



SUNDAY

by SUNDAY



CHRISTMAS GOSPEL



Jesus is born in Bethlehem.

NARRATOR 1: In those days Caesar Augustus published a decree ordering a census of the whole world. This first census took place while Quirinius was governor of Syria. All went to register, each in his own town. So Joseph, too, went from the town of Nazareth in Galilee to Judea, to the city of David which is called Bethlehem, for he was of the house and lineage of David, to register with Mary, his espoused wife, who was pregnant.

NARRATOR 2: It happened while they were there that the days of her pregnancy were completed. She gave birth to her first-born son and wrapped him in swaddling clothes and laid him in a manger, because there was no room for them in the inn.

NARRATOR 3: There were shepherds in the same area, living in the fields and keeping night watch over their flock. An angel of the Lord came suddenly upon them and the glory of the Holy One shown

around them, and they were very much afraid.

ANGEL: You have nothing to fear! I bring you good news, a great joy to be shared by the whole people. For this day in David's city a savior has been born to you, who is Christ the Lord. Let this be a sign to you: you will find an infant wrapped in swaddling clothes in a manger.

NARRATOR 4: Suddenly, there was with the angel a multitude of the heavenly host, praising God.

ALL: Glory to God in high heaven; on earth peace to those on whom God's favor rests.

Luke 2.1-14



by Joan Mitchell, CSJ

LEADER: Beloved, see what love God has bestowed on us that we may be called children of God.

ALL: We are God's children now.

LEADER: What we shall become has not been revealed.

ALL: We shall be like Jesus the Christ, for we shall see him as he is.

The newborn lying in a manger is the sign of good news for the shepherds. The child who is God's joy for the world is born among the poor to include the poor in God's good news. Each year we live out this spirit of reaching out to all.

Christmas comes at the end of the month. For families stretching paychecks, food supplies, or temporary assistance, it comes at the time of month when they have the least money. The spirit of Christmas motivates many people to unusual generosity and hospitality.

Parishes, school faculty, work staffs buy gifts and food for families in need. People invite coworkers who are alone to join their families for Christmas dinner. Christmas opens doors and widens tables in the spirit of making room for the Christ child for whom there was no room at the inn.

● What if the spirit of Christmas lasted all year? How might we change our civic community?

HOLY FAMILY GOSPEL

Jesus stays in the temple.

NARRATOR 1: Every year Jesus' parents went to Jerusalem for the festival of the Passover. When he was 12, they went up as usual for the festival.

NARRATOR 2: When the days of the festival were completed and his parents started for home, the boy Jesus stayed behind in Jerusalem. Joseph and his mother did not know it. Assuming he was among the travelers going home, they went a day's journey.

NARRATOR 1: Jesus' parents started to look for him among their friends and relatives. When they

did not find him, they returned to Jerusalem to look for him.

NARRATOR 2: After three days they found him in the temple, sitting among the teachers, listening to them, and asking them questions. All who heard him were amazed at his understanding and his answers.

NARRATOR 1: When his parents saw him, they were astonished.

MARY: Son, why have you treated us like this? Look, your father and I have been searching for you with great anxiety.



JESUS: Why were you searching for me? Did you not know that I must be in my Father's house?

NARRATOR 2: They did not understand what he said to them.

NARRATOR 1: Then Jesus went down with them and came to Nazareth and was obedient to them. His mother treasured all these things in her heart.

NARRATOR 2: Jesus increased in wisdom and in years, and in divine and human favor.

Luke 2.41-52

Jesus begins to speak for himself.

Christmas focuses Christians on Jesus as a newborn baby, a gift to the world, and celebrates all our children as gifts to the world. Fittingly the Church celebrates the Feast of the Holy Family right after Christmas. Already in Sunday's gospel Jesus is a tween, a 12 year old who goes his own way instead of journeying home from Passover with his parents.

Mary and Joseph include Jesus in their religious practice. He accompanies them and other friends and relatives to Jerusalem to celebrate Passover. Jesus is also at the age when the human brain begins to develop its abstract thinking skills. He can think, reason, and question. With these skills a young person steps beyond

accepting all he or she sees and hears and begins to questions and search.

Jesus' questions take him to the temple to sit among teachers who know Israel's history and holy writings. This process apparently absorbs him for the three days it takes for Mary and Joseph to miss him, return to Jerusalem, and find him. Today parents could have messaged their independent child or called the police who check the cameras on every corner. Instead Mary and Joseph have to walk back a day's journey with anxiety building.

What they find is Jesus taking a first step into his adult vocation. His questions and answers amaze all who hear him and astonish his parents.

Mary and Joseph express their worry but they don't yell. Like a tween, Jesus is unaware he is causing worry.

Identity is the work of the adolescent years. As they grow up, children absorb the values and thinking of their families. As their brain power increases, teens move into a wider world and begin to respond to how others see them. They have to sort out who they want to be, what they stand for and value, who they stand with. The sorting goes on into the twenties.

Today one third of all Americans ages 18-33 are non-affiliated with any religion for many reasons. For some, the sexual abuse scandals have alienated them, for others, GLBTQ issues. Teens today

may have two moms or two dads. They may believe love is love and support same sex marriage, which Church leaders teach against as they do contraceptives, divorce, abortion, and women's ordination.

Adolescence is an important time for teens and parents to search each other out and keep talking. These years are not for giving up on teens but for accompanying them, learning what matters to them, walking with them in their successes and failures, engaging their questions and insights.

- What is adolescence like for teens today?
- What value do you experience in continuing to talk?
- Who talked with you about faith and purpose in your teen years?
- With what young people have you talked about how you live and practice your faith?

Only Luke tells a story about Jesus during the years between his infancy and public ministry. Sunday's gospel takes place during his family's

yearly pilgrimage to Jerusalem to join with friends and family in the Passover celebration. This detail tells us Jesus' parents practice Jewish religious traditions. They make the four-day walk from Nazareth to Jerusalem.

The gospel also suggests that the journey to Jerusalem is fun, with friends and family members walking together, visiting with different ones as they walk along all day, perhaps singing the psalms of ascent. Participating in the feasts, stories, and traditions of his people is one way Jesus receives his religious education.

- What importance has participating in parish worship and parish life as a child had on your adult faith?
- Who has most influenced how you live your adult Christian life?

Mary and Joseph have walked a whole day away from Jerusalem when they find Jesus missing. Walking back takes a day.

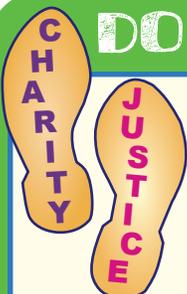


They find Jesus on the third day. For three days his parents wonder where he is. In this story Luke anticipates who Jesus is, a teacher of teachers, questioning, listening, offering insights, amazing hearers.

When Mary anxiously questions why he didn't tell them where he was, Jesus expects they should have known what he was doing. He must be about his Father's affairs. In Luke's gospel, the word *must* refers to the role his Father has given Jesus. Later he tells his followers, "I must preach the good news of the kingdom of God" (4.43) and "The Son of Man must suffer...be killed...and on the third day be raised" (9.22).

As Sunday's gospel ends, Luke restores Mary to character by saying she stores all these things in her heart. Mary at the manger and 12 years later at the temple treasures the words and encounters with others that happen in her life. To treasure is to hold in mind, to remember. Mary holds onto words and events that reveal the Spirit moving in her life and the life of the son she holds dear.

DO SOMETHING



- Catholic social teaching emphasizes that the human person is social, made to flourish in family and community. Host an intergenerational event in your neighborhood or parish this winter. For example, talk about care for the environment in your neighborhood.
- Extend group or parish support to those who work with teens in your area.

Mary gives us a model of a reflective disciple. Like us she must use her head and open her heart to all that happens in her life.

Mary goes through the steps every believer goes through. She is amazed at Jesus' insight and wisdom; baffled by why he left their company; reproachful about the fear she experienced; and finally, willing to keep reflecting on what happened. Her lack of understanding is not permanent. It prepares her for future participation in the believing community that will form after Jesus' resurrection. She is the model disciple for this new community.

- How is the way you work at reflecting on your life like the way Mary reflects on hers?
- How is Mary and Joseph's experience of raising a near teen like your own?



Hannah returns her child to God.

Like Sarah, the mother of Isaac, and Elizabeth, the mother of John the Baptist, Hannah is a woman without a child. When the family each year goes to the holy place at Shiloh to make offerings to God, Hannah can make only her own offering. Her husband's second wife has many sons and daughters who each offer a sacrifice. This grieves Hannah, who prays for

a child and makes a vow she will return the child to God.

In this she is like Mary, Jesus' mother, who must believe in her son and participate in his mission. Hannah prays in thanks to God in a prayer that Mary's Magnificat echoes.

Samuel becomes Israel's last and greatest judge, a holy man whom God calls as a child as he sleeps in the temple where the Ark of the Covenant stands. He leads the 12 tribes in making the transition from a confederacy to a kingdom. He anoints Saul and then David as king.

Hannah takes Samuel to Shiloh.

In due time Hannah conceived and bore a son. She named him Samuel, for she said, "I have asked him of the Holy One."

The man Elkinah and the whole household went up to offer to the Holy One the yearly sacrifice and to fulfill his vow. But Hannah did not go up, for she said to her husband, "As soon as the child is weaned, I will bring him that he may appear in the presence of the Holy One and remain there forever; I will offer him as a nazirite for all time."

When Hannah had weaned Samuel, she took him up with her, along with a three-year-old bull, an ephah of flour, and a skin of wine. She brought him to the house of the Holy One at Shiloh. The child was young.

After they slaughtered the bull, they brought the child to Eli. Hannah said, "Pardon, my lord, as you live, my lord, I am the

woman who stood near you here, praying to the Holy One. I prayed for this child, and the Holy One granted my request. Now I, in turn, give him to the Holy One; as long as he lives, he shall be dedicated to the Holy One." Hannah left Samuel there.

1 Samuel 1.20-22, 24-28

- What parallels do you see between Hannah and Mary?
- Compare Hannah's prayer (1 Samuel 2.1-10) and Mary's Magnificat (Luke 1.46-55).

PRAY

The Litany of Mary of Nazareth which Pax Christi USA publishes links Mary's role in the gospel narratives with the plight of poor and afflicted people today. It recognizes her role as the first disciple, model and mother of believers.

Pray the litany. Respond to each statement.

ALL: Empower us.

LEADER: Mother of the liberator,
Mother of the homeless,
Mother of the nonviolent,
Widowed mother,
Unwed mother,
Woman of faith,
Woman of vision,
Woman centered in God.

Add your own phrases.



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