

# Epiphany 01 - Luke 2:41-52

Rev. Jeff Hendrix | Faith Lutheran Church

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## The Holy Family, the Example of Epiphany Evangelism: Revealing Christ in Our Homes

When the wise men came to Jesus, it was a big deal, because it signified that the Christ was sent not just to the Jews, God's chosen people, but to all the world. God's own people rejected Him, while foreigners came to worship Him. Herod, King of Jerusalem who was supposed to protect Jesus tried to kill Him, while at least three foreign kings came to give Him gifts.

For that reason, the entire season of Epiphany celebrates the revealing of Christ, the Light of the World, to all the world. In addition to the revealing of who Christ is, there's an overarching emphasis in the season of Epiphany of evangelism, of spreading the good news to all the world.

But on the first Sunday after the Epiphany, we start at a unique point in Jesus' life: With the Holy Family, when Jesus is now 12 years old, in the temple. The Holy Family - Joseph, Mary, and Jesus - is our first Biblical Narrative as we consider our roles in evangelism.

Evangelism is spreading the Gospel, the good news, the evangel. It's not making the church grow, although the growth of the church is often a product of evangelism. Through the example of the Holy Family, we see that evangelism starts at home, with our family.

### Luke 2:41-52

<sup>41</sup>Every year his parents traveled to Jerusalem for the Passover Festival. <sup>42</sup>When he was twelve years old, they went up according to the custom of the Festival. <sup>43</sup>When the days had ended, as they were returning, the boy Jesus stayed behind in Jerusalem. His parents did not know it. <sup>44</sup>Since they thought he was in their group, they went a day's journey. Then they began to look for him among their relatives and friends. <sup>45</sup>When they did not find him, they returned to Jerusalem, searching for him.

<sup>46</sup>After three days they found him in the temple courts, sitting among the teachers, listening to them and asking them questions. <sup>47</sup>And all who heard him were amazed at his understanding and his answers. <sup>48</sup>When his parents saw him, they were astonished. His mother said to him, "Son, why have you treated us this way? See, your father and I have been anxiously looking for you."

<sup>49</sup>He said to them, "Why were you looking for me? Did you not know that I must be taking care of my Father's business?" <sup>50</sup>They did not understand what he was telling them.

<sup>51</sup>He went down with them and came to Nazareth. He was always obedient to them. And his mother treasured up all these things in her heart. <sup>52</sup>Jesus grew in wisdom and stature, and in favor with God and with people.

This is one Bible story I remember learning in grade school when I was about 10 years old. I could relate to it. Jesus, who was not much older than I myself was at the time, had not returned with his parents after their trip to the city. And he got in trouble. Or so I thought.

And I remember thinking, "Well, that sounds like me! I get in trouble all the time for not listening to my parents. If *Jesus* could do it, why can't I? If *Jesus* could leave His parents and go do whatever He wanted, maybe I can too." But then our teacher explained that Jesus actually listened to His parents and He actually didn't do anything wrong. Now I knew Jesus never sinned, but it sure seemed to me like Jesus disobeyed his parents here. That was the extent of my theological understanding at about age 10.

### The example of Mary & Joseph

But what I didn't understand when I was 10 was that Jesus was a much better example than I imagined, He was a perfect one, and more than that, He was the One who sanctified my feeble attempts to imitate His example. And also what I didn't understand then, was that even at 10 years old I had more in common with Mary and Joseph.

Parents, have you ever lost your keys, and then blamed your kids because you know they liked to play with them - even though you have no evidence that they actually took them? But you became overly anxious and so you blamed them anyway?

That's kind of what happened here. Mary and Joseph *lost* Jesus! It's not that Jesus deceitfully hid from them and left. *They* were negligent. In fact our text says they went a whole day without knowing where He was, looking for Him, or even asking anyone where He was. They had probably left Him with some relatives or friends (whose vocation was not to look after their Son) and then packed up and started on the journey home.

Mary and Joseph, unlike their Son, were not perfect. They sinned. They both neglected their duties as parents at times and they become overly and sinfully anxious.

But before we criticize Mary and Joseph too much, we also see that they serve as a good example for us.

First, they took time out of their busy lives to go to the temple, to be where God gives His grace. In our narrative today, they are attending the feast of the Passover in Jerusalem. This was one of three yearly trips they would have made to the temple (for Passover, Pentecost, and the Feast of Tabernacles), in addition to their regular synagogue life in their hometown of Nazareth.

It was a 5 day walk from Nazareth to Jerusalem, *if* the roads were good and not too clogged with travelers. The closer you got to Jerusalem, more pilgrims were going in and out for the feast, so the slower travel would be trying to accommodate everyone on the narrow dirt roads. Along the way from Nazareth to Jerusalem, wild beasts were a threat. Worse than lions were the unpredictable Syrian bears in the hills. Far more likely however were attacks by bandits along lonely stretches, as described in the parable of the Good Samaritan.<sup>1</sup>

The boy Jesus probably would have witnessed or heard about such things over His six trips back and forth every year. So, to escape these potential dangers, families traveled in caravans called "synods" in our text. The word *synod* literally means "walking together" and that's what these people would do, in order to increase their odds of actually reaching Jerusalem. They'd have to walk together in a synod if they were going to make it to the temple.

And remember, Jerusalem was the place where Herod lived, the ruler who had enviously tried to kill Jesus as an infant after He learned from the wise men about this new king. Every trip back to Jerusalem for Mary, Joseph, and Jesus was potentially life-threatening. But the study of God's Word and worshipping at the temple was more important than anything else in their lives.

30 days - one whole month of their year was spent on the road just to get to and from the temple. On top of that they would spend another week actually in Jerusalem for each of the

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<sup>1</sup> <http://www.christianitytoday.com/history/issues/issue-59/on-road.html>

three festivals. And don't think that this was easy because it was part of their culture. For Joseph, this meant giving up about two whole months of carpentry work per year.

So, we see how first they sacrificed in order to come to the temple or church regularly. But there's something else in our text that happens that's very amazing, and from it we can infer something about Mary and Joseph's religious life at home.

Our text says that when the boy Jesus was in the temple, "all who heard him were amazed at his understanding and his answers." Well, yeah, of course, He's God right? Yes, but, He's also true Man. And Jesus isn't using His powers as God here, He's not performing a miracle. Jesus' first miracle recorded in Scripture doesn't come until 21 years later, when Jesus turns water into wine at the wedding at Cana (which happens to be our account for next week). Everything Jesus knows here at the temple, He learned, as a normal 12-yr old boy..

This is knowledge Jesus has been taught by Mary and Joseph at home. Now of course Jesus is perfect, so He had been perfectly studying God's Word, but Jesus also obeyed His parents, did what they asked Him and followed their example.

So not only did Mary and Joseph make going to church a priority, they made sure to catechize their Child at home. Their example is the vocation and duty of all parents.

We have a tendency in our day to think of religious instruction as just another subject that kids need to learn, but one that the church takes care of through Catechism Class. This really couldn't be any further from the truth. The duty of catechizing isn't the church's; it's the parents. Catechism class at church is really only to make sure the basics are understood. In fact, Martin Luther began his catechism with these words: "as the head of the family shall teach them to his household."

Epiphany is about the promise of the Savior being spread to all the world. It's evangelism. And evangelism starts at home. Evangelism doesn't start at church, but it does lead there, as Mary and Joseph and Jesus show. Teaching your family at home and bringing your family to church is the most important way you can evangelize.

Mary & Joseph weren't perfect, but they were faithful parents who made the study of God's word their number one priority. Mary & Joseph's example should put us to shame.

**But the example of Jesus also shows us something even better.** Jesus isn't just our example, He's our substitute. It shows us that what He does in the temple, He does for us. Jesus didn't need to be there. But He's there, three times a year, for the Passover, Pentecost, and the Feast of Tabernacles. Jesus was fulfilling each festival for us. He's keeping the Law, because we couldn't.

And as Jesus is in the temple for each of these feasts, as He is studying Scripture, is learning all these things about Himself. He is learning of His difficult road to the cross. He is learning of His suffering and eventual death. He is learning of His sacrifice on our behalf, of Him making His temple in our hearts through faith, sanctifying our neglect of our duties through repentance and forgiveness.

Jesus is the ultimate Priest, the Priest who was to make atonement for all people, to make atonement for us, to offer Himself as the sacrifice on our behalf. Yet here, He is submitting Himself to priests, learning from them. And then, when His parents came and told Him to come with them, He went; He obeyed them, He kept the 4th commandment.

Jesus kept and fulfilled all things perfectly.

Here's where we might get frustrated by Jesus' example. Jesus, even though He was true Man, was perfect. We, as parents or children, are not. We know that Christians are followers of Christ, and because Christ was found in the temple, that's where we are to be as well...but that's difficult.

Like Mary and Joseph's trek to Jerusalem each year, making God's Word our number one priority isn't easy. It's hard to make time. It's hard to realign priorities. It's hard when the world tempts us with so much else. And, if we *do* make God's Word our number one priority, we have no promises that anything will change in our lives here; we have no promise that our kids will remain in the faith, that our church will grow numerically, or that our life will be better or easier; in fact, it'll probably be harder because, like Mary and Joseph and Jesus, it'll require bearing crosses; making sacrifices.

But because Jesus was already the perfect sacrifice for Mary, Joseph and you, what I can promise you if you follow Jesus' example and make God's Word your highest priority, is that you will walk together with our church, you will have a "synod" to walk with on the dangerous and difficult path to our heavenly Jerusalem.

You'll have Jesus helping you along the way, giving you the strength to continue through His Word and Sacraments. And, by the grace of God and the gifts of the Holy Spirit, you will be sure to reach the place where the glory of the temple in Jerusalem couldn't even compare. You'll reach the temple of heaven, where you will dwell in the light of Jesus forever. The Light that has been revealed to all nations, even to your own home.

Happy Epiphany. Amen.