

1st Sunday of Advent - C Cycle

December 2, 2012

INTRODUCTION; Jeremiah 33,14-16; I Thess. 3,12-4,2; Luke 21,25-28.34-36

The prophet, Jeremiah, lived during the most devastating time in the history of Israel. He witnessed the Babylonian invasion which brought with it the destruction of Jerusalem and its sacred Temple that had been built by King Solomon. He saw many of his fellow citizens enslaved and taken into exile. Yet his words reflect hope and not despair. His hope is based not on human capabilities but on God's faithfulness to God's promises made to God's people, promises made over 400 years earlier - during the reign of King David. God would bring to the throne a family member of the House of David, a just shoot, who would bring peace and security to Jerusalem. We still wait for peace and security - not only in Jerusalem but all over the world. The promised one from David's line has begun his reign. The gospel tells us one day he will come in great glory to complete his work and to establish the kingdom of God forever.

HOMILY: I want to start by briefly describing 1000 years of Jewish history for you. 1000 years before Christ, David was king. His son Solomon succeeded him and built a Temple in Jerusalem. He built a lot of other stuff too, including temples for the gods his many pagan wives worshipped. His building programs bankrupted the country and when he died, the northern part of the country revolted against the new king, King David's grandson, and they chose their own king. The northern kingdom suffered many uprisings and changes of leadership and eventually in 722 B.C. they were completely annihilated by the Assyrians (warriors from northern Iraq). Meanwhile, the southern portion of the Holy Land, now known as Judah, continued to be ruled by David's descendants, but the kingdom began to unravel about 600 B.C. In 587 B.C. the Babylonians came down on Jerusalem, destroyed everything and showed no mercy. Most of the Jews were taken as slaves to Babylon. That's what I spoke about in my introduction. From then on, for the next 600 years, Judah had no king of its own. It suffered under the control of foreign nations: first the Babylonians, then the Persians, followed by the Greeks, then the Syrians and, finally, the Romans. This brings us up to the time of Jesus. Being under the Romans was difficult. The people lived in poverty because of taxes and had little say as to how they were governed. Different groups of Jews dealt with their oppression in different ways. I'm going to mention four ways by which people tended to respond. 1) There were those who silently suffered under Roman occupation. They knew, humanly speaking, they could not stand up to the Romans. 2) Some Jews took more daring actions and attempted nonviolent protests. For the most part, Rome came back strong against the protesters; however, they occasionally backed down because of the protests. 3) Then there were Jews who believed that God had given the Jews the land of Israel and that it should be taken back by force from the Roman rulers. Zealots would have been among this group. Zealots were like modern day terrorists. They would even kill their fellow Jews who would not join in their rebellion. The Zealot movement led to various revolts against Rome (too many to mention) during which thousands of Jews were slaughtered. The Romans tolerated no opposition.

A fourth form of protest is the one in which we are especially interested. It developed as a sort

of "religious" protest. It was an idea or an ideology called "apocalypticism" which I have been talking about the past two Sundays. The Essenes, who composed the Dead Sea Scrolls, were of this thinking. The apocalyptic approach was based on the viewpoint that our world was controlled by evil powers; even with all our ingenuity and cleverness, we could do nothing about it. One must wait for God to act to free our world from the evil powers that dominate. Once God does this, only God can establish a world ruled by the forces of goodness and righteousness (aka the kingdom of God). Apocalyptic thinkers were especially interested in when this was going to happen. The Apostles were especially interested in when this would come about because they believed (as we do) that Jesus was the Messiah who would initiate the Kingdom of God, and they expected to have an important place in that Kingdom. The apocalyptic view was that this would happen in a very short time and people must be ready, living a good life, to be part of God's kingdom. Those who were not prepared to enter into God's kingdom would suffer eternal sorrow.

This apocalyptic way of thinking is behind today's gospel. The gospel tells us the evil world as we know it is to come to an end. It will be replaced by God's world where holiness, goodness, peace and love will prevail. Three things stand out in today's readings:

1) This kingdom where holiness and justice will prevail will come into existence through one of King David's descendants: "I will raise up for David a just shoot". The next three weeks will be focused on celebrating the birth of the One God has raised up. How will we prepare? Will prayer be a part of our preparations? A lot of people don't pray because they find it too hard. The hardest thing about prayer is to take time for it.

2) We can lament all the bad things that happen in today's world, but we cannot let them destroy us. Christians need to be optimistic. Jesus tells us when we see the signs that the Son of Man is coming (and we can see these signs more clearly through prayer and Scripture reading), we should not go around depressed. We should stand erect and raise our heads because our redemption is at hand.

3) And third, Jesus tells us to be careful our hearts do not become drowsy (the Greek word also means being weighed down, burdened) with three things: carousing or drunkenness (I know this doesn't apply to anyone here - but what about the third thing, "the anxieties of daily life." Isn't this good advice at this time of year when we can get so weary and burdened down with the "stuff" that keeps us from focusing on what Christ's coming is all about?

Our readings give us the push we all need as we start the season of Advent, so that when December 26 comes we don't just collapse and say, "thank God it's over."

2nd Sunday of Advent - C Cycle

December 9, 2012

Baruch 5, 1-9; Philippians 1, 4-6.8-11; Lk. 3, 1-6;

INTRODUCTION: In today's first reading, we hear from Baruch, the secretary of Jeremiah the prophet. He lived during the Babylonian exile over 500 years before Christ. Our first reading has the Babylonian invasion and destruction of Jerusalem as its background. Baruch speaks to the devastated city of Jerusalem and tells it to rejoice for it will prosper again. With the vision of a prophet, he tells Jerusalem to look east (toward Babylon) and see God gathering his people together to bring them back home. It is indeed a message of hope. This return of the exiles to Jerusalem is also poetically described in the Book of the prophet Isaiah. John the Baptist, who was sent to prepare the way for the Messiah, borrows from Isaiah to describe his own mission.

HOMILY: Christ came down to us to lead us to God. He came from on high, the Son of God, co-eternal with the Father and the Holy Spirit, and took on our human flesh. St. John says it so simply: "in the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God and the Word was God." "And the Word became flesh and made his dwelling among us, and we saw his glory, the glory as of the Father's only Son, full of grace and truth." This mystery of God becoming human is expressed theologically in the term: Incarnation. We say it every Sunday: "by the Holy Spirit, (he - Jesus) was incarnate of the Virgin Mary, and became man."

We are preparing to celebrate his birth among us. We tend to celebrate many births, but Jesus' birth is indeed worth celebrating. It was an event that had no equal. It was not only marvelous because it was God coming among us, sharing in our own human flesh, but as I said when I started, he came down to us in order to lead us to God. Bringing us to God is the main theme of today's readings. The liturgy uses the return of the Jewish exiles from Babylon to their home in Jerusalem as a symbol of our coming to God. Baruch explains it so beautifully in today's first reading: "God is leading Israel in joy by the light of his glory." John the Baptist quotes Isaiah when he describes his mission to prepare for the coming of our Savior. He said he was "a voice crying out in the desert: prepare the way of the Lord, make straight his paths." John was calling people to holiness so that God himself could lead them.

It is to holiness that our liturgy is calling us today. As we celebrate Christ's birth, is our celebration going to bring us a little closer to God, or is it just a ritual of decorating and undecorating, trading gifts, having parties and just wearing ourselves out. Coming closer to God, knowing his presence and his love for us is what it is all about. John the Baptist is speaking to us today: "make straight his paths." Get obstacles out of his way so he can fill our lives with his presence.

This is an ongoing effort for we are always called to grow in our relationship with God.

There are many ways we can prepare spiritually. I am going to offer two things that might help. One is the little booklet at the doors of the church called the Word Among Us. It has the

scripture readings for every day of Advent and gives a brief reflection on them. It probably wouldn't take more than five or ten minutes to read and reflect on. As I said last week, the hardest thing about prayer is sitting down to do it.

The other thing I wish to offer is my homily book. It follows the Sunday readings for this year. It has most of the homilies I preached three years ago when we were reading from Luke's gospel (cycle C). They are not the same homilies I am preaching this year even though the readings are the same. So the homily book will give you another perspective on the Scriptures for each Sunday.

There is one more thing I want to mention, which has nothing to do with anything I've said so far, but I need to say it. We are going to discontinue burning candles at the side altars. We now have two electric vigil light stands. Personally I never cared for the electric type, but many churches now use them. They are easier and less expensive to maintain, and most of all they do not smoke up the walls and the ceiling. We just spent a lot of money to make our church clean and beautiful and it doesn't make much sense to smoke it up again. Sometimes in lighting the candles, the taper or stick fell into the candle and it started a fire. It never caused a major problem, it was just a smelly one when the plastic started to burn. To light a candle simply press a button. It will burn for five days. The offering is still the same: \$2.00. Making an offering and saying a little prayer is part of the ritual of burning a candle in Church. It is the same as before as long as the sacrifice of an offering, a little prayer and the intention is there. And it will help keep our church clean. Right now we have only two vigil light stands. If we need to get one or two more we will, depending on their use. I just wanted to explain what we did and why we did it.

And now as we continue the Mass, may the Lord fill you with the peace and joy that only he can give as you prepare to celebrate the birth of his Son. Amen.

3rd Sunday of Advent - C Cycle

December 16, 2012

Zephaniah 3, 14-18a; Philippians 4, 4-7; Luke 3, 10-18;

INTRODUCTION: Our theme for today, as it often is, is summed up in the Psalm refrain: "Cry out with joy and gladness, for among you is the great and holy one of Israel." Our first reading from the prophet Zephaniah goes back about 700 years before Christ. The Assyrians were the dominant force in the Middle East at that time. They were an unusually warlike, brutal people. Their capital city was in northern Iraq near modern day Mosul. Our first reading comes from a time shortly after the Assyrians annihilated the northern part of Israel. They brought severe suffering upon the southern part of Israel too, the area around Jerusalem, but they did not conquer it. Jerusalem would still be around for another 130 years until the Babylonians conquered it. Yet in spite of the pain the Assyrians inflicted upon Jerusalem, the people did not

learn from the prophets that they needed to obey God in order to prosper. Idolatry and immorality were rampant among the people of Jerusalem. For example, the king of Judah offered his own son as a human sacrifice to the pagan gods of the Canaanites. Most of what is written in the Book of Zephaniah records his efforts to correct abuses among God's people. Today we hear only the last part of the Book of Zephaniah as the prophet addresses those who are faithful to God. He tells them to rejoice and assures them God will rejoice and sing too because of his love for them and for all the blessings that will be theirs. Imagine how beautiful it would be to hear God singing.

There is something we should be aware of when we hear the second reading too. St. Paul is sitting in prison somewhere when he wrote this, and prisons in those days were really bad. Today's prisons would look like a five star hotel by comparison. Yet, even as he sits in prison, Paul can be joyful and he is able to encourage the Philippians to have no anxiety and to rejoice always.

HOMILY: In the days when we had Mass in Latin, this Sunday was known as Gaudete Sunday because the first word of the entrance hymn was Gaudete, a word that means "Be Joyful." The priest wears rose-colored vestments rather than the usual more somber colored violet vestments and today's readings tell us to rejoice. Friday evening, after finishing my homily, totally centered on the theme of joy, I decided to watch the news before I went to bed. The news wasn't very joyful as it reported on the tragic killing of 20 innocent children and 6 adults in Sandy Hook Elementary School in Connecticut earlier in the day. This horrible thing is beyond description. With thoughts of this tragedy still on my mind, it is with mixed feelings I begin my homily today. I am convinced it all comes down to "respect for life." In our world and in our country, respect for life continues to be eroded away. As it becomes less and less an ethical and moral value, there will always be people on the fringes of society who will push things even beyond any rational or civilized boundaries. We all feel sadness for those suffering from this terrible evil and we remember them in our prayers.

Fortunately there is more good in the world than there is evil, so, in spite of times of sadness and tragedy, we do have things about which we can be joyful, especially the birth of Jesus who came to bring us eternal joy. Joy is the theme for today because the celebration of Jesus' birth is so close.

We heard the prophet Zephaniah in today's first reading telling God's people, during an especially difficult time in their history, to "sing for joy." Why? Because God was in their midst. We heard Paul, even in prison, telling the Philippians to rejoice always. Paul makes it sound like it's something we are able to choose to do if we wish, and most of the time it is. There are things we can do to lift our spirits or there are things we do that pull us down and rob us of joy. I talk about some of those things such as self-pity, guilt, unforgiveness, anger, resentment, fear, and worry in my homily book on the third Sunday of Advent. That book is available at the doors of the church. Rather than repeating what I have said in the past, I would like to look at the gospel for a few thoughts. Last week we heard from John the Baptist who identified himself as a voice crying in the wilderness: "prepare the way of the Lord." The people asked, "what should we do

do?" In other words: "how do we prepare?" We don't hear John's full message, but there is enough here to think about. It struck me that although John was a fire and brimstone prophet, his message tells us some important things about joy.

Look at the first thing he says: "whoever has two cloaks should share with the person who has none. He tells us this applies to food also. He's not talking about spreading the wealth, but he is talking about being sensitive to the basic needs of others. Reaching out a helping hand to a person in need gives us a sense of satisfaction, a feeling of joy. The opposite of helping others is greed, where we're only interested in helping ourselves. A greedy person is not a happy person, it is a person always wanting more. John says tax collectors should not try to gouge people for more than was prescribed. Tax collectors made their living on whatever they could squeeze out of people and most likely a lot of them tried to get all they could. That's partly why they were so despised. John told soldiers not to be bullies, to be honest and to be satisfied with their wages. That would not be a popular thing to preach about these days! Notice John has a message for tax collectors and soldiers, two groups who were despised by the Jews. It shows Luke's concern for those on the margins of society, a concern Jesus himself would have for the poor and for sinners. Greed is an assumption that the more we have the happier we will be. But that is a false assumption for, even though we do have material needs, our deepest longings will never be fulfilled with things. A greedy person, as I said, is always unsatisfied.

We do not yet fully have that which will fulfill our deepest needs, which is God. We have begun to enjoy God's presence and love through faith in Jesus, who has come to us, but as the letter of John the evangelist tells us, "what we shall be has not yet come to light. We do know that when it is revealed we shall be like him, for we shall see him as he is." (I John 3,2) And so our life on earth now is a time of Advent as we wait and as we prepare for Jesus coming to us to lead us into the fullness of God's kingdom, a kingdom of joy. Amen.

Fourth Sunday of Advent - C Cycle

December 23, 2012

INTRODUCTION: Micah 5, 1-4a; Hebrews 10, 5-10; Luke 1, 39-45

In today's first reading the prophet Micah is speaking words of hope to God's people in Jerusalem during an attack by the Assyrians about 700 years before Christ. He promises salvation would come, and it would come out of an unimportant little village about seven miles south of Jerusalem named Bethlehem. Bethlehem had been the birthplace of King David 300 years before the prophet Micah. The greatness of the savior to come would reach to the ends of the earth. When the Magi came to Jerusalem looking for the newborn king of the Jews, 700 years later, this was the Scripture passage that guided them to where Jesus was. What an amazing prophecy; what an amazing way in which God fulfilled it!

HOMILY: St. Matthew and St. Luke tell us about events that happened at the time of Jesus' birth. Matthew focuses mostly on St. Joseph and Luke focuses primarily on the Blessed Virgin.

Today's short gospel describes the visitation of Mary to her cousin Elizabeth. In reading today's gospel earlier this week, I asked myself why Luke was telling us this story. My homily helped answer that question for me; I hope what I discovered will be helpful to you in knowing Jesus and Mary better. Our gospel today takes place right after Luke's account of the Annunciation, the beautiful gospel where the angel Gabriel asked Mary if she would consent to be the mother of the Messiah. Mary could never say "no" to God. On that occasion Gabriel also told Mary that her much older relative, Elizabeth, had conceived and already was in her sixth month. The next thing Luke tells us is that Mary went in haste to be with her and that is the beginning of today's gospel. When I pray the rosary, I frequently reflect on Mary's eagerness to help her cousin. Mary could have been filled with pride knowing she was to be the mother of a son, a great person who would be called Son of the Most High and who would inherit the throne of King David, which no one had occupied for almost 600 years. She could have considered herself too important to help her aged relative, but she didn't. She went with haste. But possibly there is another reason for her haste. The angel Gabriel had told her that it was in God's plan for Elizabeth to have a child; it wasn't just an unplanned pregnancy. "Nothing is impossible for God," Gabriel said. Mary's haste is indicative of her enthusiastic obedience to participate in God's plan.

Luke is thus telling us something about Mary. Luke presents her to us as the example of the always faithful disciple. Once when Jesus was preaching, a woman in the crowd called out: "blessed is the womb that bore you and the breasts that nursed you." (only Luke tells us of this event - Luke, 11,27) and Jesus answered, "Rather blessed are those who hear the word of God and keep it." Jesus' answer tells us it is faith in God and doing what God wants that makes the ideal disciple. So when Elizabeth says to Mary: "Blessed are you who believed that what was spoken to you by the Lord would be fulfilled," Luke is putting Mary before us as the example of the always faithful disciple. This is the second time in today's short gospel that Elizabeth said Mary was blessed. The first time was when Elizabeth said: "blessed are you among women and blessed is the fruit of your womb," a phrase we repeat whenever we say the "hail Mary." The two blessings that Elizabeth speaks tell us that Mary is indeed twice blest, she is the physical mother of the Messiah and she is first and most faithful among Jesus' disciples. Mary's response to these praises coming from Elizabeth is to bless God for the gracious privilege God has given her. She prays the beautiful Magnificat which follows this gospel passage: "my soul proclaims the greatness of the Lord..."

Luke is not only telling us about Mary, but this scene also reveals to us something about Jesus, something more than Gabriel told Mary in the Annunciation. In the Annunciation we learned that Jesus was conceived by the Holy Spirit. Now we learn that Jesus brings that Spirit to others. Luke tells us Elizabeth was filled with the Holy Spirit at the visit of Mary and Jesus. So was the unborn John the Baptist. Because Elizabeth was filled with the Spirit, she could interpret John's movement within her: he leaped for joy. The Spirit that brings us joy entered John at that moment too. Earlier Luke told us that when Gabriel appeared to Zachariah, John's father, that John "would be filled with the Holy Spirit even from his mother's womb." (Lk. 1,15). The gift of the Spirit on this occasion foreshadows Jesus' sending the Spirit on his disciples on Pentecost.

Another important statement about Jesus is in Elizabeth's question: "how does this happen that the mother of my Lord should come to me?" It is the same question that King David asked (1000 years earlier) when the Ark of the Covenant was brought into Jerusalem: "How can the ark of the Lord come to me?" (2 Sam. 6,9) The ark symbolized the presence of Israel's God among God's people. Mary's visit to Elizabeth blessed her home with the presence of God. As we prepare for Christmas we too ask ourselves that awesome question. and we are still unable to comprehend the profound answer we know to be true: "How does this happen that my Lord should come to me?" Amen.

Christmas

December 25, 2012

INTRODUCTION: In our first reading we hear from Isaiah the prophet who lived 700 years before Christ. The king who reigned at the time of Isaiah refused to trust in God and his policies brought darkness and gloom upon God's people. We hear Isaiah prophesy the birth of a king whose reign would bring peace and justice to God's people.

HOMILY: On Christmas morning, little five year old Tommy wasn't thrilled with the few toys and lots of clothes he had received. As he slowly trudged upstairs after opening his presents, his dad asked: "where are you going?" "To my room" he said, "to play with my new socks." (Reader's Digest: Dec. 2008, pg. 206)

As she prepared to wrap her Christmas presents, a mother discovered she didn't have any Christmas wrapping paper. The only wrapping paper she had said "Happy Birthday" on it. So she improvised. She got a big marking pen and wrote the word "Jesus" after "Happy Birthday." (Reader's Digest, Dec. 2012, pg 21)

In our first reading today, we heard the prophet Isaiah tell God's people that God would send them a king who would bring peace and justice to the people. He would not be like the king who was reigning at that time. It took 700 years before Isaiah's prophecy would come true. You would think that God's people would have forgotten about this prophecy, but they didn't. Their hope was still very much alive at the time of Jesus, waiting with high expectation for that Wonder-counselor, God-hero, father-forever and prince of peace, as Isaiah had foretold. Today we celebrate his birth.

He came to us in utter simplicity and humility, but the angels of God and the stars in the sky could not contain themselves. They had to announce his birth to everyone from those at the bottom of the social ladder, the shepherds, and to those whom society held in high esteem, the magi. Over two billion people in the world today celebrate his birth and praise God for the gift of Jesus.

Jesus didn't come just for us to make a big deal over his birth. He wants us to learn from his teachings, to imitate his example of love, to accept him as our savior and to find in him our hope. He wants us to spend eternity with him. We sometimes wonder where is that peace he came to bring, the love he taught, the eternal life he came to give. People still suffer, get sick, start wars, steal, cheat and kill. Where is the new life he came to bring us? First of all, we have to buy into his message to know his new life. Second, we have to realize that the peace he brings is not of this world, nor is his kingdom of this world. Only when we accept him fully into our lives does it all begin to make sense.

St. Luke and St. Matthew tell us very little about the birth itself, but St. Luke keeps us focused on the manger in which Jesus lay. Most commentators see a connection between the manger of Jesus and a statement in the beginning of the book of Isaiah. Isaiah told God's people, "Sons I have raised and reared, but they have disowned me! An ox knows its owner, and a donkey, its master's manger; but Israel does not know, my people has not understood." In other words, even a dumb animal knows who takes care of it and feeds it, but God's people did not know their God who took care of them. When the angel announced the birth of Jesus to the shepherds they went to find the baby Jesus in a manger. In other words, Luke is telling us God's people are beginning to find their God again in Jesus. And in finding him, God's people will be cared for and fed by him. Jesus himself tells us: "I am the bread of life." He feeds us and nourishes us with his word and with his love. He invites us to be at least as smart as an ox and a donkey who know who takes care of them and feeds them. (One other detail I might interject here: Bethlehem comes from two Hebrew words, which mean "the house of bread.") Jesus wants us to do more than make a big deal out of his birth; he wants us to come to him and to find our life and our inner strength in him. As he tells us, he is the way, the truth and the life.

I want to thank all of you who have come here today to celebrate Jesus coming to us. May he fill your hearts with joy, and may his love strengthen you all through the year. Amen.

Holy Family - A Cycle

December 30, 2012

INTRODUCTION: Our first reading (1 Samuel 1,20-22.24-28) takes us back over 1000 years before Christ, just before there were kings in Israel. Hanna (the first person mentioned) was unable to conceive a child. If a woman in that culture could not conceive, it was looked upon as God's punishment for something. Her husband had two wives and the other wife used to taunt Hanna at every chance she could get. Hanna prayed very hard to be able to have a child. In her prayer she made an interesting promise. She promised that if she had a male child, she would dedicate the child to God and give him back to the service of God. She did have a child she named Samuel. Today's reading is the account of her returning Samuel back to God. She took him to where the Arc of the Covenant was kept, which was at Shiloh at the time, and entrusted

him to the high priest, Eli, who would raise and educate and train Samuel in God's ways. Samuel became a great prophet and was the one who chose the first two kings of Israel: Saul and David. The story prepares us for the gospel of the finding of Jesus in the Temple at the age of twelve. When Jesus tells Mary he must be about his Father's business (or his Father's house, as it is often translated), I suspect Mary knew someday she would have to give Jesus back to God the Father.

HOMILY: As a husband and wife were dressing to go out for New Year's Eve, the wife asked her husband: "do you think this dress makes me look fat?" He said to her: "do you think this shirt makes me look stupid?"

A mother wrote in to Reader's Digest that the highlight of her trip to the zoo with her children was a peacock showing off its plumage. The four year old son was particularly taken with it and that evening when the dad came home he couldn't wait to tell his father: "Dad, guess what! I saw a Christmas tree come out of a chicken."

Overheard at the beauty parlor was a married woman complaining to her hair dresser about her husband. She said "things have gotten so bad, I'm thinking of getting a divorce. What do you think?" Her hair dresser replied: "that's a serious question. I don't think I'm qualified to give an opinion. You better consult another hair dresser." (from Reader's Digest: Dec. 2009/Jan. 2010, pg 188)

A wife sat down on the couch next to her husband who was flipping channels on the TV. She asked: "what's on the TV?" He said "dust!" Then the fight began.

One could go on for a long time with funny stories about families. If your family is not perfect, you're not alone. There are lots of dysfunctional families around. Some dysfunctions are tragic; others are just plain funny. I'll bet even the Holy Family, most likely the perfect family, had a few things happen in their relationships that gave them a few laughs. The story we hear today, the only event recorded about Jesus when he was growing up, was not funny at all. Joseph and Mary were in anguish. They must have thought that as parents they were irresponsible and awful failures.

Luke tells us the holy family went up to Jerusalem every year for the Passover - a seven or eight day event. In the Temple there was a section where the women prayed and worshipped and a different section for the men. Since Jesus was twelve years old, he could have stayed with Mary in the women's section or he could have stayed with Joseph in the men's section. At age 13 he would have been obligated to join the men. Not only did the men and women pray separately, they would gather together into groups (for safety) and they would travel separately. So apparently when Joseph and Mary returned to Galilee after Passover, they both assumed Jesus was in the group with the other parent. No one knows how it was that Jesus missed out on joining either group. Ann Rice, in her book: Christ the Lord, out of Egypt, describes the possibility that on this particular visit to Jerusalem, Jesus found out from the scribes and Pharisees about the things that happened when he was born, the shepherds who found him, the

magi who were looking for him, the killing of infant boys in Bethlehem by King Herod. He had inklings that he was somewhat different before this time, but someone among the Jewish elders told him about all the unusual things that happened at his birth and the whole revelation dumbfounded and exhausted him, so much so that he missed the caravan going back to Galilee. That whole description that Ann Rice gives us in her book is pure speculation, but it's one that makes sense to me. Behind this explanation is the assumption that Jesus did not have clear knowledge yet of who he really was. Some theologians think Jesus knew who he really was from the very beginning, while others believe it wasn't until Jesus was an adult that he knew he was Son of God. It's a debate that will never be answered in this life. I just gave you Ann Rice's explanation because he helps me imagine what might have happened.

Luke tells us even Mary and Joseph did not understand what he said to them as to why he had not joined them on the way back home. It shows the perfectly human side of the holy family; what family hasn't had to go through times of crisis. At the same time it implies the divine nature of Jesus. Whether Jesus' answer is translated "in my Father's business" or "in my Father's house," the reference is to God and Jesus' very unique relationship with him. How blest we are that Jesus shares his special relationship with the Father with us by sharing God's life with us through grace and teaching us to pray to God as Our Father. Amen.