mary and Joseph failed to understand that in those first fateful words, **“I must be in my Father’s house,”** Jesus was alluding to His future passion and resurrection in the Holy City. So the question now becomes, **“How do we understand them for ourselves?”**

What is the first thing we learn from this Gospel Reading, the twelve-year-old Jesus is in church; **Christ is in His House**. Is this not the place where every child should be, not just on the Sabbath but at every opportunity? Contrary to the golden years of our youth, where life seemed carefree, serene, peaceful, and secure, a life hardly touched by worry or care, life for our youth today is complicated by the digital age and a secular educational system which leads them away from Christ into a world of degenerate behavior where the abnormal is called normal and sin is simply an ancient word of grandparents; a word without meaning in the modern world. Thus, our children are brought up in a nihilistic world, a world with no right or wrong, a world of relativity where what’s right for you does not mean it’s right for me, a world devoid of value and principle. From such a world they need shelter, a place that will shield them from the darts and arrows of an evil world, a world in which Satan roams looking for young, innocent minds to pervert. There is but one place where shelter from this world exists: that is in God’s Church where His Word proclaims the blessed Gospel of the forgiveness of sins in the name of His Son, Jesus Christ.

This is the proper place for the Son of God as well as for the sons of God who have been adopted through the blessed waters of Baptism. Here in God's house, true wisdom is to be found and learned. Here true preparation for life is offered. In God's house a child learns the things that are truly necessary for a peaceful, contented, useful life here on earth through hearing God's Word which brings them to a living faith in the atoning sacrifice of Jesus; that sacrifice which won their eternal salvation when this short life is done. Such a youth is a model youth flooded with the light of the God's grace, shielded by the shadow of His Son's cross, brought into close communion with our Savior, Jesus Christ, nurtured and fed upon the green pastures of the Gospel, and filled with the grace and blessings of the Holy Spirit while walking in the fear of God, enjoying the guidance and the comfort of God's divine Word.

It saddens me when I know of children who should be here in Church and in Sunday school, who should be immersed in God's Word and strengthened by the liturgy but aren't. It saddens me to know they are missing the truly important lessons of life. It also saddens me when I think of parents who are depriving their children of the blessed opportunity of hearing the Word and receiving the Sacraments. When I think of them, I cannot help but be reminded of the words of Jesus; ***"whoever causes one of these little ones who believe in me to sin, it would be better for him to have a great millstone fastened around his neck and to be drowned in the depth of the sea"*** (Matthew 18:6 ESV). I am also reminded of the command God gave to parents, saying, ***"Hear, O Israel: The LORD our God, the LORD is one. You shall love the LORD your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your might. And these words that I command you today shall be on your heart. You shall teach them diligently to your children, and shall talk of them when you sit in your house, and when you walk by the way, and when you lie down, and when you rise. You shall bind them as a sign on your hand, and they shall be as frontlets between your eyes. You shall write them on the doorposts of your house and on your gates."*** (Deuteronomy 6:4-9, ESV) Woe to the parent who keeps their children from the house of God.

St. Luke reminds us that all who heard Jesus, ***"were amazed at his understanding and his answers"*** (v. 47). Wouldn't it be wonderful to hear such a report of your own child? Wouldn't it be wonderful to know there are children who are prepared for the world, not by secular thought and process, but by the Word of God which overshadows all the wisdom of men?

Since St. Luke gives no specifics regarding the conversation between Jesus and the teachers of the Law, I believe it was much of what He taught when He entered His ministry. He would have explained that God's righteous indignation directed against human sin would be poured out on His own Son as compensation for that sin. Teaching that on the Altar of the Cross, human sin and guilt would be washed away completely in the cleansing blood of His Son's sacrifice. That there, upon the Cross, would be an unimaginable, blessed exchange; His divine righteousness would be traded for human sinfulness.

Moreover, those teachers would have heard, all who hear and believe the Gospel, trusting it for Christ's sake, are no longer dead, but alive; no longer slaves, but free; no longer bound to earth and time, but joyfully walking the path that leads to heaven and an eternity of bliss. Our Lord would have told them, although His Cross bleeds, it also comforts; it signifies death, but it also brings hope and eternal life. His Cross brings their present life to a close, while at once embarking them on a new life. The Cross renders sin powerless, taking away the sting of death. Moreover, He would have told them, as you stand at the foot of the Cross looking at the crucified Christ, you would be a firsthand witness of the fullness of God's love lavished on all men. Yes, they might even think that a death by crucifixion represents defeat, but they would soon learn it is a sure sign of victory.

The very things I imagine Jesus telling those teachers when He was twelve, is what our children learn today when they attend Divine Worship, Sunday school, and other programs of the Church. Here, they hear and learn the theology of the Cross which deals with today's suffering while joyful anticipating the ultimate realization of the things of heaven, fully aware that the Cross of Christ is the epitome of suffering and joy.

This teaching is the Gospel, which has the power to turn our youth into sons and daughters of God; living souls that testify of their faith; a faith that confesses Christ Jesus as Lord of all, a faith that believes in the Triune God; Father, Son, and Holy Spirit; a faith which hungers for the Word of God, a faith that believes that; ***“man does not live by bread alone, but man lives by every word that comes from the mouth of the LORD.” (Deuteronomy 8:3, ESV)***; a faith that eagerly looks forward to Divine Service where our Lord invites us to, ***“Take eat, this is my body; take drink, this is my blood.”*** Here, in the distribution of Holy Communion, His precious body and blood, in, under and with the blessed bread and wine are distributed for the forgiveness of sins. Such children are a delight in God's eyes and a blessing to every congregation to whom they belong. Such as these are the future theologians, pastors, professors, teachers, elders, deaconesses, Sunday school teachers, and laity of the Church. Such as these, when taught the true Word of God, will carry on Christ's Gospel in all its truth and purity until the Day of Resurrection, Judgment Day when Christ will return to judge the living and dead. But not a day of judgment for those who have been given the gift of faith, for our Lord Jesus tells us, ***“Truly, truly, I say to you, whoever hears my word and believes him who sent me has eternal life. He does not come into judgment, but has passed from death to life.” (John 5:24, ESV)***

So parents I urge you; follow the instruction of our Lord Jesus, who said, ***“Let the little children come to me and do not hinder them, for to such belongs the kingdom of heaven.” (Matthew 19:14, ESV)*** Cleave to the Word of God that your children, led by the Holy Spirit, will relish being with *Christ in His House*, that they may be adopted as sons and daughters of God through the blessed waters of Baptism, and given the gift of faith, to forever know, worship, and believe in our Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ for the forgiveness of their sins and life eternal. In the name of Jesus. Amen.

May the Peace of God, which passes all understanding, keep your hearts and minds in Christ Jesus. Amen.