

December 27, 2009
First Sunday after Christmas
Luke 2:41-52
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GETTING DOWN TO BUSINESS

Did it catch you off guard? A couple days ago we heard the story of Jesus' birth and today he is twelve years old. Nothing like getting down to business. Getting on with the story. The thing is: next Sunday Jesus will be an infant again as we hear about the visit of the Magi to the Christ Child. For some, today is the feast of the Holy Family and today's gospel is one of three or four stories about Mary, Joseph and Jesus that follow the birth narrative.

It goes without saying that we tell the story of Jesus' life, death and resurrection in a one-year period. And save today's gospel, there's nothing in the four gospels between his birth and his baptism. So things need to move quickly. But let's not forget that the purpose of the gospels is not to give history, or even to tell a good story. They are making theological statements. Think of it this way. The gospels are writing four to six decades after Jesus' resurrection. They are now telling the story of Jesus' life through the lens of his resurrection, and thus his identity as Son of God. So in this light, even at the very beginning Jesus is the promised Messiah. Knowing the end of the story influences the way they tell the beginning.

You've seen it in movies and TV shows. There are flashbacks to earlier times and situations. Today's gospel is a kind of flashback. Even on the brink of adulthood, the adolescent Jesus is in the temple studying the scriptures, listening to the teachers and asking them questions. We see that even at age twelve people are amazed with his answers, a foreshadowing of his later career.

But is this a Christmas story? If we move beyond Christmas equaling *the baby Jesus* and look at the purpose of the infancy stories in the scriptures, we answer: yes, of course. All of these *early* stories reveal to others the presence of God's Son in the world, the one who will save his people from their sins. The gospel writers are getting down to business, getting down to basics, giving us a flashback and a sneak preview of what is to come. Revealing to us--the reader--the identity and destiny of this holy Child.

If you have been a parent you can probably relate to the panic Mary and Joseph must have felt when they realized that Jesus was not with the caravan traveling back home after a pilgrimage to Jerusalem. Maybe you've lost track of a child in a big department store, at a large auditorium, on a busy street. I remember hearing about a child inadvertently left behind at a subway stop in New York. Someone stayed with the scared child until the parent got on the nearest subway the other direction. But I bet the parent was even more anxious than the child!

You can imagine what kind of lecture Mary and Joseph would have given their child. Just because you have a holy calling doesn't mean you should be disrespectful toward your parents. There's a commandment about that, you know! Did the prodigy Jesus get so engulfed in Torah study that he lost track of time? But really now, three days?

When they find him, Joe and Mary get right down to business. They lose no time in letting Jesus know how worried and anxious they were.

But it's Jesus' answer that is the mysterious line of the story. Though his parents didn't have a clue what he meant. And we're not so sure either, since the Greek is ambiguous. The most common translation is: *Didn't you know that I must be in my Father's house?*

But it could also mean: *Didn't you know that I must be about my Father's business ... or affairs?*

In both cases we have a preview that Jesus is God's Son. He is getting down to business. Spending time in the Temple. Studying the scriptures. For later his business will be teaching and healing and proclaiming the kingdom of God.

And for us, it's the third day of Christmas. A new year and a new decade are several days ahead. And yet we still have the same problems we had before. There is still plenty of bad news in the world. There are health worries for some, employment worries, climate change worries. And after a few quiet days this week, many of us will fall right back into the overscheduled, busy-ness of our lives. Getting down to business may well be returning to our same old patterns and obsessions.

Yet at Christmas we remember God getting down to business. God dwelling among us in the messiness and ambiguities of life. Jesus growing in wisdom for the day of his public ministry when he will get down to the business of bringing healing and hope to those in need. In other words, entering into our very human lives.

We too come to God's house this day, seeking wisdom, seeking peace, maybe even seeking answers. Even as we celebrate the birth of the Christ Child, we remember his calling, his purpose, his destiny. When we try to keep him in the crib he says to us, Didn't you know that I must be about my Father's business?

We can't get trained in this kind of business with an M.B.A. In fact, God's affairs, God's business, is none other than divine presence in the world. In this holy house we get glimpses of it, but we pray that we will learn, day by day, to see with our own eyes that all the world is alive with the glory of God.

Jesus surprises us this day, as he comes among us to shatter our expectations, to awaken our wonder, and to give us hope and resolve as we soon begin a new year.