



# ST. STEPHEN'S ANGLICAN CHURCH

11856 MAYS CHAPEL RD., TIMONIUM, MD 21093

Sunday January 11<sup>th</sup> – Epiphany I

**✠ In The Name of The Father and of The Son  
and of The Holy Ghost. Amen.**

Today's Gospel reading reminds me of an incident with John, our younger son. I don't think this is such a remarkable event for most parents but it is interesting how reflecting upon it brought home the Gospel lesson. Our family joined another and took a day trip to a large model railroad display. To say large doesn't actually express the vastness of the place. There were trains running through acres of beautiful scenery, picturesque towns, full of little animated people spread out over three stories.

I think it took us two hours to walk through the place. I forget what it was exactly, but John was fascinated by one display in particular. I can still see him hunching down, arms wrapped around his legs, watching the object of his fascination. We fell into two groups, my buddy and I in one group and Diane and his wife in the other. As you might guess, Diane and I both assumed John was with the other. We got to the exit and discovered that neither of us have John.

Diane was upset and turned her dismay upon me "YOU were supposed to watch him!" She was in tears. I pulled an "Adam" and did my best craven "yes dear" and tried stammering out that I thought John was with her. Needless to say that was insufficient and I was thoroughly chastised as we looked high and low for John. We asked our friends when they last saw him. We asked the man at the ticket counter. We checked the men's room and just about everywhere else. After perhaps after half an hour, we found him. He was on hands and knees watching the same display I described earlier. *We didn't look for him where he was last seen looking at something, instead, we looked for him where we*

*wanted him to be* – with friends, with a responsible adult just NOT ALONE by himself.

Turning back to our Gospel lesson today, Joseph and Mary were on their annual visit to the Temple in Jerusalem. Jewish males were directed by the book of Exodus (23:14) to visit the Temple three times each year for Passover, Pentecost and Tabernacles. As the Jewish people grew in numbers and spread out over the land, away from the Temple, the practice became to attend just during the Passover. People would journey in large groups for security and, well, for the social aspect. Imagine a large group of people traveling.

When I think of my own family making such a trip, I can visualize women and the children traveling with other women and children, chatting, gossiping and bragging about their children to each other and children playing games like tag and some kind of ball. Meanwhile, the men would hang around camp swapping opinions about current politics and swapping lies. Eventually the men would start off knowing full well they would catch up with the slower moving procession of women and children up ahead by night fall.

It was on one such day, whilst returning from Jerusalem, after a hard day of probably regaling the other women about the great deals she scored in the market that Mary reached their stopping place for the night and realized that her first son, Jesus, was not with her party. Probably having a bit of misgiving, she consoled herself that Jesus was almost a man and it was right for him to travel with men. Of course, as

we all know, that when Joseph, with the rest of the guys, showed up – no Jesus.

Like my experience with my own wife, I can well imagine how distraught Mary would have been. Jesus was probably then and continued to be – thought of as “her baby.” Speaking for myself, I recall thinking “how could I lose my kid??” Joseph, probably for an instant, thought the same thing . . . until the reality of what he had done hit him. He had “lost” the messiah to be - the Savior . I imagine my own fears were as nothing to the fear that Joseph felt. “What would God righteously do to me for losing Jesus???”

Joseph and Mary asked their friends and extended family if they had seen Jesus, they asked the caravan leaders, they checked in all the likely places he might have been. Doesn't this sound familiar? Joseph and Mary were preoccupied with the daily activities of life. In this case, they were probably in a hurry to get back to Joseph's carpentry shop back in Nazareth. I can well imagine Joseph thinking about the work piling up undone in the shop during his absence and Mary was thinking about all the housework she had to do after their Passover vacation. Following in the same vein, when Jesus went missing, Instead of thinking back to what was important to their son (like my earlier story about my son) they checked the places that they felt he should be, first. Then the places he might have been diverted and finally, after three wasted days, the last place they expected – the Temple.

Jesus was sitting there, listening to the wise men of the Temple. Asking them questions about important points and growing wise in both his questions and in his understanding of the nature of his Father, God Almighty. Jesus was doing what he was supposed to do – learn and grow wise to best be a servant to his Father. Joseph and Mary didn't think about WHAT Jesus was doing or WHAT was important to Jesus. They looked in all the wrong places.

Mary took Jesus to task for not staying with them doing what they wanted Him to do. Jesus was to follow. Jesus was to do as He was told and not cause them any grief. In reply, Jesus simply told them he was doing the things His Father in heaven wanted Him to do. At the time they didn't understand, but later, Mary would reflect back and realize what Jesus had meant. *It wasn't that Jesus left them. It was they who left Jesus.*

Joseph and Mary most likely assumed the great things they had been told about their son would be fulfilled in Jesus becoming a great earthly king not the risen Son of God as we know him from scripture, history and presence with us today. They didn't think of what God wanted for Jesus. In the joy of traveling, visiting the temple, hanging out with friends, or simply going about the activities of life, did Joseph and Mary lose sight of what was really important? Did they really place God first?

Are we having problems finding Jesus because He is not the foundation of our life? Do we go about our daily lives – getting the kids ready for school, driving to work, listening to the news, applying ourselves to the job that pays the bills, fixing dinner, helping the kids with homework, preparing our taxes, watching a new movie and then falling exhausted into bed to start it all over again the next day without thinking about Jesus? Have *we* left Jesus?

When do we think about what God wants us to do? How do we show our love of God? Do we follow His great commandments? When we finally do have a moment to breath, do we spend some time reflecting on God and how we might integrate His rules for our lives into what we do, or, do we find a new project to work on, a football game to watch on TV, or posting to Facebook? In short, do our choices get in the way of following God, or, are we following idols instead?

I would encourage you to take some time (outside of Church this morning) to think about how you might place God first and then using this primacy to guide your day and how you might better reflect Jesus' love for you unto others. *AMEN.*

***To the Only Wise God, Our Savior, be Glory and Majesty, Dominion and Power, Both now and Forevermore. Amen.***