

SERMON FOR MORNING PRAYER
The First Sunday after the Epiphany¹

Lessons:

The First Lesson:² Here beginneth the twenty-second Verse of the eighth Chapter of the Proverbs.³

“... The LORD possessed me in the beginning of his way, before his works of old. I was set up from everlasting, from the beginning, or ever the earth was. When there were no depths, I was brought forth; when there were no fountains abounding with water. Before the mountains were settled, before the hills was I brought forth: While as yet he had not made the earth, nor the fields, nor the highest part of the dust of the world. When he prepared the heavens, I was there: when he set a compass upon the face of the depth: When he established the clouds above: when he strengthened the fountains of the deep: When he gave to the sea his decree, that the waters should not pass his commandment: when he appointed the foundations of the earth: Then I was by him, as one brought up with him: and I was daily his delight, rejoicing always before him; Rejoicing in the habitable part of his earth; and my delights were with the sons of men. Now therefore hearken unto me, O ye children: for blessed are they that keep my ways. Hear instruction, and be wise, and refuse it not. Blessed is the man that heareth me, watching daily at my gates, waiting at the posts of my doors. For whoso findeth me findeth life, and shall obtain favour of the LORD.”

Here endeth the First Lesson.

The Second Lesson:⁴ Here beginneth the forty-first Verse of the second Chapter of the Gospel according to St. Luke.⁵

“... Now his parents went to Jerusalem every year at the feast of the passover. And when he was twelve years old, they went up to Jerusalem after the custom of the feast. And when

they had fulfilled the days, as they returned, the child Jesus tarried behind in Jerusalem; and Joseph and his mother knew not of it. But they, supposing him to have been in the company, went a day's journey; and they sought him among their kinsfolk and acquaintance. And when they found him not, they turned back again to Jerusalem, seeking him. And it came to pass, that after three days they found him in the temple, sitting in the midst of the doctors, both hearing them, and asking them questions. And all that heard him were astonished at his understanding and answers. And when they saw him, they were amazed: and his mother said unto him, Son, why hast thou thus dealt with us? behold, thy father and I have sought thee sorrowing. And he said unto them, How is it that ye sought me? wist ye not that I must be about my Father's business? And they understood not the saying which he spake unto them. And he went down with them, and came to Nazareth, and was subject unto them: but his mother kept all these sayings in her heart. And Jesus increased in wisdom and stature, and in favour with God and man."

Here endeth the Second Lesson.

Text:

From the Second Lesson: "*And when they had fulfilled the days, as they returned, the child Jesus tarried behind in Jerusalem; and Joseph and his mother knew not of it. But they, supposing him to have been in the company, went a day's journey; and they sought him among their kinsfolk and acquaintance. And when they found him not, they turned back again to Jerusalem, seeking him. And it came to pass, that after three days they found him in the temple, sitting in the midst of the doctors, both hearing them, and asking them questions.*"⁶ In the Name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Ghost. Amen.

Let us pray.

Dear Lord, help us to understand and to accept Your will when we do not comprehend it. Give us grace to accept our limitations and to accept instead Your plan for our lives. Give to us those things, Lord, that in our ignorance and misunderstanding we cannot ask for nor even understand that we need. This we ask through the blessed Name of Jesus, our Lord and Savior. *Amen.*

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¹ This sermon was originally written on the Gospel for Holy Communion on the First Sunday after the Epiphany, 2013.

² *Psalms and Lessons for the Christian Year* (1943), The Book of Common Prayer xii (PECUSA 1928, rev. 1943).

³ Proverbs 8:22-35 (KJV).

⁴ “Upon any Sunday or Holy Day, the Minister may read the Epistle or the Gospel of the Day in place of the Second Lesson at Morning or Evening Prayer.” *Concerning the Service of the Church*, THE BOOK OF COMMON PRAYER viii (PECUSA 1928, rev. 1943). The Book of Common Prayer xii (PECUSA 1928, rev. 1943).

⁵ St. Luke 2:41-52 (KJV).

⁶ St. Luke 2:43-46 (NIV).

⁷ St. Luke 2:46-47 (NIV).

⁸ St. Luke 2:48 (NIV).

⁹ St. Luke 1:32-33 (RSV).

¹⁰ St. Luke 2:51 (NIV).

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Homily:

It is every parent's nightmare. You travel to a big city, and when it is time to go, somehow, inexplicably, you lose track of a child, and it is hours, perhaps even days later before you realize what has happened. Our minds reel with horrible possibilities even to consider the results of such a thing.

The psychological horror of losing a child is so universal that in virtually every society there are people who report nightmares about this possibility. Every parent, on hearing this story, feels the anguish, the fear, the clawing horror of a child who is lost.

The circumstances initially seem common enough. Joseph and Mary, as was usual at the time, took a trip to Jerusalem each year at the Feast of the Passover. These trips were, no doubt, a strain on the resources of the family, and were undertaken only with the company of extended family and neighbors.

The Feast of the Passover was huge, lasting a full week. Despite this, the family stayed the full week at the Feast, but when the time was come, the family turned towards home along with their kin and neighbors. The family started for home, presuming that Jesus, then aged 12, was with the group, perhaps with kinfolk or others.

After a day's travel, however, they still had not seen Him, and so they began to inquire about him. “Have you seen our son?” “Do you know who he is with?” “Has anyone seen Jesus?” But no one had seen the boy.

No doubt terrified, His parents turned back towards Jerusalem to find their son. It took them three days to find Him.

We can only imagine the fear, the concern, the agonizing worry that must have gripped Joseph and Mary. But after three days searching for their son, they found Him: *“And it came to pass, that after three days they found him in the temple, sitting in the midst of the doctors, both hearing them, and asking them questions. And all that heard him were astonished at his understanding and answers.”*⁷

Not afraid, not searching for His parents, not even seemingly concerned that He might be missed, Jesus was in the temple taking part in theological discussions with the most learned of the Jewish scholars. His answers to their questions, we are told, astonished those scholars.

They could not have truly understood that they were in fact taking part in discussions about God with God Himself. Even at the age of 12, Jesus was taking part in the spiritual life of His people, and fulfilling the requirements of the law so that He could completely fulfill the prophecies about Himself. He could not stand outside the faith and reform it, but must instead show Himself a full part and participant in that faith in order to change and fulfill it.

Joseph and Mary, however, were not so concerned at the moment with prophecy, but with making sure their son was safe. When they found Him, they were amazed, the Scripture says. No doubt they were amazed at His self-assuredness, His lack of concern for what seemed to them to be His unsafe circumstance, and His focus on the affairs of the temple.

We can feel the pain His mother Mary felt when she remonstrated with Him, *“Son, why hast thou thus dealt with us? behold, thy father and I have sought thee sorrowing.”*⁸ We hear in her simple protestation that she and Joseph were worried about Him, and were afraid that something horrible might have

happened to Him. Jesus, however, was preparing Himself to begin His ministry. He would be faced with saving His people from their sins and teaching an entire people and world how to relate to God.

So Jesus responded to His earthly parents, *“How is it that ye sought me? wist ye not that I must be about my Father’s business?”* *“Why were you searching for me? Don’t you know by now that I am called to do My Father’s business?”* He reminded Joseph and Mary of what the angels had told them before His birth to Mary.

The angel had announced to Mary, *“He shall be great, and shall be called the Son of the Highest: and the Lord God shall give unto him the throne of his father David: And he shall reign over the house of Jacob for ever; and of his kingdom there shall be no end.”*⁹ But Joseph and Mary, perhaps overwhelmed by their concerns, did not understand what Jesus was telling them.

So Jesus went back with them to Nazareth, where he lived as their son and was *“subject unto them.”* Mary did not forget what had happened, or what had been said; she *“kept all these sayings in her heart.”*¹⁰ Nor was the time lost on Jesus. We are told that He continued to grow in wisdom and in stature, and that His renown grew among people as His favor grew with God.

Despite Mary and Joseph’s fears, He had never really been lost. He had only been pursuing His true mission, a mission that would lead Him back to Jerusalem again, this time to face crucifixion as He defeated the powers of sin and death. His earthly parents’ nightmare would become the means by which the world would be saved.